Not a Gentleman

by Tintinnabula

Summary

An alternate imagining of Mrs. Gaskell's story, assuming Margaret had been hurt more seriously on the day of the riot. Intertwines elements of both the book and the BBC series, but focuses less on angst and more on the relationship of John and Margaret. Disclaimer: I do not own these characters, but am only presuming to borrow them for a while.
The Riot

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Chapter 1
The Riot

John Thornton didn't see the rock that whizzed by to strike his love's temple but he felt the jolt, as surely as she felt it herself, although not so acutely. He shuddered as she crumpled, doll-like, in his arms. Truly he could not be held responsible for the shout that escaped his lips moments later.

"Are you satisfied now? It was me you came for- kill me if you want!"

He was lucky, he realized, that the soldiers arrived just moments later, for the crowd might have taken him at his word. They had more rocks- and sturdy leather clogs- at the ready. But they got what they deserved. Those fools! And more fool, she, to think that these ruffians could be reasoned with.

But he loved her regardless of her impetuous naivete. Miss Hale was a lover of justice. This stood to reason: as the daughter of a clergyman, she was raised on a steady diet of scripture and philosophy. Of course she would stand on the side of what she thought was right. But John had hopes that one day she would see that he, too, was right, and stand by his side. Apart from today's most astonishing behavior he'd already been encouraged: she'd said words that brightened his outlook only the night before, once he'd taken the time to ruminate upon them. That surely it was good to see both sides of an argument.

John found the small, bloodied rock, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and secreted it in his waist coat pocket, then gently lifted his savior into his arms. Her eyes did not flutter when he whispered her name, and as he clasped her to his chest the steady trickle of blood from her temple strengthened into a rivulet. He did not notice the bright crimson pattern it made on the starched linen front of his shirt and the silk twill of his waist coat. He did notice that she smelled of lavender and roses. He breathed in the heady fragrance and sighed.

Margaret—dare he call her that?- was lighter than he expected, her form reminding him again that she was a mere eighteen years of age. John held her tenderly as he crossed the threshold, reminded briefly that this was something one typically did with ones bride, although typically said bride would not be bloodied and unconscious. He hurried her inside, only stopping at the foot of the stairs to kiss her once on the forehead, out of the sight of the prying eyes of servants and family.

John gingerly deposited Miss Hale onto the chaise lounge recently warmed by his hypochondriacal, vaporous sister, whose incessant fanning seemed enough to summon those typhoons seen in the far eastern parts of the Empire. Clearly Fanny would be useless as a nursemaid. But Mother would take care of Miss Hale, John knew, even if his sister could not. Certainly by the time John returned from speaking with the constable a doctor would have things in hand and Miss Hale stabilized.

But that was not the case, John learned, when he returned from his duties not a half hour later. Miss Hale was still unconscious, although a dressing had been applied to her wound. Dr. Donaldson's silver eyebrows were knit together, and his features, typically schooled in a neutral expression, betrayed concern.
"Might I speak with you in private?" the Scotsman asked quietly. John ushered him into his study, closed the door and gestured to a pair of leather wing chairs flanking the fireplace. He offered him a brandy, but the man demurred.

"I'll not mince words with you," Dr. Donaldson began.

John bowed his head. "I appreciate that." As one who spoke plainly, John appreciated this trait in others. Like all true men, he had little patience for the inanities of small talk. And in a situation like this where one of the weaker sex had been injured, he simply would not set aside the time to engage in such trivialities, customary though they might be in other locales. His chief concern - his only concern - was Miss Hale.

"Head injuries can be quite dangerous. And the sad truth is, modern medicine knows very little about the healing of the brain."

John's eyes widened, and his face paled as fear snaked into the recesses of his own brain.

"Miss Hale's skull does not appear to be fractured, but her brain has been deeply concussed. There are issues with her eyes indicating that it is a severe bruise, and to return her to her home in Crampton is out of the question." The doctor shook his head. "The jolts of a carriage ride over two miles of rough cobblestones would be quite harmful, I am afraid. Has her family been contacted?"

"I am not sure. I will need to ask my mother." John willed himself to continue listening, willed his features not to betray the emotion he felt, willed the tremor from his voice.

"You will forgive this intrusive line of questioning I hope, but I have seen you many times at the Hale residence and know you to be a familiar acquaintance of Mr. Hale."


"And you are then aware of the circumstances surrounding his wife's health?"

Again John nodded.

"I do not think Mr. Hale is in any state of mind to be hearing this news about his daughter. In fact, his own health is not the best. He is a man of advancing years, after all. I would suggest..."

"You would suggest a somewhat altered tale of events?"

Dr. Donaldson nodded. "Perhaps that she has simply taken ill."

John rose from his chair and stirred the embers in the fire as he pondered the doctor's suggestion. "I do see the logic in that."

"I do not ask you lightly to deceive your friend. It would be better, I feel for Mr. Hale to deal with issues as they arise, rather than worry for what may be. There is some chance, after all, that Miss Hale may survive this."

John spun on his heel to face the doctor, his face incredulous. "Do you mean to say there is an even greater chance that she may not survive?"

Dr. Donaldson nodded gravely. "As I said, medicine understands very little of the workings of the brain. Dr Bright of Guy's Hospital has done an extensive study of these types of injury and has made two major findings."
"Which are-?"

"I did not realize you were a man of science, Mr. Thornton."

"I do not claim to be. I am but half educated, yet still considered by some to be sharp-witted. I do, however, read about what these men of science have done whenever possible. Pray continue."

Dr. Donaldson sighed at the insolence of the overbearing manufacturer. "Dr. Bright found two things: that our traditional treatment of bleeding by leeches, cupping or blistering had little effect-"

John scoffed. Even someone as poorly educated as he could see the non-scientific basis of such treatments. Although Aristotle's peers might have recommended it, science had advanced well beyond those times. There had even been stories in the newspapers about work done in France showing the clear lack of merit of such treatments, and the efficacy of the new, numerical method of medicine. How was it that a poorly-educated brute should know this, but a doctor did not?

"-and that the brains of deceased patients with injuries such as our Miss Hale have extreme swelling. It would therefore be best, one would think, to do something to relieve the swelling. However, Dr. Bright's team has not yet moved into the realm of experimentation."

"Perhaps they are not as much men of science as you would like to think them, then."

"No," Dr. Donaldson agreed, before reaching into his leather satchel for a small, leather-bound notebook and pencil. He scratched notes into it furiously for a minute or two, then nodded to himself several times. John took the opportunity to hand him the instrument of Miss Hale's injury, and looked on as the doctor unwrapped the shilling-sized stone.

"It was wise of you to pick up the rock. You can see here that it was this face her that struck her," he pointed to a narrow edge, "and therefore, all of the mass of the rock was concentrated in that small area. In some of Dr. Bright's patients, there were broken blood vessels inside the brain as a result of such injury. But I should add in these cases the injuries were much more substantial. Men run over by carriages and the like." The doctor scribbled again in his tiny notebook, and muttered to himself.

John returned to the fireplace, and poked the coals in vexation. How this man could be so dispassionate about a woman who was possibly dying? What an odd man this doctor was. But then again, he had asked for it, had he not, when he'd handed him the stone?

"Now, as for events that transpired today...I did hear bits and pieces of the story of Miss Hale's accident today. Servants will talk, unfortunately." Dr. Donaldson lifted an eyebrow. "Interestingly, they seem to think of us doctors as part of the furniture." He paused as John stared back at him as gloweringly as the reignited coals of the fireplace, seemingly daring him to continue. The doctor blinked once in recognition of this bulldog glare and continued, although slightly less confidently.

"I gather that there is an understanding of some sort between you and Miss Hale?"

John felt his blood begin to simmer. The sheer, unadulterated impudence of this man, to suggest so openly that Miss Hale- his Margaret- would declare herself publicly, so brazenly-

"I only ask, because as her intended, you would have the authority to make medical decisions in lieu of her father."

A cloud lifted from John's countenance, and the storm raging in his mind dissipated into fine, swirling mists.

"Yes," he said abruptly, as he headed for the door. "We have an understanding. Margaret is my
fiancée. Tell me, what are the options for her treatment? I would imagine we are wasting time."

Author's note: Dr. Richard Bright of Guy's Hospital, London is a historical figure. In 1831 he published a treatise on brain disorders including a section on concussion and other forms of brain damage which I have pulled from, as this book would have been available to Dr. Donaldson. Sadly, although in the 1830s researchers showed that pneumonia and other infectious illness were not improved by bloodletting, the standard treatment of the early 1840s still did include leeching, cupping and blistering. (Note that doctors were not washing their hands, either, not even for surgery —that was not suggested as medical practice until 2 years after the publication of N and S, and the doctor who did so lost his job). I hope you enjoyed what I've written so far, and that if you did, you will leave a review as it is an incentive to write more!
The son broached the most necessary topic carefully, as befit the worsening circumstances. "Miss Hale will need to stay here for the time being," he began.

"I am very much aware of that, John. Did I not see to her care myself?" John's mother responded tartly. "It is clear to see that she is in some peril, is she is not?" She shook her head, unable to contain herself. "The foolishness of that girl! My only consolation is that it must have taken some strength of spirit for that haughty girl to lower herself enough to admit her feelings for you." Then, seeing the immediate effect of her words on her son, she placed a consoling hand upon his arm. Mrs. Thornton did not apologize, however.

John cleared his throat and did his best to keep his voice level and free from emotion. He failed. "Mother, you must not speak in that way about Miss Hale. I do not imagine that she cares for me. My only concern is to do what I can for her in her time of need."

"But John! She has shown it- two hundred men have witnessed it!"

"She is young, and idealistic, Mother. She takes the side of the hands. I do not think things are as straightforward as they may seem. That display was for their benefit. The more I think on it, the more certain I am of it."

"She will be ruined unless you act. I consider you bound in honor."

"You know that I will do what is honorable, Mother. I already-"

"What, John?"

The younger Thornton adroitly changed the subject. "I have asked Dr. Donaldson to discuss the most appropriate form of treatment for Miss Hale. Her parents must not be involved."

"And why not?"

"I am afraid Miss Hale may not have been forthcoming with you about her mother's condition."

"That fine woman and her 'low spirits.' Is she too weak-willed to hear that her daughter is ill? Will she need the smelling salts?" Mrs. Thornton's upper lip curled.

"According to Dr. Donaldson, she will not be with us long. I think Miss Hale did not share this out of grief."

Mrs. Thornton's face blushed an uncharacteristic rose. "I am sorry, John. I have offended. And I see that I have misjudged someone you care about. Perhaps there is more to this Miss Hale than I have realized." She sat down on the nearby settee and reached for the fan her daughter had carelessly left behind. Her son joined her and spoke earnestly.
"There is more, Mother. I misrepresented the situation between myself and Miss Hale. I told Dr. Donaldson there was an understanding between us. This was in order for him to allow me to approve any medical treatments. I worried that her father would be unable to. With his wife ill and given their limited financial resources-" he opened his hands in near supplication.

His mother laughed, her sullen mood finally released. "John, Miss Hale has declared herself for all the world to see. You have done no wrong in your own declaration. Your words have relieved Mr. Hale of a tremendous burden and he will thank you for it, I am sure." She did not bring up their own monetary burdens, and how the girl's care might affect these. She had no worries in this regard. John had their finances under control and would see him right- she was sure of it.

John sighed in relief, and stood, unfolding his lanky frame from the petite and rather fussy furnishings. "Then I will go and attend to her. Please have the servants make up the room closest to mine so that I may keep watch over her. We will bring her up shortly, I think."

"We will do no such thing. I will not subject this family to even more gossip from servants. She will take the room closest to me."

"I will stay with her, mother." The look in his eyes brooked no objection.

The elder Thornton took her son's arm as she rose from the settee and drew herself up to her full five foot two inches. She squared her jaw, tilted her head back and stared him down.

"Very well. Then I will stay with you."

Dr. Donaldson turned to the black-clad Thorntons as they approached. They looked as grave as pall-bearers, he thought. But their outlook should not be so dark yet. There was a glimmer of hope. He was convinced of this.

"Has there been any improvement?" the younger Thornton asked.

A shake of the head was the response John dreaded. He watched as the doctor lit a candle and bent over the slight, unconscious woman who had protected him so fiercely not an hour earlier. The doctor gently lifted her eyelid and held the flame of the candle close enough to the eye that it would normally provoke a reflex. But the pupil did not restrict. "As I mentioned," the doctor explained, "this is thought to be evidence of swelling of the brain."

"And the treatment?" John asked quietly.

"Yes, the normal treatment is to watch and wait, but in such as case as this the prognosis is not good. If we do nothing it is not likely she will survive the night."

"You said there was another treatment." Impatience crept into the manufacturer's voice.

"Yes, it is completely experimental, mind you. And I should warn you that I am not a scientist. Not before today."

"But clearly you have a scientific mind." John noted the extreme pallor of Margaret's skin. She seemed worse than before, although the greenish cast of the light in the parlor made it hard to tell for sure. Was her breathing more shallow now, or was he simply imagining this? He closed his eyes for a moment and silently offered a quick prayer to whomever might be listening.

Please do not take her away from me. Not yet. I beg of you.

What was the doctor saying?
"I do keep up, yes. Our field is in dire need of advance and it is frustrating to apply practice that is based on tradition in some cases and superstition in others." The silver-haired man cleared his throat and laughed nervously. "I speak too frankly, perhaps. But there are some in our profession who see how fields such as yours have advanced tremendously through the application of reason and mathematics, and we would like to do the same to ours."

"That is an admirable goal, and one I am willing to support. Particularly as it seems to me one more likely to heal Margaret." John glanced at his mother as he said his love's name, but to her credit, his mother did not react.

"As for the plan of treatment. You see, a Dr. Latta found that-"

John tapped a polished boot impatiently on the parquet floor."You'll forgive me, Doctor, but I do not think there is time to educate me on the whys and wherefores of this treatment. I trust that you will do your job."

Mrs. Thornton harrumphed in agreement, then began to pace the length of the room, her skirts rustling in noisy frustration. She might not like this Miss Hale, but her son's happiness lay in the girl's survival.

"But I must tell you that it has never been done before," Dr. Donaldson continued. "I am merely speculating based on what has been done by others for other diseases."

"But the alternative is death, is it not?"

"It is."

"Then it is decided. Proceed."

"I do not have a laboratory. There is equipment I must procure. And I must visit an apothecary."

"A servant can run to the apothecary with a list you provide. And you forget, I run a mill. We dye fabric. I have a vast assortment of glassware used for developing dyeing methods, some of it unused. I can quite possibly obtain what you need, as well as a burner for heating, should you require it. And thanks to the strike, I have plenty of space for you to set up." John shook his head at the irony.

"Would you have a large spirit thermometer and gallon-sized glass flask and bung? And a glass rod for stirring? I think I have everything else I need in my satchel. I will need to run back home to find Dr. Latta's letter to the Lancet, of course."

John shrugged. "You do not ask for much. Mother, is Williams still around?" His mother nodded, glad to see her son take command of the situation. "Once Dr. Donaldson has made his list for the apothecary, despatch a servant, and have Williams take the doctor to Shed 3. They should be able to find what the doctor needs in the unopened crates there."

While preparations were made, John carried Miss Hale up to the guest room already made up for her. To Hannah Thornton's consternation she was unable to talk her son out of this overt display of impropriety. Surely the girl could be carried just as easily by the doctor as by her son. But John insisted, and the look in his eyes told Hannah that he would have his way. However, the matriarch ensured that the servants were otherwise occupied as her son carried Miss Hale upstairs. Thus one source of tittle tattle was squashed, although more was sure to follow, no doubt.

Hannah had always known that someday she would be displaced in her son's affections, and she had always known it would hurt, but the reality was a much more savage and cruel pain than she could
have predicted. She pushed it aside, however. There was too much to do. She found Fanny in the music room, sitting at the piano, indolently paging through sheet music.

"She's still here, Mother, isn't she? And she will marry John, won't she?"

Hannah did not have the time nor the inclination to humor her daughter this late in the afternoon of such a trying day. "Does it matter, Fanny?"

"Of course it matters, Mother! She thinks she is such an aristocrat, and so much better than us! But who is she really? She is not rich. Her house is tiny, and attached, and her clothes are so plain. She does not play, and I'll bet she cannot draw or paint. I am sure she is not half as accomplished as Miss Latimer, or even myself! Surely there are much better choices for a wife for John-

"The real question, Fanny, is why do you care so much? He loves her, you know. Is that not enough?"

"He loves her? He told you this?" Fanny's eyes widened at the news. To think her taciturn brother was finally in love with such a person as Miss Margaret Hale, lately of London and much too good for Milton.

"I can see the signs." Hannah sighed. She was lost. But Fanny did not need to know that. "I will need a nightgown from you, preferably an old one as it is likely to be damaged. I do not know what Dr. Donaldson is planning but it is not likely to be pretty."

"I do not have any old nightgowns. I put those in the rag bag some time ago. I told Jane to burn them."

Hannah sighed anew at her daughter's wastefulness. She and John had done too good at job at insulating Fanny from the poverty of her youth. "Give me the least good one then."

Fanny simmered with resentment as she accompanied her mother back to her bedroom. She rooted through her bureau, finally pulling out a fine nainsook gown trimmed with Ayrshire whitework. "Here," she said, almost throwing it at her mother. "I'm sure the invalid Miss Hale will look stunning in this."

It was not appropriate for John to be in the room of this invalid, but he did not care. This might be their last few hours together and he would be damned before he let anyone take that away from him. That did not make it any less frightening to see Margaret lying atop the several towels that covered the bed. She was clad in white, and seemed almost corpse-like.

John marveled at her beauty. He'd never seen her hair down before, and had not realized it was so long, that it had such a curl to it, nor had he noticed the auburn highlights that glimmered here and there along its length. The gown she was wearing was something a man would not normally see until his wedding night and revealed parts of her form that encouraged urges that were wholly inappropriate given the current circumstances. No, he should not be here at all. John was surprised his mother had not put up more of a fuss. She must have read the distress in his eyes.

"Are we ready?" Dr. Donaldson asked. John glanced at the small table next to the bed, noting its oversized flask of liquid and also the array of sharp, steel tools that seemed more like instruments of torture than medical devices. The doctor was going to hurt her, he realized, and he would be a party to it. The slightest of tremors ran through his body.

"What do you need me to do?" he asked as calmly as he could.
"I do not know if she will regain consciousness when the fluids are introduced-"

"What exactly are you planning to do?" John could not hide the trepidation in his voice. He stood close to the edge of the narrow bed, close enough to feel the warmth of Margaret's body. It was unsettling.

"I was going to tell you this earlier, but you did not want to hear."

"My apologies. Please tell me now."

"I will introduce a quantity of brine into Miss Hale's bloodstream. To do this I must cut through the skin of her arm with this lancet," the doctor pointed to a sharp, ivory handled tool, "puncture her vein with this device, and hold it open with that." He pointed to two metal tubes, one with a sharp point and one completely hollow and open-ended. "Then I will introduce salt water with this syringe. I will need you, and Mrs. Thornton, if necessary, to hold down the patient."

"I am willing," Mrs. Thornton placed herself at the head of the bed, and smoothed the hair on Margaret's forehead.

Margaret responded to the stab of the lancet. Although she did not regain full consciousness she did begin to writhe, and a moan escaped her lips. John placed his arm across her upper arm and torso, and leaned into her, apologizing as he did so. He did not allow his body to respond to the fact that his flesh touched hers so in such an intimate manner, nor did he allow himself to consider exactly where his flesh touched her own.

Mrs. Thornton turned away from the sight of the blood flowing freely from Margaret's arm and onto her son, although she gripped Margaret's other hand firmly. She felt a weak grip in return.

The writhing intensified as the trocar and then the cannula were deployed, and reached a climax as the syringe was filled and emptied several times. Finally, the apparatus was disassembled, the blood staunched, and the bloodied towels stripped from the bed.

"That went more smoothly than I expected." Dr Donaldson murmured.

"Did it?" John looked at him, aghast. "She was in pain."

"Could you not have given her some laudanum?" Mrs. Thornton joined in.

"Not without risking further damage. As I said earlier, we simply do not understand enough about the brain. I could not risk further harm. I am sorry, but I did try to explain earlier to you what I had in mind. You would have had the chance for input then." Dr. Donaldson shook his head in wonder at the presumptuousness of these wealthy clients.

John looked at him sheepishly. "I suppose you had better explain now," he said by way of apology.

"Might I have a piece of celery or a carrot? And a-"

"I apologize for our lack of courtesy," Mrs. Thornton interjected. "I had not realized how late the hour had become. Surely we can provide a meal that is more substantial than vegetables."

"I am not hungry, Mrs. Thornton. Rather, I was hoping to demonstrate for you how this treatment will work. So, if you could get me a pitcher of water, a tumbler, a salt cellar and spoon and piece of celery or a carrot-?"

The servant, Jane, was easy to find as she and the other household staff were gathered in the upstairs
hall, eager to learn any news of this unusual treatment and this even more unusual house guest. Jane returned with alacrity to make up for her eavesdropping, burning cheeks as a signal of her repentance and heavy tray filled with the materials Dr. Donaldson had called for.

This prompted a burst of energy from the doctor. "In school, you may have learned of Mr. Robert Hooke's observation of the interior of plants?"

"Would you remind us please? I am sure I do not remember." As John had left school at fifteen, he had not had spent much time studying the sciences. What little he knew of chemistry he had learned on the job. He was certain he knew nothing of botany.

"Hooke discovered that the interior of plants are made of many box-like rooms he called cells. Excitingly, all living things seem to contain these little rooms, although their shape may differ."

"-and?" both Thorntons replied simultaneously, the significance of these little rooms equally lost on the pair.

"These cells contain a liquid substance with some type of matter dissolved inside it. This matter is trapped inside the cells, but the liquid- which undoubtedly is water- can move freely." The doctor poured a large amount of salt into the tumbler of water and stirred until it disappeared. "Now if I placed this piece of celery into this brine, something interesting will happen."

"I can already tell you what will happen-" interrupted Mrs. Thornton with a dismissive wave. "I've salted cucumbers before for salad. Would this not be the same? The celery will go limp."

Dr. Donaldson thunked the celery into the tumbler without hiding his irritation. "Yes, Mrs. Thornton. That is precisely what will happen. But why? And what do you think would happen to the shape of these cells?"

John cottoned on quickly. "I would imagine it is because water is leaving the cells and moving into the container of brine. And perhaps they might grow somewhat smaller in size. But what on earth does this have to do with Margaret?"

The broadest of smiles graced Dr. Donaldson's face, fully erasing his previous annoyance with the pair. "Yes! Here is our conundrum. Miss Hale's brain has been swelling. But the skull is only so big. It cannot expand to accommodate an increase in the size of the brain. Damage will undoubtedly occur."

An epiphany lit John's face. "You are saying that salt water will shrink the swelling in Margaret's brain? That by surrounding her cells with this brine, water will leave her cells and enter the brine?"

Dr. Donaldson nodded vigorously, impressed at his student's quick intelligence. "But why not have her drink the liquid rather than subjecting her to that-" John waved his hands toward the tray of bloodied instruments. He was without words to describe the scene he had beheld nor the pain Margaret had undoubtedly felt.

"It has been tried and it simply doesn't work. In the Edinburgh cholera epidemic of 1832, doctors realized patients were losing a great deal of body fluids and tried replacing them with salt water. Patients vomited any salt water they drank. I am sure the same would happen if we offered brine to Miss Hale."

"Yes, but only to a certain extent. I was in Edinburgh during the outbreak, you know, and observed my colleague, Dr. Latta using salt water to replace body fluids during this same cholera epidemic
with great success. His patients survived, when others' did not. I should tell you that I, however, have 
not, nor has anyone else in Milton replicated Latta's treatment. Backwards as we are in Milton, we 
have not been so unfortunate to be affected by cholera. And the treatment I devised is different in that 
the water is saltier in order to draw water out of the cells. So there is a chance that it may not work as 
I predict."

"It is, as you said, an experiment. I understand this."

"I will return in the morning for another treatment. But I will need a caretaker to collect data, 
overnight."

John settled into the slat-back chair to the right of the bed, leaving the larger wing chair for his 
mother. "I will do this, Dr. Donaldson."

The doctor raised an eyebrow.

"My mother will chaperone," John added quickly, schooling his face into a neutral expression. He 
had no use for propriety at a time like this, but for his mother's sake- and Margaret's- he would play 
along with society's conventions.

"Well then, in cases like these a patient may fall into a deep sleep, or coma, and not reawaken. It is 
 imperative that you not allow Miss Hale to do more than drowse. I would ask that you try to wake 
er up each hour and check her eyes. Record any change you see in her pupils. If absolutely 
necessary, you may use sal ammoniac to rouse her, but please try tapping her hands or cheeks first, 
or even speaking loudly. I am not certain that smelling salts are the best course to take." Dr. 
Donaldson turned to the patient. "Miss Hale," he said loudly, striking her cheek smartly as he spoke 
her name, "do you hear me?"

Dr. Donaldson turned to John. "I should note that she may not be fully regain consciousness, nor 
may she be fully sensible if she should awaken. It is of course difficult for even a healthy person to 
remain awake for extended periods of time. So it is of no consequence if she seems to drowses off or 
does not seem quite herself. The main thing is that she not sleep deeply."

"I understand." John nodded, suddenly eager for the man to take his leave.

As there was little response from the patient, Dr. Donaldson rummaged in his satchel until he found a 
needle and pressed it into the fleshiest part of Margaret's palm. The patient began to stir almost 
instantaneously, and John began to anger just as quickly. He pushed Dr Donaldson away roughly. 
John would wake her with the tenderness she deserved.

"Miss Hale! Please come back to us!" John rubbed Margaret's hand briskly between his own and 
noted with some pride that her eyes began to flutter.

Dr. Donaldson wiped his instruments with a cloth, and queried his client. "Is there a place where I 
might wash these and store these until the morrow? I think I can leave Miss Hale in your care until 
then."

John ignored this tiresome man. Margaret was his own again.

And now, she was speaking to him.

"The light is so bright. It hurts. Oh, how my head hurts!"

"Do not worry, Miss Hale. I am here-" John extinguished the bright Argand lamp that had lit Dr. 
Donaldson's work. Still, the slanting late afternoon light fully illuminated the room. He jumped up to
draw the curtains shut, but quickly returned to Margaret's side.

"Everything is so blurry. Papa, is that you?"

Chapter End Notes

I hope that Margaret's treatment was not too gruesome nor the details not too onerous. The hypodermic syringe was invented 1 year after N and S was published, but I decided not to fudge by including it because, even though it was invented then, it was not publicized for another twenty years. As a result, there really is no way our Dr. Donaldson would have known about it. From what I understand of medical history, he would have been stuck with using the tools I described instead, with all the attendant risk of infection. Note that Dr. Latta is another historical figure. Note also, that this will probably be the last chapter with any medical references or science (osmosis!). While I intend to keep up the historical references, they will be taking other forms. :) Thank you again for reading this very long chapter! And note that there will be interaction between John and Margaret next chapter (finally) although you can probably tell I like writing from John's point of view. :)
"Miss Hale, it is I, Mr. Thornton," John began, but quickly realized Margaret had slipped back into unconsciousness. A familiar, tightening sensation spread through his midsection, one he recognized as anxiety- of the type brought on by unfilled obligations. "Mother," he said, turning his attention to the black-clad woman sitting sentinel-like in the wing chair to the left of the bed, "you did send a letter to the Hales, didn't you? I completely forgot to ask. With all of the commotion this afternoon..." John rubbed a hand through his hair, completely disheveling it. Mr. Hale must be completely out of his mind with worry. Hopefully he had not mentioned his concerns to his wife.

"Do not worry, John. While you were ignoring Dr. Donaldson, he happened to mention he would be checking in on Mrs. Hale. I asked him to drop off the water mattress and to let them know of the girl's condition. He also had some final comments about Miss Hale's care. No food or water tonight, although he did not say why."

John breathed a small sign of relief. Circumstances were more than he might have hoped for. While his mother's letter likely would have told the entire story, Dr. Donaldson was sure to be more circumspect, and to paint Margaret's injury in the way they had discussed. They agreed that Richard Hale did not need to know every detail, not when his own wife was so ill. A carriage could be quickly despatched to Crampton should Margaret's condition change, and the entire truth told at that time. Additionally, John did not feel comfortable sharing the particulars of how Margaret came to be out there on the porch before those rioters. That was a story for Margaret to share with her father herself, should she choose to do so. John turned his attention back to Margaret, his stomach attempting to untying the Gordian knot snarled expertly by anxiety and dread. His contemplation was interrupted immediately by the parlour maid, Jane.

"Ma'am, if you'll excuse me, the Hales' servant is here. She's askin' to see Miss Margaret."

John jumped up and hastily exited to investigate the medicine chest. Perhaps there was something there for rapid-onset indigestion. Besides, it would not do for that harpy, Dixon, to see him in the same room with Margaret. The ever-indignant housekeeper would surely have an apoplectic fit.

In contrast to her beleaguered son, John's mother rose in the imperturbable manner that befit the mistress of the finest mill in Milton, and met the red-faced housekeeper with steady eyes and a calm demeanor.

"Is she hurt?" Dixon asked as she rushed into the room. She dropped her shawl as she sprang to Margaret's side, fairly knocking over the slat-back chair so recently warmed by Mr. Thornton. "Miss Margaret, please wake up!"

"She is resting," Mrs. Thornton said in dry tones, drawing the draperies to further darken the room. "Dr. Donaldson suggested it would be best not to disturb her for some time."

Dixon ignored the older woman, and began patting Margaret's hand in an effort to rouse her. "And what is this, then?" she cried, noticing the bandage on Margaret's arm. "Dr. Donaldson said she fell and hit her head. He did not mention any injury to her arm."

"Dixon," Margaret opened her eyes and blinked, struggling against the dim light. "Is Mama well? Has something happened?" A look of fear crossed the young woman's face as she tried to sit up in
bed. She was unsuccessful. "Oh. The room is spinning. I.. I am not well."

Mrs. Thornton glared at the frumpy housekeeper, who for her part tried to soothe her charge. She patted her hand after tucking her back into the bed.

"Now, now, Margaret, do not worry. Your mother is doing much better, thanks to the water mattress you fetched from the Thornton's. It was very generous of them to offer it, and she sleeps much better this evening as a result."

"Oh. I am glad of it." Margaret blinked as her dilated eyes tried unsuccessfully to adjust themselves to the room's dim light. "But where is Papa?"

"With your mother, of course. Now rest." Dixon smiled with some relief as Margaret dropped off to sleep, and busied herself with brooding, hen-like motions. She fluffed the pillows as best she could without moving the poor girl's head, and smoothed the blankets, noting their precise tucks at each of the bed's corners. Dixon surveyed the room from her vantage point at the head of the bed. It was over-large, in keeping with the house's ostentation, but its housekeeping could not be faulted. Even in the dim room she could see the sheets were bleached to brilliant brightness and starched to crisp perfection, and the room was in perfect order, without mote of dust in the air. That was a fine accomplishment in this dirty, sooty locale. Still, Dixon did not like the looming presence of Mr. Thornton himself who had appeared, arms crossed, in the doorway, as if overseeing some industrious pursuit on the floor of his mill. He should not be darkening even the doorstep to this room. Propriety forbade it. She would tell tell Mr. Hale, she would, but first the letter. Dixon crossed the room, chin raised, and with well-mustered hauteur she handed over a thin envelope addressed to the mill owner. He nodded in perfunctory thanks, but opened the letter immediately and scanned its contents. Then, much to her chagrin, he entered the room and took up the empty seat beside dear Margaret's bed. The slightest of smiles was upon his face, she noted. For some reason, it irked her mightily.

"Mother," said the tradesman quietly, as Dixon's mouth opened to the point considered by most to be agape, "Mr. Hale thanks us, and asks that we act in loco parentis."

"He- he should not be here," Dixon stammered, flustered, knowing full well it was well above her station to speak in this way, but knowing also that Margaret's virtue as a lady hung in the balance.

Mrs. Thornton shook her head at the nonsensical scene being perpetrated in her home. Her son should know better, she thought, than to rile up a servant, especially one so pig-headed as this. (And how fitting, she thought, that the Hales would employ one so recalcitrant as themselves!) Surely John could have waited to reenter the room until this Dixon person was gone. With a sigh, Mrs. Thornton held out her hand across the bed, and John dropped the folded missive into it. His mother read it quickly, then reread it aloud to Dixon.

"Dear John,

I must thank you for the considerable efforts you have made, once again, on behalf of my family. Dr. Donaldson has conveyed to me the unfortunate news of the riot today at Marlborough Mills, as well as my daughter's extreme shock upon encountering this scene, and her subsequent faint. How providential that she was that you were there to protect her from the encroaching crowd after she fell and hit her head! Dr. Donaldson also tells me that you have extended your hospitality to avoid moving her at this critical time. For this I am most appreciative, although I do hope I may myself encroach upon your hospitality early tomorrow, as I would like so dearly to see my beloved daughter. Until then I authorize you and your mother to act in loco parentis, as you have already shown your willingness to protect and defend Margaret in my stead. I am glad to count your friendship among my many blessings.
"With utmost appreciation,

Richard Hale"

"So you see, Dixon, there is nothing untoward here. My son is chaperoned, by me, and is here at Mr. Hale's request. Your young mistress' has nothing to fear."

Dixon gathered her shawl, her face beet red. No, it was not right, no matter if Mr. Hale allowed it. Perhaps he was addle-headed from all the time spent nursing poor Mrs. Hale. But even if he did not, his servant still knew right from wrong. It was this place, Milton. It was this horrible, sooty place that had turned everything they knew inside out and upside down. A place where tradesmen were the better of gentlemen, where men stole the virtue of maidens while their mothers looked on- no, she would never forgive Mr. Hale for bringing them to this horrible, horrible town, and inflicting such torture on her family.

"Dixon, it is late. Please allow me to send you home in our carriage." John extended the olive branch, but it was swatted away by the affronted Dixon. Did they think she was putting on airs? No, she knew her place in society, even if he did not.

"I require nothing so extraordinary, sir. I am fully able to walk there as I did here." Dixon pulled her shawl more tightly around her and held her head high.

"Our butler, Stokes, will accompany you, then. I insist. Please tell Mr. Hale that I will send the carriage at eight a.m., sharp, so that he may visit his daughter. And although Dr. Donaldson thought this very unlikely, should circumstances should change in the night, I will call for both Mr. Hale and Dr. Donaldson immediately."

With undisguised resentment, Dixon nodded, and walked out with Jane. Once the servant were safely downstairs, Mrs. Thornton summoned John into the hall with an imperious gesture, settling herself on one of a pair of settees strategically placed in that wide space. She spoke softly, although she was certain she was out of earshot of Miss Hale, should she wake.

"Was that really necessary, John?"

"The carriage?" John shrugged. "I thought it might subdue her temper a bit. She seemed quite irate, and it's getting dark. We've missed dinner, I imagine."

"Don't change the subject. And no, not the carriage, although I certainly do not approve of treating our personal carriage as a cab. Son, you know what I am talking about."

"Mother-"

"There was no need for you to enter the room as you did, not while that Dixon was there."

John shrugged again, and rolled his heads and shoulders into a languorous stretch. "I do not care what Dixon, or any other servant thinks."

"Are you sure, John?" He looked at his mother quizzically as she continued. "We both know they will talk, as your presence in Miss Hale's room has obviously been noted by our own servants. It will be all over Milton by noon tomorrow. But you seemed intent on provoking, just now. There is a difference. Ask yourself why, and what it is you were trying to prove. And to the likes of her."

John thought. "I do not know, Mother. Except... she thinks me less. When I come for lessons that woman stares at me with contempt. She will barely touch my coat and hat."
"You go to better yourself—not that you need to— and she looks down on you? Then it is she who has the problem."

"You are right, Mother. As you often are." John sighed, but the smallest of smiles lit his face. How lucky he was to have a person of such wisdom to guide him.

"John," his mother said quietly, "I do not see what you find of interest in these Hales. They are not our sort of people. You think them too good for you, but this could not be further from the truth. Look at what you have made of yourself and think of who you are. You have made yourself into this person, from nothing. How many can say that?"

"Mother-"

"Please let me finish, John. I can see that you have a great deal of respect for this Mr. Hale, and that you consider him a friend. A fatherly friend, perhaps. That is a good thing. There is a loneliness in you since your father's passing, one that should have been remedied many years ago." Mrs. Thornton paused, as she contemplated her next words. "I also see that you have formed an attachment to Miss Hale." John looked at her in surprise. "Yes, a mother can see these things. I do not know if this attachment is a good thing. But that is not for me to decide. I only pray you are not hurt."

"How could a creature such as this hurt me?"

"As I said, you are from different worlds. She is a fine lady." Mrs. Thornton could not help but roll her eyes as she said these words. Yet her son took her seriously, as was his wont.

"And I am not a gentleman. I know, Mother. I am not good enough. But I do not offer myself. Not yet. I only seek to help her. That is enough, for now. It will have to be."

"Well, then. Let us return to your Miss Hale, and hope she appreciates all you do for her."

John noted it was 3 a.m on his pocket watch before he attempted to awaken Miss Hale again. She was barely sensible each time he'd done so before this evening, and he hardly expected this time to differ. He lit a candle, and found the pencil stub he'd been using to scrawl hasty notes about her condition in the small twin to the leather-bound book Dr. Donaldson had left behind. He leaned over Margaret and carefully attempted to rouse her.

"Miss Hale?" He would not attempt to slap her, as Dr. Donaldson had done so brutishly. No, a gentle voice worked wonders, he had found. Her eyes fluttered open almost immediately.

"Mr. Thornton?" This was the first time she'd recognized him. Progress, to be sure.

"It is, yes. Are you well?"

"Where am I?" Margaret attempted to sit up in the bed, her eyes widening suddenly. She gripped the sides of the bed, wrinkling the sheets as she pulled them loose. "So dizzy. That was not a good idea." She fell back into the bed, closing her eyes with a sigh. "I am not well. No, indeed."

John waited until her grip on the bed clothes relaxed, and presumably the room had stopped spinning.

"Miss Hale, I apologize," he began, "but Dr. Donaldson asked that I examine your eyes. Would you open them for me?"

"But, why?" She opened her eyes again, but now they were filled with dawning apprehension. "I do
not know this room," she said carefully. "Am I in your house? Where is Papa? How is it that I am here with you?" A gradient of pink crept over Margaret from decolletage to forehead as she slowly became aware of her situation. Her hands moved to her neck, ascertaining that the clothes she wore were unfamiliar, and therefore, not her own. She pulled the bed clothes tight to her breast and trembled.

"Do not worry. My mother is also here. Over there." John held out the candle so that its pool of light illuminated the sleeping woman, who was snoring lightly in the wing chair to the bed's left. Margaret turned her head carefully and relaxed slightly at the sight of the elder Thornton.

"Would it make you more comfortable if I woke her?"

"No, please. There is no need," Margaret said softly.

"Your father asked us to take care of you," John continued in a near whisper. "He will see you in the morning. All will be well, I promise."

"Father? You promise." Margaret nodded and relaxed further.

"Miss Hale? May I look?"

"What?"

"At your eyes. As Dr. Donaldson requested," John clarified, patiently.

"Oh, yes. What must I do?"

"Nothing. Just look at the candle." She did, and John observed that her pupils were every so slightly less dilated than before. Progress, again. He scratched out some notes in the book Dr. Donaldson provided.

"Does the light still hurt?" He could not help but notice her eyes were tearing up. John placed the candle on the bedside table, behind her head, so that it provided just enough illumination for comfort.

"Yes," Margaret replied, "My eyes can't seem to focus, and my head aches dreadfully. Did elephants stomp on it?"

"Do you do not remember what happened?" A vertical crease marred the space between John's intense blue eyes. Dr. Donaldson had not mentioned memory loss as a possible complication of the injury.

"That was an attempt at levity." Margaret laughed weakly, although she still clutched the blankets tight against her person. "Although apparently not a very good attempt. I do remember behaving shamefully earlier today."

Even in the dim candle light John could see the color that came into her cheeks at these words, words that were not the ones he hoped to hear. He saw nothing shameful in her embrace. To protect someone else could never be so.

"It was wrong to send you down to face that crowd. I apologize, Mr. Thornton. I must admit, my naivete gets the better of me at times. You see, I think I understand the way men think. But in Milton, people behave so differently from what I expect. I never thought those men would attack, I thought they would listen to reason. Or at least to a woman. I did not realize. I am sorry."

These words were even less expected then the last. He longed to hold her hand, to comfort her in
some way. But words would have to do.

"It is I who must apologize to you. It was my choice to face the hands. It would have been cowardly not to, just as you suggested. But to allow yourself to place yourself in harm's way as you did was unforgivable. No man should have allowed that. And you did come to harm. I cannot tell you how worried."

She surprised him then, by reaching out until her hand found his. "I would offer you forgiveness, but you have done nothing wrong. I, too, acted of my own free will. It was I who sent you down there, so clearly it should be I who protected you, should it not?"

"No Miss Hale, it should not." John shook his head at the simple stubbornness of this young woman, and the principles from which she would not be moved. There was something to admire in her granite temperament. And clearly her mind was returning to its normal, clear self. He smiled in recognition of this observation.

"But one act mitigates the other. One hand washes the other clean. We will have to disagree on this, I think." Margaret's wide-pupilled eyes regarded him gravely.

"Yes, Miss Hale," John said, as he regarded Margaret's supine form. Her eyes, inky, blue-rimmed pools glowed in the shadowy light cast by the single candle and her full lips seemed more silken than he'd ever noticed. He longed to kiss them, but settled for the fact that her hand still rested in his own. "We will agree to disagree."

"Should you not sleep, Mr. Thornton?"

"I cannot, Miss Hale."

"But the strike is broken, is it not? Surely you must rest this night so that you can tend to the reopening of the mill."

"Tomorrow, or rather, today is Sunday. Even in Milton men rest on this day."

"Of course. I am still confused. I did not realize... but why do you sit with me?"

"To be honest, Miss Hale, you suffered quite a blow. The doctor did not want you to sleep deeply tonight."

"So you take it upon yourself to keep me awake?" Margaret's lips curved into a small, tentative smile, and John's heart sang. "What shall we talk of, then? I know, why don't you tell me about your childhood. Were you always a mill master?"

"I believe I once told you I was apprenticed to a draper," John said quietly, and not without some tension.

"Oh, yes." Margaret blushed as she remembered the embarrassing conversation brought on by her own insistence that Mr. Thornton could not know anything of the hardships faced by his hands. "I had forgotten. Please excuse my lapse in memory. My mind is a bit woolly, it seems. And were you successful? What did this job entail?"

"There was much fetching and cutting of fabric at first. Then, waiting on customers directly. Finally, as my skill with figures became more apparent, my master, Mr. Coleridge had me keep the books, and manage the ordering of goods."

"And what of before that? Were you born in Milton?"
"Yes, in one of the estates on the hill. Watson, another mill owner, recently bought the property. I hear he plans to fully renew it."

"Had you not thought of buying it yourself? As it was once in your family?"

"I have no desire to. It is far more efficient to live within footsteps of the mill. And I have no desire for such an ostentatious lifestyle. Our days in that house were splendid, certainly, but in some ways, I am glad they are past."

"I am sorry to bring up this subject. I fear that once again I have offended."

"You have not. It does not pain me to talk of those days, Miss Hale. My father was a good man. The poor decisions he made cannot change this. Nor can they taint the love he felt for his family."

The pair were silent for a while, and it was only when Margaret closed her eyes that John said softly, "Tell me about yours. About your childhood, I mean."

"Oh." She opened her eyes, and nostalgia colored into her voice. "Well, until I was nine I lived in Helstone with my parents. Helstone is quite small, even for a village, and it is surrounded by the New Forest. Despite its name the trees are quite old, and I spent many a day tramping through those woods, crushing bracken under foot as I looked for birds nest and mushrooms and any other treasures I might glean. Have you ever been to such a place?"

John shook his head. It sounded like another world to him.

"The smell of bracken is intoxicating. The only word I can use to describe it is 'green.' It is the greenest smell I know." Margaret laughed softly at the recollection. "As you know, my father was the parson, so we lived in the parsonage. It was a brick building that sat close to the village green, along with most of the commercial buildings of the parish. It had a rather large property, and a garden that mama loved. She had planted the most beautiful climbing yellow roses along an arbor that arched into a long tunnel. I would play in it all summer long. Oh, how I miss those roses!"

Margaret's narration was punctuated by a loud snort from Mrs. Thornton, which served as a reminder to lower the volume of the conversation. Margaret readily complied, as she found herself enjoying this irregular talk with her father's good friend.

"And there were fruit trees, too. Some espaliered against a fence, and others growing in their natural form. My father's favorite was a pear that grew the most succulent fruit. Of course, Father did not while away his time in the garden. He traveled some distance each month to the far ends of the parish to minister to the shut-in members of his flock. On foot, as we did not keep a horse. I accompanied him whenever possible. I loved those visits."

"And when you were not out walking? Were your days taken up with dolls and tea parties? Under the beautiful yellow roses?" John tried to imagine a young Margaret Hale and utterly failed. Like Athena, she a seemed a goddess born fully-formed.

Margaret brought him back to the present with her throaty laugh."Oh, no. My favorite past-times were climbing trees and playing dread pirate. My bro- my friends and I would fight to see who would climb the tallest tree behind our house. That was the mast of the ship, and the highest spot we could reach, its crows nest."

"And you, I take it, most often reached this crows nest?"

"Much to my mother's chagrin, yes. I tore far too many dresses, and ruined others with tree sap. Mama would much rather have seen me playing with dolls and the porcelain tea set my Aunt Shaw
had sent for Christmas. I think it was because I was so wild that they sent me to London."

"To London! And how old were you then?"

"Nine. It was horrible at first. Although I could not let Papa know. He would have been heartbroken, as he was the one who escorted me there. But I was terribly homesick in the beginning."

"Yes, of course you were. The Helstone you describe is a child's paradise."

"I do love my cousin Edith, though, almost as a sister. And Aunt Shaw. And I learned so much in my time in London, although I will admit at times it was frightfully boring."

"How so?" asked John, intrigued. He never would have guessed that a lady such as Margaret Hale might not find London and all its perfection not to her liking.

"The endless parties, the daily social calls inviting a calculus of snubbing such that people pretend to be out when they are actually in, the extended conversations about exactly nothing. I so envied the men each evening after dinner. When the women left the table we whiled away the next half hour talking about nothing more interesting than the latest fashion plates or china patterns, while I surmise that in the next room you cigar-smoking men were talking about local politics. Or world events. Or perhaps the price of cotton. But of course, you see, I do not know. For I was not allowed to know."

John chuckled, although he hesitated to ask the next question. "And does Milton suit you better?"

"At first, no, I thought I did not. I was slow to learn your customs, and gave offense at every turn. To you, for instance. But the longer I live here the more I appreciate the openness of its people and the fact that unlike Londoners, Milton people say what they mean. There is much to admire in that."

John tilted his head as he processed both the apology and the oblique compliment. Margaret was full of surprises this night. Was this solely due to the accident or was this a facet of her personality newly revealed to him?

Margaret yawned. "You have learned something about me, I daresay."

"And what is that, Miss Hale?"

"That I am an incorrigible chatterbox, at times."

John scoffed. "I never would have imagined that of a preacher's daughter who loved accompanying her father on his visits to his flock."

Margaret smiled. "All of this talking has made me quite thirsty. May I have some water?"

"I am sorry Miss Hale, but that is something I cannot provide. Doctor's orders. His treatment requires-"

"What treatment is that?"

"You have noticed your arm is bandaged, have you not?"

"Yes, it is very sore."

"Dr. Donaldson administered salt water to you, in an attempt to lessen the swelling within your skull. It seems he is worried about the concussion you have suffered."

"He administered salt water to my arm. Somehow. By cutting me, I surmise. And because of this I
cannot drink? But I am so thirsty! Surely a sip or two could not hurt?"

"I would not advise it, Miss Hale. His orders to my mother were quite clear."

"But not to you?"

"I was otherwise engaged."

"With the mill. I see. Of course. You had to worry about rounding up the rioters. And the damage to your property." Margaret's face fell in disappointment, although she tried valiantly to hide it.

John rubbed the crease between his eyebrows, as he felt a headache coming on. She jumped to conclusions as easily as a child playing four square. "No, Miss Hale," he replied. "With you."

He cleared his throat, then looked up sharply, mindful that the increased volume of their recent conversation might have awakened his mother. He needn't have worried. She slept on. That was a credit to him, he realized. She seemed to have no worries that son might somehow tarnish Margaret's virtue while mother slept.

John turned back to Margaret. "You should sleep."

"But you said I cannot."

"The doctor said you cannot sleep deeply. A light sleep will be fine, as you did earlier this evening. It will help you ignore the thirst, if nothing else. Your father comes at eight, and Dr. Donaldson with him. Hopefully you can survive until then?"

"I will try, Mr. Thornton."

It was 5 a.m., and based on her eye movements, Margaret was dreaming. Was this deep sleep? John had no idea. But Margaret seemed happy at first, based on the smile on her face and her relaxed affect. Although he was bleary-eyed with lack of sleep, John pressed on with his vigil. He could think of worse ways to spend a sleepless night: right now he had the opportunity admire each detail of her face, to memorize every curl that lay tousled around her. And certainly he could not be blamed if, in the growing light of the dawn he happened to notice that her blanket had slipped to her waist, allowing him a tantalizing view of the curves of her breasts through perfectly translucent fabric. He was shameless.

She stirred, and seemingly the dream changed, as her breathing quickened and she cried out softly. Her arms and legs moved slightly and John decided it was time to wake her.

"Miss Hale!"

She sat bolt upright, eyes wide open. He noticed her pupils were much smaller now, although still not quite back to normal.

"Oh, I had the strangest dream!"

"Why don't you lie back down and tell me about it?" John asked soothingly, pulling up her blankets, although he did not dare arrange them around the patient himself. While Margaret regained her modesty John glanced at his mother instead. She was still out, amazingly. Perhaps she had drunk too much claret with dinner.

"You are not dizzy?" he asked Margaret once she was settled back in bed.
"No, I think that has passed." her voice was soft and breathless, her face flushed.

"That is good."

"Yes." She seemed confused, as one often is after a nightmare, and in dire need of comforting. He wished he could hold her and offer that succor.

"Do you want to tell me?" John prompted softly.

"Do you think dreams have meaning?" Margaret whispered.

"In what manner?"

"Some say they are portents, as in the Bible, or symbols. For instance a dream of a crown may symbolize a desire for power."

John shook his head. "I cannot credit such ideas, as they have nothing to support them but wishful thinking. It seems more likely that dreams are the detritus of our waking hours, our brain's housecleaning. Certainly your mind has been through a lot in the past day and has a lot of organizing to do. I would not read too much into any dreams you have had this night."

Margaret took a deep breath. "It scared me. I was in the woods where I grew up. In the New Forest, as I told you. But it was different than I remember. Instead of a place where the sun breaks through to dapple the forest floor, the forest was dark and foreboding. But there was a bright lamp that I was heading towards-I was intending to visit the home of my friend, Bessy."

"A childhood friend?"

"No, she lives here in Milton. In fact she works at the mill."

"At Marlborough Mills?" John lifted an eyebrow. He knew Margaret was on a first name basis with some of the mill girls, but not that she took tea with them. His Margaret was like an onion, he thought, when one layer was revealed, yet another presented itself.

"Bessy is a weaver, I think. I met her that day..."

That day. John frowned. The day he showed Margaret just how violent a temper he possessed, how far below her standards he measured, and quite possibly shut her out of his life forever. With an effort, John removed all traces of emotion from his voice and urged Margaret to continue.

"I was bringing her a basket, as I sometimes do, and somehow I knew there was a wolf following me."

"Like Red Riding Hood?" John forced a smile.

"Yes, I suppose so. Except there are no wolves in the New Forest. The largest mammal I've ever seen, apart from ponies and pigs is a squirrel, and those are red. This wolf was silver. And it was huge! I was tiny compared to it. But I wasn't a girl like Red Riding Hood. I was grown."

Her hands began to shake as she continued, and to John's amazement she reached again for his.

"The wolf tricked me. The lamp was not lighting Bessy's house. It hung from a tree deep in the darkest part of the woods. And there the wolf attacked me. It pinned me down and bit me. I was in terrible pain, and I thought it would kill me."

Margaret trembled as she continued. "But then something strange happened. Two ravens flew down
from the trees and intervened. They were huge, too. Much larger than me. One was noisy, the way ravens often are, and it attacked the wolf repeatedly. It pecked at his eyes, but still the wolf persisted. The other raven spread its wings and covered me completely. It sheltered me until the wolf went away."

John was silent, as he had no idea what to say. Finally he responded, "But you were safe? In the end?"

"Yes, I was safe," she replied quietly, mindful of the sleeping matriarch in the chair beside her. "And really, now that I've told you, I don't know why I was so scared." She released his hand and pulled her blanket higher on her chest.

"It is hard to understand why dreams affect us the way they do-" John began, but Margaret interrupted.

"As you say, they are just detritus of the mind." She closed her eyes and was quiet for a while, as she pondered the import of his words.

"But if that is true," she asked after some time, "which raven were you, Mr. Thornton?"

Chapter End Notes

Although this chapter was very long, I hope it is what people were anticipating after two chapters without almost any interaction between Margaret and John at all. I thought it was important to set up the stage sufficiently first, but I thank you for your patience.

Although their situation varies greatly from what occurred in the book and movie, my goal is to keep this couple in character as much as possible, while at the same time writing this as a love story. I see both Margaret and John as similar in temperament. They are both passionate, principled people and that is why sparks fly when they get together, and also why they tend to misunderstand each other. But it is also why they belong together. I hope that I am able to do them justice as this story continues. I mentioned earlier that I greatly enjoy writing from John's POV. This may continue, as I am having a lot of fun with it. But I also realize that Margaret very much represents, us, the modern reader, who is often struck by the inequities of the new industrial era. For instance, in Victorian times, medicine (and many other aspects of life) suffered greatly from paternalism. Patients (particularly women) were often not told what was wrong with them, although their husbands or other influential people in their lives might be. Nor were they granted autonomy in their care. From a modern perspective, this rankles. I think it would bother Margaret, too. We shall see. ;)

Margaret awoke about two hours later to a parched throat and the greatest hunger she had ever experienced. It had been a good twenty-four hours since she’d eaten, she realized, a span of time in which she’d never gone without food before. She quieted her thoughts for a moment, allowing herself to fully experience the twin sensations of thirst and hunger, and then considered that the hunger pangs she felt were insignificant compared to those experienced by the Boucher children. How spoiled was she that twenty-four hours was the longest fast of her life! And how those poor children were still suffering, particularly the youngest, who had no words to express their pain. They had gone for weeks subsisting on little more than porridge that was more water than oatmeal. Hopefully the mill would be back in operation soon, so that their father could retake his place at the loom. She would need to ask Mr. Thornton about him.

Margaret turned her head and noticed that Mrs. Thornton was no longer seated in the wing chair next to the bed. The parlor maid, Jane, had taken her place and was peering at Margaret with rapt fascination. She blushed and looked away as soon as Margaret engaged her eyes with her own.

Margaret carefully sat up in the bed, and smiled slightly in relief as she realized that the sudden movement had not set the room spinning. She noted, too, that she could also see clearly once again, and that the bright morning light did not sting.

"Jane," she asked softly. "Could you direct me to my clothes? I would very much like to get dressed."

"Miss Margaret," Jane whispered, "that won’t be possible just yet. The master is sleeping, and the mistress has asked that we not awaken him."

Margaret turned and realized that to her left, sprawled in a most uncomfortable-looking position was Mr. Thornton, fast asleep in the under-sized, straight-backed chair in which he had sat all night. His upper back was slumped against the slats and his head was tilted back to rest against the wall, his mouth slightly open. His legs, so long and gangly, jutted out at odd angles, like those of a stork perched on a chimney. She had never seen him looking so relaxed, she realized. This was despite the fact that he was still fully dressed in the clothes he had worn yesterday. His cravat was still tightly wound around his neck, his waistcoat- splattered with her own blood, Margaret realized with dismay- was still fully fastened, and his frock coat still covered the whole of the ensemble. There was blood on the portions of the shirt cuffs visible to her, which caused Margaret to wonder exactly how much she’d spilled the day before. She touched a hand gingerly to the plaster just above her temple. Surely head wounds did not bleed that much. Then, her second wound reminded itself of her presence. Her arm hurt frightfully. She touched it experimentally and immediately regretted such a stupid decision. It felt as though it was on fire.

What was it Mr. Thornton had said? That the doctor had introduced salt water into her for some reason, and then had prohibited her from imbibing. Surely this also explained the Sahara-like conditions in her mouth. She would need to ask Dr. Donaldson to explain the reasons for his actions- it annoyed her to have only a few pieces of a puzzle.

"Could I have some water?" she implored Jane as quietly as possible.

The girl blushed as she shook her head in an emphatic no. "I am sorry, miss. The mistress says it is
not allowed. But the doctor will be here soon, I think. Mayhap you could try to sleep until then."

"No, I think not. Could you fetch me a hairbrush, please? And would it be possible for me to, well, I need to use-" Margaret looked at Jane and then at Mr. Thornton, not willing to talk of private bodily functions in front of him, even if he were sleeping.

"Oh, of course, miss. Here is a robe the mistress left for you to wear. Come with me, please."

"But surely I could get dressed while I am up?"

"I suppose so, miss." Jane crossed the room and opened an armoire where Margaret’s clothes lay, neatly folded, boots besides them. "I will help you dress, shortly," she whispered as she gathered the bundle, then directed Margaret to a dressing room that stood nearly empty, apart from a large copper tub, a table stacked with towels, and a wooden commode.

Margaret returned to her bedroom, dressed in the clothes of the day before, hair styled simply in a low bun, and quickly made the bed, as Jane had left to find Mrs. Thornton. She sat on the bed’s edge, ankles crossed, and shook her booted foot nervously as she regarded Mr. Thornton, who slept on. Clearly she needed to apologize to him for her behavior the day before, and to his mother for the huge imposition she had placed upon the family by becoming injured. But more than that, she wanted to be home. Her mother needed her, as did her father. Even Dixon did. The housekeeper could not run the household and take care of Mama both. It was far too much work for one person. Margaret would need to convince Dr. Donaldson that she was fully recovered and that no signs of injury lingered. She winced as she moved her arms to fold her hands in her lap. It seemed even moving her arm was an issue. It stung in one place in particular, likely the location where the doctor had cut her. She had not unwrapped the bandages to check the wound, but it was likely to be an unpleasant sight. She would need to act the stoic when examined.

Margaret looked up, to see piercing, brown eyes examining her. They put her in mind of the dream of the night before. Yes, Mrs. Thornton was the smaller raven, the one who had so much to say as it attempted to drive the wolf away. Of course, that made her son the other raven, the one who had pressed his outsized wings against her. Margaret blushed at the thought. What exactly was her mind suggesting? And what had she missed while she was unconscious?

"Miss Hale," said Mrs. Thornton in familiar dry tones, although much softer in volume than usual, "I see you are already dressed. Are you that eager to leave our dirty, smoky home?"

Of course the woman would take offense to something as innocuous as dressing, Margaret thought with an internal sigh.

"No, Mrs. Thornton," she replied politely. "It’s just that I wasn’t dressed in the most appropriate manner. Well, to be honest, I am concerned about my mother and father. You see-"

"Walk with me," the older woman commanded, her voice no less authoritative when whispered. "We must not wake my son. It is clear he is exhausted." She did not add, "And it is you who have exhausted him," but she did not need to, Margaret felt. It was written in the woman’s forbidding countenance.

The pair descended to the lower level of the house, entering a brightly lit drawing room Margaret had not previously seen. It was less forbidding in its décor than the public rooms of that level, and from its softer furnishings, was clearly the private room of the mistress of the house. Several baskets of sewing and embroidery were neatly arranged on a side table, another by a mohair-upholstered chair closest to the fireplace. Mrs. Thornton took that chair and gestured to its mate.
"My son told me that your mother is more ill than you initially mentioned. Although why you did not simply tell us this is a mystery." Mrs. Thornton clucked disapprovingly at the girl as she remembered her own comment about "low spirits." She would not have had cause for such a petty remark about Mrs. Hale if the woman's own daughter had been more forthcoming from the start.

Margaret bowed her head. "It is not something even my father fully realizes, I am afraid. He does not yet understand..." She could not say the words.

"Is your mother in pain?" Mrs. Thornton had no such trouble getting to the crux of the issue. The woman was dying, that was all there was to it. Denying such a thing would be of no benefit.

"Yes. The laudanum helps, but not enough. And that is why the water mattress is such a blessing. I thank you for your generosity in loaning it to us."

Mrs. Thornton waved her hand in dismissal of such a small act. "Yet your father is so blind that he does not see the pain writ upon your mother's face?"

Margaret sighed. "I must admit Dixon and I have not shared all aspects of my mother's illness- or treatment- with him. Mama asked us not to. And I do not know how much he and Mama have talked. Perhaps he is not ready to acknowledge the severity of her illness." She shook her head and forced a smile that appeared more of a grimace. "But in the end it does not matter. He is not able to care for her, as he has students to teach. And Dixon cannot care for Mama and take care of the house, too. Therefore, I must do my share."

"You take on the household chores?" Mrs. Thornton narrowed her eyes as she regarded Margaret in a new light.

"The stove grate must be blacked daily, the rest of it weekly. Laundry must be done. Provisions must be bought. There is no shame in seeing that these things are done." Margaret lifted her chin. "At least, I see no shame in them."

They were not so different, Mrs. Thornton realized. Sixteen years prior, she had been in a similar situation to Margaret, forced to take on work that was considered far beneath her. Yet she had felt the very same way. There was no shame in seeing that these things were done. Because they must be done.

A small seed of respect planted itself in Mrs. Thornton's breast. This haughty girl, with all her airs and graces was more complex than she had initially considered. No wonder John was so intrigued by her. There was much more there than a fair face and pretty wit. Much more, indeed.

Their tête-à-tête was interrupted by a knock on the door. The butler, Stokes, announced the entry of Mr. Hale and Dr. Donaldson.

"Margaret? I was so worried..." Her father looked so frail, so unsteady on his feet. Margaret noticed that his hair fell in a soft, disheveled halo around his head, as though he had not thought to comb it that morning.

Daughter rushed to father's side, much to Dr. Donaldson's consternation.

"Young lady, I did not expect to see you out of bed this morning. You are in no condition to be dressed."

Mrs. Thornton barked a short laugh. "If you think you can tell Miss Hale what to do, you have not spent much time around her."
"I am much improved, Dr. Donaldson," Margaret chose to ignore her hostess' well-placed barb. "Certainly I feel as well today as I did yesterday morning. I am hoping you will allow me to return to Crampton. I know I am needed there." She turned to her father. "How is Mama? How did she sleep last night?"

"She had a restful night, Margaret. I think she is getting over this illness, at last." Margaret looked at her father critically. He did not seem to believe his own words. The half smile he wore, which seemed plastered onto his lips, was witness to this. It was not mirrored in his eyes, or in any of the many tiny muscles of his face. He did know, Margaret realized. Clearly, the words he spoke were solely for his daughter's benefit. He thought her a child who needed protection. This realization brought with it a confusing mixture of sadness and frustration.

Dr. Donaldson broke into Margaret's train of thought. "Mrs. Thornton, might we use this room for an examination? I would need a servant to stay of course. But Mr. Hale--"

"John's study is just across the hall, Mr. Hale. I regret that my son will not be able to join you." Mrs. Thornton side-eyed Margaret. "He had a rather exhausting evening, I'm afraid."

"Did he?" Mr. Hale's brow lifted in puzzlement. "No matter. I am sure John has plenty of books to occupy me. Dr. Donaldson, please take your time and make sure that my dear daughter is well. I should not like to find she is exerting herself prematurely."

"Father! I am certain I am well. Really, I must protest." Margaret's words did nothing to stop her father leaving. Mrs. Thornton briskly slid the pocket doors shut behind him, then reached for a key on her chatelaine to secure the lock.

"I will surely be a more able chaperone than a servant," she noted, as Dr. Donaldson's moved toward Miss Hale with alacrity.

"Let us check your eyes first. Mrs. Thornton, if you would light a candle, please?" The doctor nodded with satisfaction as he examined the immediate response of Margaret's pupils to the bright light. "They are almost back to normal. This is good news, indeed. Mrs. Thornton, do you know if your son was able to collect data last night? This information may be worth publishing in a letter to The Lancet."

"You will have to ask him yourself, Dr. Donaldson. At my age it is hard to spend the entire night awake. I do not know if he was able to collect any of your data."

The doctor harrumphed. "Have you taken any liquids?" he asked the patient.

"No," responded Margaret. "Nor have I eaten. And I am both terribly thirsty and famished."

"Good girl. Thank you for your obedience. You may have a thin gruel today, I should think. But no more than a cup of water until noon. We will need to watch very carefully to be sure that the swelling does not return."

"You are referring to the swelling in my brain, I think. And imbibing water might cause this swelling to recur?"

The doctor smiled, and patted his patient on the arm. "Do not trouble yourself with details, my dear. It is enough to know that the treatment worked and you are on the road to recovery."

Margaret lowered her brows but said nothing for a moment. The doctor's bedside manner left something to be desired, but he had healed her, and that was what truly mattered. She could ignore the condescension, she decided. Finally she asked, "Am I allowed to sleep, then? I mean, assuming
the swelling is gone. There was some reason, was there not, for keeping me awake all night?"

"Yes, yes. You should be able to sleep now."

"Why?"

"It is a bit complicated, Miss Hale. I would not want to confuse you."

"It involves celery," said Mrs. Thornton with a smirk. "I will explain it to you later, Miss Hale."

Dr. Donaldson shot daggers at the elder Thornton. "Assuming your eyes continue to behave normally, I believe you are out of the woods, young lady. However, to ascertain this, it will be necessary to do a full examination. You will need to remove your garments. Down to your chemise, please." Margaret blushed, as the doctor made no move to turn away or even avert his eyes. "Come, now. I have seen this all before," he explained impatiently as he tapped his foot against the plush Persian carpet that covered the better half of the room.

"I am certain you have not," retorted Mrs. Thornton. "This way, Dr. Donaldson. You will wait in the hall until I call you."

The elder Thornton helped Margaret out of her gown and loosened her stays enough for the younger woman to easily unfasten its front-closing busk. Then Mrs. Thornton tidied the garments into an unobtrusive bundle before returning to the door to readmit the doctor. She hovered close by, however, prompting several looks of undisguised irritation over the course of the examination.

The doctor removed a snake-like stethoscope and auscultated his patient, holding one end of the tube to his ear and the other to her chest. He directed her to breathe in and out, and then hold her breath, then performed the same routine on her back. He examined her throat and palpated her glands, although to Mrs. Thornton's eyes he took entirely too much time on each of these tasks. Surely there was no need to touch her skin as much as he did, particularly that skin under her arms so close to her breasts. Or to place that strange listening device all over the girl's breasts, again and again. And why would he need to spend as much time as he did examining her legs as he tested the young girl's reflexes? She'd hurt her head, not broken her ankles, after all.

"There seem to be no issues resulting from yesterday's treatment," the physician noted after some time, pulling out the leather-bound book he'd had by his side the day before and jotting down some lines.

"But why would there be?" Margaret asked.

"It is a very new treatment, to be sure."

"But you haven't answered my question. I wouldn't think age would have anything to do with efficacy, so long as the treatment was sound."

"What I mean to say is that the treatment applied was of an experimental nature." The man's patience was growing thin, Mrs. Thornton noted. She moved to stand by Margaret's side, although she decided it would be better not to intervene.

"I see. And was it therefore dangerous?" Margaret could not conceal her own irritation.

"Yes, to a degree," The doctor conceded. Margaret's eyes widened. "But it was decided that the potential benefits far outweighed the risks."

"Who decided?" Margaret asked.
"Excuse me?"

"I said, who decided upon this treatment?"

"Why Mr. Thornton, of course."

Margaret was silenced.

Of course? What could Dr. Donaldson possibly mean by that?

"Now, then. We will need to see if the poultice applied yesterday did its job." The doctor unwound the bandage covering the lower portion of her arm, and despite her earlier promise to herself, Margaret shrank back at the sudden pain produced by this action. The doctor hissed softly as he sucked in his breath. This was not the sight he had hoped to behold. The incision site was an angry red, and lines radiated away from it in an irregular corona. Margaret's skin was quite warm to the touch and swollen in the area. "There are signs of corruption. I am surprised. A bread and milk poultice is usually helpful at preventing and treating these kinds of things. Your color is quite high as well, and you are fevered." He scratched some more in his small notebook.

"It is nothing," Margaret replied. "The fire has made the room a bit warm. That is all."

Mrs. Thornton lifted an eyebrow, but said nothing, although she was certain embarrassment and indignation had surely painted some of the color on the girl's face.

Dr. Donaldson rummaged in his bag and pulled out a long wooden box. Inside, shrouded in a layer of cotton wool was a long glass rod striped with markings. The doctor held it between his fingers and snapped his wrist several times, until the liquid within the rod moved to its very end. "I am going to ask you to lie down, Miss Hale, and not to move for the next twenty minutes. I would like to take your temperature, but to do so requires some quietude on your part. But first, get dressed. There is no reason for this measurement to be done in private." He was released from the room, once again, and Margaret hurriedly dressed.

Margaret lay on the sofa upon the doctor's return, although she felt rather ridiculous to do with boots on, and a foot-long device extending from her clasped lips. Nor was she pleased when her father returned to her side, for he immediately drew the wrong conclusion.

"Margaret, you are ill!" Mr. Hale set down the book he'd carried in from the study and took up his daughter's hand. "Yes, you are quite warm. And what is this device?"

"Ah, yes," Dr. Donaldson replied. "I have been reading about the measurement of bodily temperature. There are some that feel that humans have a body temperature that is normally somewhere between 97 and 99 degrees. We will see how your daughter compares."

"I am sure I have never seen such a tool before," said Mr. Hale with some curiosity, oblivious to the scarlet blotches seated high on his daughter's cheeks, and to the dampness of the curls at her hairline. "You men of Milton are full of scientific ingenuity." He nodded at Mrs. Thornton. "Why, John has been telling me of the inventions developed on Yorkshire soil, and how his mill is that much the better for them."

"We are not afraid to embrace change. That much is true, Mr. Hale," replied Mrs. Thornton proudly.

The noise of rustling taffeta preceded the entry of Fanny into the drawing room. She shoved back both doors completely before entering, but the gown she wore, a bright tartan in hues unknown to past generations of Scots and supported by several layers of horsehair crinoline required more width for her to pass through than the space the two opened doors would provide. She squeezed the gown
to her sides as she passed through and ignored the slight reverberation the fabric made once she released her hands from her sides. Fanny looked from person to person with a look of pronounced annoyance.

"You didn't tell me the doctor was coming, Mother. I have been wanting to see him about those dizzy spells I have been experiencing."

"Perhaps if you stop inhaling smelling salts so regularly the dizzy spells will end," replied her mother calmly. "Breakfast is still on the sideboard, although I am sure it is quite cold by now. You might consider waking up before nine occasionally for the chance of a hot meal."

Fanny ignored the remark, turning her head away from her mother, to allow her lovely blond ringlets to bounce attractively around her shoulders in a flirtatious gesture. "Whenever you are finished with Miss Hale I will be waiting for you, Dr. Donaldson. I assume you have time? I have some other symptoms I would like to discuss with you."

"Of course, Miss Thornton," replied the doctor distractedly.

"Surely this is not necessary, Fanny. The doctor has other demands on his time." Mrs. Thornton eyed the man she'd suggested as physician to the Hales. After his behavior today, she wished she'd chosen another. There was something she did simply did not like about this man.

"What is that in Miss Hale's mouth? She looks so silly!" Fanny pointed at Margaret with undisguised mirth, just as her brother shut the front door.

He entered the drawing room, face flushed, hat in one hand, and a over-sized, conical bundle in the other. Yellow blossoms peeked out one end.

"John?" his mother asked. "I did not think you were awake yet."

He was out of breath, and took a good minute to reply. "I had an errand to run before Miss Hale left us."

"Are those flowers?" his mother asked. "But the markets are closed on Sundays."

John shrugged. "Being a tradesman has its small advantages. Good morning, Mr. Hale. Miss Hale, are you well?" His eyes widened in worry at the woman laid out on the sofa, thermometer still in mouth.

"Mmmph," was her eloquent reply, although there was a definite smile in Margaret's eyes.

The doctor removed the device and Margaret sat up abruptly and smoothed her skirts. "I am quite well, Mr. Thornton, although I fear you did not sleep much last night." To be sure, the wakeful night showed on his face. Shadows had appeared under his eyes, which were red-rimmed.

"I have a nap planned for most of this afternoon. I will survive, Miss Hale." The manufacturer smiled suddenly, and Margaret was surprised to see how much the action changed his face. He looked years younger.

"Have you been given a clean bill of health, Miss Hale?" the quicksilver smile left Mr. Thornton's face, and his brows knit into a well-worn expression of concern.

"Actually, no," interjected Dr. Donaldson. "One hundred two degrees cannot be classified as well. You are quite ill, Miss Hale. And, Thornton, as you seem to have a special relationship with the town's tradesmen, I wonder if you wouldn't do me a favor. I require salicylic acid and turmeric
powder from the apothecary— one to fight Miss Hale's fever, the other the corruption."

"Corruption?" John's expression of concern deepened, and he stood quickly. "Of course, Dr. Donaldson. If you will write out a note with your requirements, I am sure I can convince Mr. Lloyd to open shop, as soon as he returns from this morning's church services. I have done him several favors in the past, I am sure he will oblige me in return."

"Good." Dr. Donaldson tore a page from his notebook and scratched out some quick words in pencil. John scanned the note and tucked it into his waistcoat pocket, then consulted his watch before shooting yet another look of concern in Margaret's direction.

"Before you leave, Miss Hale—" John began, but he did not finish, as Dr. Donaldson had more to say.

"And while I am thinking of it, I will write out directions for Mrs. Thornton on how to make a new poultice. This one will be of shaved potato and turmeric. I am surprised the last worked so poorly, so we will try this."

"Mrs. Thornton?" Margaret queried. "Am I not to go home?"

"Margaret," Mr. Hale said softly. "Dr. Donaldson and I spoke in the hall. Your fever is likely to get worse before it gets better. I do not think Dixon and I can take care of both you and your mother."

"But Papa, I am well! And Mama needs me! Why did you not—" She held her tongue. He should have asked her. But she would not admonish her father in front of others. She bowed her head and held back tears of frustration. "I understand, Papa. Is this acceptable to you, Mrs. Thornton?"

"Of course it is acceptable," John replied in her stead, his face neutral, his heart dancing. Margaret would not be leaving him. Not yet.

"Then it's off to bed with you, Miss Hale. Mrs. Thornton, if you could have your servants prepare a thin oatmeal gruel and the poultice I mentioned?"

The elder Thornton nodded and rang for Jane, who entered the room with well-trained speed.

"Please take Miss Hale to the green room, as before, and ready her for bed. John," she turned to her son, "I expect you to get some sleep, as you just promised. You will have a full day ahead of you tomorrow. It won't do to face it in the throes of exhaustion."

"I am well aware of my obligations, Mother."

"Dr. Donaldson," the matriarch continued, "I am sure we have taken up enough of your time this Sunday morning. I am sure that even if you do not have other patients to see your wife anxiously awaits you."

Dr. Donaldson bowed, and said his goodbyes, as did Mr. Hale, much to Margaret's dismay.

"I am sure you will be well enough to come home tomorrow, Margaret," said Mr. Hale soothingly. "And I think you know this decision is for the best."

"I am worried about Mama," Margaret whispered as she hugged her father goodbye. "That is all, Papa."

"You are a good daughter. I have no question in my heart about this. Nor does your mother. Let the Thortons take care of you. We are lucky to have such friends as they. And part of friendship is obligation, you know."
"I know, Papa. I will do as you say."

Margaret turned away, tears in her eyes, and left the room with Jane, just before the doctor and Mr. Hale took their leave.

Fanny was furious. It was not normal for her to be something other than the center of attention, and for the past day Margaret had sucked all of the air out of the room, whether she'd intended to or not.

"Mother," she cried. "I needed to see the doctor! I could not have been more clear with you. Why did you thwart me?"

"I am sure it can wait, my dear. Perhaps you can compile a list of symptoms, with date of onset and severity, and we will present it next time?"

Fanny shook her head in defiance, setting her ringlets into motion once again. "That sounds like something John would do. Sooooo boring!" She flounced out of the room, forgetting to hold her skirt close to her as she passed through the doorway. She found herself wedged in the doorway, the bell of her skirt, fully occupying the opening. She yanked hard on her skirts and their accompanying crinoline, which finally obliged with a snap. With a huff and a glower, Fanny turned back to the face the room's occupants, her expression daring them to comment. But the eyes of her mother and brother were elsewhere, although they could not fully hide their mirth.

"I think Fanny will be asking for renovations, John, should skirt widths grow any wider," Mrs. Thornton said quietly once her daughter had left.

John smiled but did not reply, instead gathering the bouquet of flowers in his arms. His thoughts were focused, as they should be, on Margaret and the afternoon they would be passing together.

Chapter End Notes

Not much of John in this chapter, but I hope you will find Margaret in character. As you have probably guessed, the next chapter will be all Margaret and John again- this chapter is setting that up, and once again, I needed to include some Victorian medicine to accomplish that. If you find that terribly boring, I apologize, but I find the contrast between our modern world and the world of 170 years ago to be absolutely stunning, and medicine is a part of that. To make a few things clear, in 1845, doctors and scientists did not know that germs caused disease, so Dr. Donaldson would not have known that the tools he was using to cut Margaret needed to be sterile, or that the salt water he was introducing into her veins was probably contaminated. So for the story to be realistic, she more than likely would have gotten an infection. :) Poultices, mashes of different household foods and herbs, were often used to draw out infection ("corruption") from wounds, but varied in how well they worked. And of course, it's possible that they could introduce infection, too, as people were not washing their hands. Aspirin wasn't yet invented in the 1840s, but pharmacists had begun purifying the related salicylic acid from willow bark, a traditional treatment for fever. It was harsher on the stomach than aspirin, however, and in high doses could lead to heart problems. Also, in the 1840s, primitive stethoscopes were in use, but they were only for one ear and did not work as well as modern ones. Most doctors did not use thermometers, because they took 20 minutes to get a reading, and also, no one had done the research to know that human body temperature was 98.6 F (37C). So Dr. Donaldson is definitely keeping up with his
field, although it may not seem that way to our modern sensibilities.

As for a more delicate topic, Margaret's need to use the bathroom, which I alluded to at the start of the chapter, a very few extremely wealthy London homes did have flush toilets by the 1840s (they had been invented many, many years earlier—Queen Elizabeth had one!), but the vast majority did not, because there was no sewer system for the toilet to be hooked up to. It wasn't until the Great Exposition (1851) that public flush toilets became a thing, and it was much later than that when they began to appear in homes. So it is unlikely that the Thorntons, living in dirty, smoky and less advanced Milton, would have had a bathroom anything like what we would recognize. They probably had a commode, a wooden cabinet with a chamber pot built into it. Some of the more fancy commodes had a water reservoir and could flush into a lower reservoir (kind of like some modern toilets used for camping). But servants would still be responsible for emptying the chamber pot and filling the reservoir. (Ugh.) Back then, personal hygiene would not have been fun for anyone! As I am having a very hard time with the idea of a portable commode being moved from room to room, I went ahead and assigned a room to it and the copper bathtub. But I think this is probably not accurate. :) Modernity rears its ugly head...
John bounded up his home's wide stairs two at a time, medicine packets in one hand and invalid's cup in the other. He could not help his good mood. He'd had time to check on the remaining Irish replacement workers this morning, who were in good spirits, thanks to Williams. With them and the flood of workers likely to show up the next morning he would be back in full production before the week was out, which meant orders would not be terribly delayed.

As for his more immediate concerns, Mr. Lloyd had been more than willing to open up the apothecary when John caught him outside the church just as services let out, and it had taken very little time for him to measure out the salicylic acid or to grind the turmeric root with mortar and pestle. Right now Cook was preparing a poultice to Dr. Donaldson's instructions and John himself would make sure Margaret took the correct dosage of the fever-reducer.

He was glad he would have her in his house for another day. In fact, he could not believe his luck, mixed though it was. A fever certainly could not be said to be a good thing, but in truth he looked forward to spending an afternoon with Margaret, even it meant forgoing the sleep his body very much needed.

He knocked on the door frame, as the door to the green room was itself open, and was surprised to see that Margaret was not in bed. She was pacing the room, like a tigress in a too-small cage. By the time John crossed the room she had walked back and forth twice from the window to the march stand where a servant had arranged the bouquet of yellow roses. She paused, finally, to breathe in their fragrance, closing her eyes as she did so. Her expression calmed as she did so, and John was glad he had impressed on the flower vendor the importance of opening up shop on a Sunday.

"They are exquisite," she said, when he joined her. "I have never seen roses quite so lovely."

"They are not like those at Helstone, then? I was hoping they would remind you." John tried valiantly to hide his disappointment.

"Oh, no." Margaret smiled. "Those were quite wild. They quite covered the arbor, and volunteers even made their way into the hedgerow. They could not be contained! But these are elegant. Their shape is perfected and they have so many more petals. And I don't think I've ever seen a bouquet quite so large. I counted fifty blossoms."

The slightest tinge of pink crept into John's cheeks. "My mother usually does the purchasing of floral arrangements for the house. I apologize if it is a bit too much."

"Oh! Not at all. I did not mean to imply-" Margaret looked at her hands as she collected her thoughts, then looked back at John with grave eyes. "Once again, Mr. Thornton, you have made a kind gesture, and I have gone out of my way to offend. I seem to have a particular talent for doing so."

John smiled, and Margaret noted how the expression transformed his tired face. "We seem to be matched in that regard, Miss Hale."

"We do seem to go to great pains to misunderstand each other." Margaret bit her lip thoughtfully, then attempted to change the subject. "I have not thanked you properly for sitting up with me last night."
"I would not think I had any choice in the matter." John immediately regretted his words, as he saw Margaret stiffen as soon as they were out of his mouth. "What I mean to say is, I would not have chosen differently under any circumstances. You risked your life for me yesterday afternoon. I owe you a great deal."

"Mr. Thornton, I."

"Yes?"

Margaret shied away from John's piercing gaze, and could not bring herself to say what she felt she must.

"It is nothing. I see you have brought the medicine Dr. Donaldson mentioned."

John set down the porcelain cup and tiny envelopes on the table next to the bed, and filled the cup half-full with water from the ewer that sat on a tray next to a tea service. He emptied a packet into the cup and stirred briskly until the white powder dissolved.

"Have you eaten? Mr. Lloyd said this treatment is best taken on a full stomach as it may irritate."

"Oh, yes. I had some gruel." Margaret wrinkled her nose. "Not to cast aspersions on your cook, but it is lucky that I was quite hungry."

John chuckled. "There is not much one can do to make gruel actually taste pleasant. I have eaten enough of it myself to know this."

"I did not realize you had such expertise."

"You forget I was poor, once."

Margaret blushed. Again she had put her foot in it. She did her best to mitigate. "Yes. I did forget. It is hard to reconcile the man you are now with the boy you once were. Perhaps some day you will tell me more about him."

John nodded as he handed her the spouted porcelain cup. "I would very much like that, Miss Hale."

"This is hardly necessary," Margaret said as she noticed the cup. It was of the same type her mother used on her worst days, when she could hardly get out of bed. "I am not an invalid. In fact, I am not unwell at all. I can readily drink from one of those tea cups, if it is truly necessary to take this medicine. But I do not think it necessary. I am fine."

The light sheen of perspiration on her brow belied her words, John thought. Margaret was stubborn in all things, it seemed.

"Indulge me, Miss Hale. You will need to drink it all. I was told it will be quite sour."

Margaret lowered her brows, but did as he asked, tilting her head back to allow herself to drink from the silly cup. It would have been much more efficient to gulp the mixture down from a normal container. This cup forced the fluid to come out in a frustratingly slow trickle, but at least the mixture was not sour as Mr. Thornton had suggested it would be. It was not unpleasant tasting at all. Finally, the job was done. She set the cup down on the table with an emphatic thud.

"So. This will cure me of what does not ail me. And then I will be able to go home to attend to my mother?"
John's face darkened. "You are not a hostage, Miss Hale. You are here at your father's request."

Margaret blushed furiously, then blinked back tears of frustration. "I know. That was unkind of me, Mr. Thornton. I have done it again, and once again, I apologize. It is just that-

In a lapse of propriety, John reached for Margaret's hand and directed her to the wing chair next to the bed. Then he knelt next to her and offered her his handkerchief, which she gladly took.

"I should not speak ill of my father. Especially to his friend. But somehow I feel that perhaps you might understand and not think too poorly of me for talking of my father in such a way." Margaret sighed.

"I would not do that, Miss Hale. Sometimes these things must be said. Please speak freely."

"It's just that he did not consult me, and this is not normal for him." Margaret shook her head as she dabbed at her eyes. "I know that women- and daughters- are often seen as nothing more than ornaments, or possessions, but my father has never treated me in that way. He has always seen me as a whole person, endowed with intelligence and wit, someone capable of making my own way in life, of making my own decisions."

How deeply hurt she was.

"I would not presume to speak on behalf of your father, Miss Hale. I have never had a daughter and therefore have not experienced the type of deep bond you share. But I do know that if I loved someone so deeply as your father loves you that I might act irrationally at times. It was easy to see this morning that your father was concerned for your health. Perhaps that explains his decision. It was done out of love, not out of some desire to proscribe your autonomy. I know your father thinks the world of you." As do I, John added silently.

Margaret frowned. "I know my father loves me. I have no doubt of this. Yet I am well, and my mother is ill, and she needs me."

"But the doctor did say you are running a fever."

"But I do not feel warm. I feel a bit chilled, in fact."

"Then under the covers might indeed be the best place for you, just as the doctor suggested."

"I would rather sit here and read, if I may."

John sighed, but forced a smile. "Again, Miss Hale, you are not a prisoner. Your ability to make your own decisions has not been rescinded while you are within these walls." The manufacturer stood and dusted imaginary flecks of dirt from his knees. "Would you like me to bring you some books? I have a fairly good selection in my study. If you would tell me what might interest you I would be happy to bring up a stack for you to choose from."

"Might I see your study?" Margaret asked hopefully. "It's just that at home, most of Papa's books are classics and I've read them all. And as we don't subscribe to a lending scheme I am forced to reread the few books I brought along with me from Helstone."

"Of course, Miss Hale. And I hope you would feel welcome to borrow any titles you found of interest."

A bright smile rewarded his suggestion.
"There was something I wanted to ask you. Dr. Donaldson said something this morning I found confusing."

"Oh. Did he mention the treatment?"

"Yes, he did, although he did not deign to explain it to me. But-"

"Well, I will be happy to explain." John launched into an detailed explanation of the doctor's hypothesis and rationale for treating Margaret, as well as the reason for the wound on her arm. By the time his short lecture was complete, the pair had made their way downstairs to John's study, and Margaret had forgotten her initial question.

Her sudden bout of forgetfulness was not only due to the impromptu science lesson, however. Margaret's mouth opened in astonishment as her escort opened double doors onto a room that glowed with warm tones of polished wood and smelled comfortably of leather and ink. "But this is not a study. It is a library! I was not expecting such a grand room."

It was indeed grand, much nicer than the library John remembered from his youth, and the one room in the house he had taken great pains to make his own. John did not often spend money on himself. Out of long-ingrained habit he preferred to see to the comfort of his mother and sister instead, but the creation of this space was one indulgence he had allowed himself. Floor to ceiling bookcases covered three walls completely and flanked over-sized windows on the fourth. Brass rails secured two-thirds up each case allowed a movable ladder to slide the length of each wall, allowing ready access to the upper reaches of the collection. Of course, the shelves were not completely filled yet. Time would see to that, as John was not the type to buy books by the yard.

"How is it organized?" Margaret asked as she ran her finger along the spines of several volumes. Her delight was palpable, and John asked himself why he had not thought of showing her this room himself. Of course, Richard Hale's daughter would have an abiding love of books. That much should have been obvious.

"Logically, I would hope." John finally replied with a smile. "Books relating to cotton production, manufacturing, and engineering are on the shelves closest to my desk. I'm not certain you would be interested in those. Philosophy is in that section," he pointed to a series of shelves near the door, "and literature and poetry are on the far wall." He pointed to the shelves above the brass rail.

"So high? I think that says something about your feelings toward fiction, Mr. Thornton." Margaret crossed the room, slid the ladder to the appropriate location and began to ascend.

"Miss Hale, I would be more than happy to collect any book you would like to read. I do not think it wise-"

"Not at all, Mr. Thornton. I have always wanted to avail myself of such a ladder. Not even my cousin's house on Harley Street has such a fine library. Although," she added with a low laugh, "I must say that like most Londoners, they are not really great readers. They spend more time talking about the books they claim to have read than they do actually reading them."

John stood close by as Margaret stretched to read the titles on several far away spines. "Rookwood? I am surprised. I would not think you interested in stories of highwaymen."

"Much of the literature collection is Fanny's, I must confess."

"Ah. That explains Oliver Twist, then."

"No. That is mine."
"Once again, you surprise me, Mr. Thornton." Margaret pulled the volume from the shelf and pivoted on the ladder to regard the manufacturer with a smile. He had turned away from her, however, to face the window.

"And why is that, Miss Hale? Do you think me incapable of even reading fiction- mere stories- about the plight of the poor?"

"No! No, that is not what I meant at all. It is just that Dickens is such a realist. I would think you have enough of that in your day to day activities. Please, Mr. Thornton. Let us not argue." Margaret replaced the book on the shelf and grasped the ladder firmly. Suddenly she felt a bit dizzy. It must be the near-constant disagreement. Why did every interaction with Mr. Thornton come to the same inevitable conclusion?

"I do not think I have a novel in me this afternoon. Perhaps poetry? Do you like Tennyson, Mr. Thornton?" Margaret grabbed a thick volume bound in red-leather, but found she needed two hands to hold it."Perhaps you could share your favorite-"

The room tilted and Margaret slipped from the ladder.

John turned back just in time to catch her, although the book was somewhat damaged by the fall, one corner dented, some pages bent. Thankfully Miss Hale was not hurt, herself. John cursed his pride in turning away from her, and his stupidity in even allowing her to use the ladder.

But what had she said earlier? Her autonomy was important to her. She was not some employee he could simply order around. He could not tell her what to do, not if he wanted a future with her.

John carried Margaret to the settee that sat in front of the window and arranged her carefully, then crossed the room and shut the french doors. He grabbed some papers from his desk and knelt next to his love, fanning her as he loosened her collar as much as he dared. He undid one button, then two, then pulled back the lace that fully encased her throat. His hand grazed her flesh, and he pulled back abruptly.

She was burning up.

"Miss Hale!" He rubbed her hand with his own, as he tried unsuccessfully to keep the urgency from his voice. But she did not respond, although her breathing was steady. John left her side and rang for a servant, and was soon joined by Stokes and a very curious Fanny.

"Oh. Has Miss Hale fainted again? Luckily, I have my smelling salts with me. I have been carrying them with me everywhere because of the dizzy spells I've had of late. You know, John, it really was wrong of Mother not to let me see Dr. Donaldson this morning. It's not like we can't afford it. If he has time for your pet projects he certainly should have time for me." Blonde leaned over brunette and waved the small vial under the unconscious woman's nose, soon rousing her.

"There, there, Miss Hale! You have left us, once again! Perhaps your corset is too tight?" Fanny nodded knowingly, as she pushed John aside.

"Stokes," said John quietly to the butler. "I will return Miss Hale to her bedroom shortly, but she will need help readying for bed. If you could send Jane to attend her, I would be most appreciative. Additionally, please find my mother and apprise her of the situation. Cook has been preparing a new poultice and Miss Hale will need her bandages changed. I am sure my mother will want to supervise."

The man nodded and left quietly, as a very concerned John refocused his attention on Margaret and
returned to her side.

"Miss Hale-"

"You know, John, it was really quite inappropriate for you to be in this room alone with an unconscious woman. The door was closed! What were you thinking? Do you have any idea what people will say when they find out?"

"But how would they find out, Fanny?" John asked icily.

Fanny's jaw tightened, but she smiled her most brilliant smile as her reply dripped acid. "I think you should go, John. I will take Miss Hale back to her room and wait for the servant. It is not right for you to be present. I don't know what Mother was thinking to allow it."

"Really, Miss Thornton," voiced Margaret weakly, "I appreciate the gesture, but it is not necessary. I will be fine on my own. And Mr. Thornton had promised to read some of Tennyson's poems to me. I was very much looking forward to it, to be honest. But you are welcome to join us, as chaperone, if you'd think that appropriate."

John smiled inwardly at the oblique invitation and helped Margaret to her feet. Fanny preferred to rant.

"Tennyson? Ugh! He is so old fashioned. I would rather listen to John read the dictionary. There's an issue of the American Review right over here. It took a while to get to us, of course, but Miss Hale, it contains the latest poem by Poe. His words are far more dramatic. And romantic! 'Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary -'"

"Fanny, please give it a rest!"

Brother and sister stared each other down, and as Margaret exited the room with Mr. Thornton she wondered why she and Frederick had never bickered in such a way. Perhaps it was that unlike she and Fred, who were of such similar dispositions, the two Thorntons were like night and day. Margaret smiled to herself. She definitely preferred the later hours. Still, she could tell that although it was in Fanny's power to annoy her brother mightily, it was not necessarily intentional. So, as was her nature, Margaret tried to smooth things over.

"Miss Thornton, should you join us, would you be kind enough to share this poem by Poe? I have not heard it, although certainly I know of the author. Your description has quite intrigued me."

Fanny nodded, then lifted her chin in an expression of eager rebelliousness as she regarded her brother. "Why, of course I will, Miss Hale. I cannot think of anything I would enjoy more."

John's hopes of a quiet afternoon of conversation with Margaret were dashed by circumstance. It was not Fanny's presence that was the cause: she stayed a mere twenty minutes, as she was annoyed when Margaret failed to attend fully to her dramatic reading of The Raven, complete with sound effects. Fanny was not amused by the several yawns, nor the numerous times that Margaret closed her eyes, despite a steady increase in volume over the progression of several stanzas. Fanny flounced out of the room in a fit of pique, her copy of Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque in hand, unopened, as clearly it was not worth sharing more Poe with such an uncooperative audience.

No, the cause was not Fanny. It was Margaret. She fell asleep just as soon as his sister left. John took the opportunity to claim the wing chair Fanny had vacated, and soon was asleep, as well. Darkness had long fallen by the time his mother woke him up, although not intentionally.
She was leaning over Margaret, as she first applied a damp washcloth to the younger woman's forehead, and then wrung out a second cloth, which she used to wipe down the patient's arms and neck.

"She is quite feverish, John," his mother said quietly, once she noticed he was awake. "Is it time for another dose of medicine?"

John produced his pocket watch and held it near the candle his mother had lit to illuminate her work. "It's ten o'clock. I completely missed a dose. I am a full six hours late." He rose and prepared the solution with urgency.

"I am sorry, John. I did not want to wake you. You were sleeping so deeply. Heavens know you needed the rest."

"Mother, this is not your responsibility. This is my fault alone." What type of guardian was he, to fall asleep on the job?

He woke Margaret up enough to drink the concoction, but not enough, it seemed, to recognize either him or his mother. Margaret seemed to be having a waking dream, one that was markedly unpleasant.

"Is she delirious?" John asked his mother.

"I would not know. I wonder if we should call for the doctor."

"Bessy!" Margaret cried out. "The raven-"

"Bessy is her friend," John said softly. "A girl who works at the loom. She told me of this dream."

He did not mention he and his mother were a part of it.

"Miss Hale is friends with the workforce?" Hannah rolled her eyes.

"Do you think she should care more for matters of class, Mother?" asked her son. "If she did, where would that leave me, a tradesman, given that she is a lady?"

"You have made something of yourself, John. You are one of the wealthiest men in Milton. But what is a girl at a loom? She is nothing."

"I disagree. She is part of my mill and therefore very important to this family. It does Miss Hale credit to think her worthy of friendship."

Hannah scoffed. "You are blinded, son. The world does not work in this way. It never has." She stood and smoothed her skirts before resuming her familiar poker-straight posture. "I will have Jane bring up a plate, as it is long past dinner. You are not eating enough. I fear the strike and this most recent business has caused you to lose weight. You look gaunt." She paused at the door. "I would suggest we call the doctor if your young lady does not improve within the hour." His mother left in a quiet rustle of crisp bombazine.

John took up the washcloth his mother had left in the basin, and began gently wiping down Margaret's arms with the wet cloth.

She continued to cry out, occasionally, despite John's efforts to cool her.

"Fred-"
Who was Fred? And why did saying his name bring her such anguish?

"You cannot say you will never return!"

She said no more, her heated brain turning to other topics, none of which made much sense. John did his best to push her nonsensical words from his mind and to focus on her alleviating her physical symptoms. It was his fault, after all, that she suffered so.

John waited the full hour suggested by his mother before waking an underservant to call the doctor. Margaret's condition continued to deteriorate during that long hour and its conclusion he kicked himself for waiting. Dr. Donaldson arrived quickly, however and wasted no time assessing the gravity of the situation. He unwrapped Margaret's bandage with rapid precision and frowned.

"Her arm is much improved. See how the redness has abated? The turmeric is doing its job."

"Then why does her fever continue?" Asked Mrs. Thornton, who hovered over Margaret protectively. "Is it not due to this corruption you mentioned?"

The doctor nodded. "It must have entered her blood. But the salicylic acid should be helping. You did administer it every six hours, did you not?"

John's face colored in shame. "I must apologize. I missed a dose. But I did administer more, an hour ago. Yet, since then Miss Hale has only gotten worse."

Dr. Donaldson pressed his hand to Margaret's forehead and issued sharp orders. "Have a servant draw a tepid bath, no cooler or warmer than body temperature. The tub should be half way full. We will have to lower Miss Hale's temperature by immersion." As Mrs. Thornton hurried away to wake a servant, the physician turned to John. "Let me see the medicine you procured from the apothecary."

John picked up a packet from the bedside table and handed one to the doctor, who opened the handmade envelope, licked a finger to pick up some of the sample within and tasted it.

"This is not salicylic acid. It is the right color, but I am not certain of just what it is. I am afraid that either the Mr Lloyd made a mistake when he synthesized the drug, or he pulled the wrong preparation from his shelf."

John's brow wrinkled in concern. "Is she poisoned?" If so, he himself was culpable. This all led back to him, after all.

"There are no other symptoms beside the fever she already had. Perhaps this chemical is inert. But I would not want to possibly worsen things by giving her yet another medication, should the two interact. We will have to wait and see."

Jane, groggy from sleep and not as neatly attired as usual, entered the room to tell them that the bath was ready. John removed his frock coat and rolled up his sleeves before carefully lifting Margaret from the bed and directed Dr. Donaldson down the hall to the dressing room.

"We will place her in the bath fully clothed, of course, to preserve her modesty," the doctor said. "And we will need to make sure her bandaged arm does not contact the water, as the poultice should not get wet."

John knelt as he gently lowered Margaret into the bath, and swallowed a gasp of shock as the water transformed the thin nainsook of her nightgown into the most transparent of films. She was as much a goddess as any shown in a Renaissance painting, he realized. It was wrong for him to be seeing her in such intimacy, yet he could not look away from the perfection of her breasts, nor the curve of her
waist and thighs. But look up he did, when he heard a strangled noise just across from him. It was accompanied, he saw, by a most lascivious expression on Dr. Donaldson's face, whose eyes ran back and forth across Margaret's nearly naked figure as though they were committing every detail to memory.

"Mother, a towel," John said, with as much calmness as he could muster. His mother handed a heavy white cloth to him which he quickly dropped into the tub. It floated for a few seconds, before submerging itself to fully cover Margaret's body. Then, with equal calmness John addressed the servant observing the scene, mouth agape. "Jane, thank you for extra duties this evening. You are dismissed. Please close the door as you leave, as there is a draft."

After the maid left, and his mother with her, John did his best to control his rage. "I will thank you not to treat Miss Hale as your personal picture book of indelicate illustrations, Dr. Donaldson. You will not besmirch her virtue."

The doctor was speechless, but his shamefaced expression conveyed his guilt.

John took several deep breaths and with great difficulty calmed himself. He loosened his white knuckled grip on the copper tub and regarded Margaret before speaking. He felt the anger leave him quickly, almost as though she were speaking to him in soothing tones, as she had earlier, when she'd urged them not to argue. His voice was therefore even as he addressed the physician. "Dr. Donaldson, you are an educated man, and your help has been invaluable. I do not wish to lose you as our family's physician. However-

"Miss Hale is your intended. I have overstepped, and I humbly apologize. In the moment I forgot myself. It will not happen again. You have my word." The doctor rose, and with a chastened expression began to pack his bag. "Miss Hale may spend another 10 minutes in the bath. Remove her immediately if she begins to shiver. Then back to bed. She will need to ride this out, I am afraid."

John nodded, as Mrs. Thornton returned to the room to take the doctor's place at Margaret's side. "I would very much like to pretend this never happened, Dr. Donaldson."

The doctor bowed his head, cognizant of the sheer amount of power concentrated in Mr. Thornton, magistrate and manufacturer. It would not be good for business to make him an enemy. He did his best to convey this recognition. "As would I, with your permission. I have no doubt that you and Miss Hale will be the loveliest of couples. Milton society will be much improved for it."

John said nothing, although he felt a small knot of discomfort install itself in his gut at allowing his initial deceit to continue. Instead, he extended his hand to the man, although the grave expression begat by the physicians egregious actions did not leave his face. "I will see you out, Dr. Donaldson."

"I spoke to Jane," his mother said when he returned upstairs to find Margaret already in bed, in a fresh nightgown, her damp hair combed straight, and his mother by her side. "I gave her a pay rise. Hopefully it will be enough to keep her mouth shut. She is a smart girl, I think, smart enough to know she will lose her job if she talks out of turn."

John nodded. "Do you think Miss Hale will remember anything?" He could not imagine the level of mortification Margaret would feel to know that two men had seen her effectively naked. "I should not have been there, Mother." He ran his hand through his hair in frustration, and grasped hard on several unlucky locks. No decision he had made today was the correct one, it seemed.

"Yes, John. Have I not said this from the start?" Hannah said tartly. "But it is too late now. What is
done is done." She regarded the young woman, sleeping more soundly now that her body had been cooled. "I do not think she will remember. But that is inconsequential. As a man of honor, you must-

"Is there any question of that, Mother? Of course I must! Even before tonight I planned to marry Margaret. You know this."

Hannah shook her head at her short-tempered son, so much like his father in that regard. "No. What I mean is you must insist. We both know your Margaret is strong-willed. You must make sure she says yes. Otherwise she will be ruined. She has spent too many days in this house for tongues not to wag."

"She is her own person, Mother. I cannot control her. Nor do I want to."

"I am not suggesting you do. I am suggesting you use your brain."

Margaret stirred and the conversation ended.

John did not sleep for the rest of the night. He couldn't. He observed Margaret intently, noting every change in her breathing, every small sound she made. He lit extra candles so that he could get a better sense of any changes in her skin color, any return of the flush the fever would bring with it. And of course, the fever did return.

But it broke, just after 2 a.m. Her body stilled itself, and stopped perspiring. John allowed himself the luxury of caressing her forehead, and found it demonstrably cooler.

John felt relief, and then exhaustion flood into his body, but still he did not dare sleep. Margaret's fever could return and he would not foolishly be caught unaware if it did. John pulled the candles closer to himself and opened the volume of Tennyson they had planned to read earlier that day. He opened to a random page, but the words were not enough to keep him awake. They were too rhythmic and soon he found himself drifting. He shook himself awake and saw his mother fast asleep in the wing chair he had insisted she take. Conversation with her would be stimulating enough to keep him up, but that would not be fair to her. She had a full day's work ahead of her, just to run the house.

Maybe reading aloud would keep him from falling asleep. John turned the page, and spoke the words quietly:

"O blackbird! sing me something well:
While all the neighbours shoot thee round,
I keep smooth plats of fruitful ground,
Where thou may'st warble, eat and dwell.
The espaliers and the standards all
Are thine; the range of lawn and park:
The unnetted black-hearts ripen dark,
All thine, against the garden wall.
Yet, tho' I spared thee all the spring,
Thy sole delight is, sitting still,
With that gold dagger of thy bill
To fret the summer jenneting.
A golden bill! the silver tongue,
Cold February loved, is dry:
Plenty corrupts the melody
That made thee famous once, when young:
And in the sultry garden-squares,
Now thy flute-notes are changed to coarse,
I hear thee not at all, or hoarse
As when a hawker hawks his wares.
Take warning! he that will not sing
While yon sun prospers in the blue,
Shall sing for want, ere leaves are new,
Caught in the frozen palms of Spring."

John looked up from the page to see Margaret gazing at him, a sleepy smile on her face. "That was beautiful, she said quietly. Would you read me another?"

"Miss Hale!" John wanted to grab her and kiss her. But of course this was not possible. So much was not possible right now. Then his eyes lit on the next poem in the volume and he smiled in recognition of serendipity. He moved his chair closer to the bed, and began reading, his voice just above a whisper.

"O sweet pale Margaret,
O rare pale Margaret,
What lit your eyes with tearful power,
Like moonlight on a falling shower?
Who lent you, love, your mortal dower
Of pensive thought and aspect pale,
Your melancholy sweet and frail
As perfume of the cuckoo-flower?
From the westward-winding flood,
From the evening-lighted wood,
From all things outward you have won
A tearful grace, as tho' you stood
Between the rainbow and the sun.
The very smile before you speak,
That dimples your transparent cheek,
Encircles all the heart, and feedeth
The senses with a still delight
Of dainty sorrow without sound,
Like the tender amber round,
Which the moon about her spreadeth,
Moving thro' a fleecy night.
You love, remaining peacefully,
To hear the murmur of the strife,
But enter not the toil of life.
Your spirit is the calmed sea,
Laid by the tumult of the fight.
You are the evening star, alway
Remaining betwixt dark and bright:
Lull'd echoes of laborious day
Come to you, gleams of mellow light
Float by you on the verge of night."

Margaret, tears in her eyes, grasped John's hand, and he was lost.

Chapter End Notes

About the invalid's cup: In the BBC mini series, you can see Maria Hale drinking from a spouted porcelain invalid's cup. It is very similar to a modern toddler's sippy cup and I would think its use would feel infantilizing to someone who is not feeling ill. Hence Margaret’s annoyance at John's insistence that she drink from it. They are feeling each other out. :)

About John's library: I think Margaret was surely an avid reader, growing up as the daughter of an parson/academic. But given their limited means she would have been
unable to purchase books on a whim, as they were very expensive. And in Milton, which Gaskell based on Manchester, there would not have been a public library similar to the ones we think of today. In the 1800s Manchester did have the Chetham's Library, which was a free library, but it was not a lending library. Until the mid-part of the century the books were actually chained up. The way for middle class people to borrow books was to join a subscription service, where people pooled their money to buy and share books. However, I don't think the Hales would have been able to afford this. So I see John's library as being very, very attractive to Margaret.

About Rookwood: this is a novel written by William Ainsworth Harrison and published in 1834. Until Dickens novels came along and eclipsed it, Rookwood was considered the one of the most successful novels of the 19th century. However, I don't think it is a book John would have read, as it was a gothic romance and not at all serious. Definitely more Fanny's cup of tea.

About Poe: Fanny is quoting from "The Raven," which was published in the American Review in 1845 to immediate success.

About Tennyson: Tennyson was very popular in the 1840s and was a great favorite of Queen Victoria. For this reason I think Fanny would have found him a boring old fogey. The two poems John reads are The Blackbird, published in 1842, and Margaret, published in 1833.

About the salicylic acid: in the 1840s, pharmacists synthesized many of their own medications using the newly discovered organic chemistry techniques of how to put together and take apart complex molecules. (The job was a lot different than it is today.) However, as the science was new, the chemical produced were often impure. And sometimes the wrong chemical was accidentally produced, depending on the skill of the chemist. And of course, as in the present day, mixups inevitably occurred.
Hannah Thornton was tired. Her back ached from sleeping in a wing chair for three nights running, and her neck had a crick that made holding her head straight a painful endeavor. And while it could not be said that her household was in disarray, it was not running to the degree of clockwork precision it normally did. All this was thanks to the Hale girl, of course, who still occupied a bed in the green room.

Hannah entered that room now, a bundle of fabric over her arm, and regarded her son's choice of fiancée, who was still sleeping, despite the late morning hour. Of course it was not out of the ordinary that the girl did so- Dr. Donaldson had expressly stated that Miss Hale needed her sleep. Fighting off an illness took away greatly from the body's reserves, so it made sense that a person occupying a sickbed would be very little aware of her surroundings.

And that had its benefits, as far as Hannah was concerned. For one thing, it meant that John was not hovering around, and could spend his time at the mill, as he should. The elder Thornton was more than irked when she woke in the wee hours to the sound of her son reading poetry to an enraptured Miss Hale. Her son should have been sleeping, after a prior night spent keeping vigil. There was no time for such nonsense when the fate of the mill hung in the balance. Thankfully, she'd been able to limit her son's time with the girl to an hour the next night. The fact that he was completely exhausted made it easy to do so. Still, her son had put up a fight. He'd wanted to spend another full evening reading poetry to the girl, like some love-struck Romeo. But in the end, he could barely keep his eyes open. Mother had walked son to bedroom, as she'd done many years before, and the boy had fallen into bed fully-clothed, already asleep.

Hannah shook her head as she smiled.

John had never been in love before. As his mother, Hannah was certain of this. And persons in love behaved in very predictable ways. She should not be surprised that he would put the invalid girl's needs before his own. With just the slightest bit of encouragement from those large, grave eyes he would have done anything that girl had asked of him. Hannah supposed her son was lucky the girl hadn't taken advantage.

Maybe she was the type of girl who would take advantage. But maybe she wasn't. After the near-endless stream of women Hannah had paraded before him over the past five years—none of whom he'd seen fit to offer more than a second glance- maybe John knew what he wanted in a wife. Maybe his mother should give him more credit.

Hannah sighed aloud. She would reserve judgment for now.

Miss Hale stirred as Hannah returned to the wing chair, with a silent vow that yes, this particular piece of furniture would be replaced as soon as the mill was turning a profit. It was easily the most uncomfortable chair in the house, of that she no longer had any doubt.

"Mrs. Thornton," the girl sat up groggily. "What time is it?"

"It's half eleven."

"Oh!" Miss Hale's eyes widened, and Hannah smirked.
"Is there someplace you needed to be?"

"No. It's just that..." Miss Hale was flustered, in a way that was probably quite attractive to the opposite sex. "You see, Mrs. Thornton, I greatly appreciate the hospitality you have shown me since Saturday, but I am also certain that it has been a tremendous imposition." The girl bowed her head. "I apologize for this."

"Do not apologize, Miss Hale. Of course a manufacturer such as my son would take care of someone who had been hurt on his property. Propriety demands it."

"Yet you have stayed by my side these nights, instead of in your bed. Surely this is not fair, propriety or no. You have your own health to worry about."

Hannah nodded once in agreement, tight-lipped. A servant certainly could have kept vigil these nights, but that was not a possibility with John by the girl's side. However, Hannah's actions were for him, not for Miss Hale. There was nothing she would not do for her son, and it was unlikely someone who was not herself a mother could possibly understand this. John had given up the latter part of his childhood for her, and grown into a man who far surpassed her hopes and dreams. And those hopes and dreams certainly excused any lingering doubts Hannah had about this girl he'd taken into his heart.

The matriarch unfolded the yard of white cotton fabric that sat in her lap, and nipped one selvage with the tiny scissors that hung from her chatelaine. Next, she tore the cloth with a satisfying rip. She noted with pride how few fibers flew into the air as the cloth tore cleanly through the warp threads.

"You are making bandages?" Miss Hale asked.

"You have quite depleted our supply," was the dry rejoinder. "Luckily, we have a ready supply of fabric, although it is of far finer quality than what is required." Hannah rolled the first strip of fabric into a tight cylinder, then repeated the process of nipping and tearing. "I will see to your wound shortly. Is it causing you pain?"

"No. It is feeling much better."

Hannah nodded. "I am not surprised. I had a mind to suggest that remedy to Dr. Donaldson at the outset."

"Have you had much experience in treating wounds? Were Mr. and Miss Thornton rambunctious children?" The girl's lips curved into a pleasing smile.

"No," Hannah replied shortly, punctuating the word with another tear. After several minutes of wordless bandage-making, she continued. "My father was a physician. I learned a small amount from him."

"I see," said the over-curious girl. "I imagine he saw patients in the house? Did you assist?"

"Yes. And no. He had a practice where some patients came to him. But not many. My father's aim was to serve the upper crust of Milton, and that meant he must attend to his patients at all hours, and of course go directly to their houses whenever needed." She paused. "It also meant we saw very little of him."

"Oh." The girl had nothing more to say. Well, that was good. It seemed she had recently gained some skill in discerning when to keep her mouth shut.

"But he taught me some things, because I was very interested. I would have learned more, but-"
Hannah abruptly decided she'd said too much. Regardless of his son's affections for the girl, Miss Hale did not need to know her own intimate history.

Nonetheless, recognition dawned on the girl's face. Hannah would have wriggled with discomfort, if her stiff back allowed it, and if wriggling was something she ever did. Instead, she sat as erect as usual, and busied herself with the task at hand.

"I see," Miss Hale replied compassionately. "I am so sorry. You were very young, I take it?"

Hannah sighed. "I was fourteen. So you see, Miss Hale, I do have an inkling of what you are going through with your mother."

"As does Mr. Thornton." the girl looked away as she said, "Death is too much with us. I have a friend who is also very ill. She is but nineteen."

"It is a fact of life, Miss Hale. We all must die, and know not when." Hannah rose stiffly from the wing chair and set all but one of the bandages upon it. "Let's see to your wound." She moved to the other side of the bed

"When is Dr. Donaldson coming?" Miss Hale asked as Hannah carefully unwound the long strip of cotton.

"He will not. He saw you yesterday. You were half asleep. Do you not remember?"

"I... no, not really."

"Perhaps you were more tired than either of us realized. Your fever was gone by yesterday afternoon. He said that all you likely needed was another night's rest." Hannah cut a strip of clean cloth from the bandage roll and moistened it with water from the ewer that stood at the bedside table. She wiped away the poultice and appraised the wound. "It's scabbed nicely, I see. I'll bandage it again, but as the doctor suggested, you won't be needing the poultice. The corruption is gone, thankfully."

"Thank you, Mrs. Thornton."

In response, Hannah busied herself with the re-wrapping of the girl's arm.

"Are you satisfied with the care Dr. Donaldson is providing to your mother?" she asked after a while.

The girl blushed. It seemed like she did so at the slightest provocation.

"I must thank you again, Mrs. Thornton. He has been a godsend to us. Without his care I am not sure my mother would still be with us."

Hannah nodded impatiently.

"Yes, but would you say your mother is happy with her care? He treats her... appropriately?"

The girl cocked her head. "He treats her with compassion and... intelligence." She thought for a moment, and nodded emphatically. "As he should. My mother and Dixon seem very happy with her care."

"Dixon is the servant, I recall?"

"Yes, she is always by Mama's side. She has been Mama's servant for many years."
"I see," said Hannah and dropped the matter. Clearly the girl had no recollection of her time in the bathtub, thankfully, and had not noticed anything strange about Dr. Donaldson's behavior. Sleeping dogs would lie still for now.

"Does that mean I can go?"

"Excuse me, Miss Hale?"

"If Dr. Donaldson is not coming today, does that mean I am sufficiently healed that I may rejoin my family? As you know, my mother needs me."

The hopeful smile that spread across the girl's face was infectious.

"I will choose not to be insulted by your over-eagerness to leave us." Hannah bit her lip to prevent it from echoing the girl's grin as she collected the used bandage and prepared to exit the room.

"Would it be possible for me to see Mr. Thornton before I take my leave? I would very much like to thank him for the time he spent by my side."

"I am certain that won't be possible, Miss Hale. He is overburdened with work right now. I will be sure to convey your thanks to him, however."

"I see." Miss Hale's brow furrowed. "I owe him much. Both of you."

Hannah nodded. "I will send Jane to attend you. And Miss Hale, before you suggest the alternative, I will be ordering the carriage for you. You will not be leaving Marlborough Mills on foot."

Hannah swept out of the room with a rustling of skirts. She had no doubt that Miss Hale would be seeing her son later that day. He would, of course, be stopping by their tiny Crampton home to do the honorable thing and make a formal offer of marriage to Miss Hale. And Hannah also had no doubt that her son would be angry that she'd allowed Miss Hale to leave before he could make this offer at his own home, before the girl left.

But even if she liked Miss Hale a good deal more than she originally had planned to, there were some things Hannah Thornton simply could not permit. She would not be ousted so easily from the relationship she'd built with her son over one and thirty years. No, she would gladly be the target of John's frustration if it meant she could remain a few more hours as first in his affections.

It was good to be home!

Margaret had never thought she would find the cramped rowhouse as welcoming as she found it today, re-purposed chests, threadbare carpet and all. Those things did not matter of course, no more than they had in Helstone. It was the presence of her parents that made the place a home, and she was overjoyed to see them.

Dixon clucked over her, but that was to be expected, and Mama was feeling well enough, thanks to the waterbed, to be sitting up in bed reading the latest missive from Aunt Shaw. This was not at all what Margaret expected, and she felt a tremendous weight lifted off her shoulders to see her mother so full of life and vigor.

Her mother gasped over the gift of the roses. Margaret separated them into two bouquets- each still abundant- and placed one on the occasional table that held her mother's embroidery basket.

"These are not at all like Helstone roses," her mother said somewhat judgmentally, but approval
shone in her eyes nonetheless. She had many questions for Margaret about the frigid Mrs. Thornton, and even more about her son. All of this was peppered with a running commentary about the extreme usefulness of the waterbed they had provided, and its similarity to the fine feather beds she'd experienced as a girl at Oxenham.

Papa's affect was much less vigorous. He more resembled a man who been through a windstorm, unsheltered, yet somehow survived. He had dark circles under his eyes and a look in his eyes of a man who knew a truth that had been withheld from him. Still, he was thrilled to see his daughter, and she him, and Margaret found herself spending the early part of the afternoon traveling back and forth between Papa's study and Mama's bedroom, meting out her time equally between the two people she loved best in the world.

"They took good care of you, Margaret, did they not?" her father asked as he looked up from the oversized book he was reading, one which Margaret did not recognize.

Margaret smiled brightly from the chair she had pulled to sit quite close to his desk. "Of course, Papa. Mr. Thornton, especially. I can see why you think so highly of him. He was quite solicitous."

Mr. Hale nodded as he returned to his book. "He is a good man, Margaret. I don't know that I have met finer."

No. Margaret had not met any finer man, apart from her father, anyway. She realized that now. How wrong she'd been about Mr. Thornton. He had demonstrated to her, over the past few days that he was nothing like the portrait she painted of him.

"Did John mention whether he would be taking his lesson this evening? It is the usual day."

"I do not know, Papa." Margaret smiled at her father's childlike enthusiasm. "I was not able to say goodbye to Mr. Thornton when I took my leave this morning. Mrs. Thornton did mention there is a great deal of work to accomplish in a very short time."

"Yes. Of course." Her father's crestfallen look pained her.

"But surely he will send a note if he is unable to come, Papa."

Mr. Hale returned to his reading, then looked up with an absentminded smile.

"I did not tell you, Margaret. Mr. Bell sent me this Bible. He thought I might be interested, in light of my dissension."

"Oh?"

"It's the version the Unitarians use. Archbishop Newcome's translation."

"Is it much different?"

"Why, yes. In some ways. Listen to this: "Love is long suffering; and is kind; love envieth not; love is not vain; love is not puffed-up, doth not behave itself unbecomingly..."

Margaret graced her father with a patient smile. He seemed bursting to enlighten her.

"You see, Margaret, it's different from our version."

"But it's wrong. It should say, 'charity,' not 'love,' should it not?"

"Well, my dear, that's a matter of translation from the ancient Greek, and different translators may not
always agree. The Greek word is *agape*, which means love. To be clear, unlike us, the ancient Greeks had four different words for love. *Agape* is the purest, most selfless form of love—God's love, which we must do our best to imitate. It is unlike *eros*, the physical love between a husband and wife, *storge*, the love between a parent and child, or *philia*, love between friends. *Agape* is love as action, love demonstrated, not just a simple emotion. It is more than love felt."

"Love as action..." Margaret chewed her lip thoughtfully as she considered her father's small lecture. "Yes. I do like the unvarnished clarity of this translation." The former pastor pushed up his spectacles as he turned back to his new Bible.

John was kind. John had been patient and long-suffering with her. He was many of those things called out in that verse of I Corinthians Papa had shared. But certainly Mr. Thornton had his flaws, and she had yet to reconcile these. He was like the mythological Janus, a two-faced creation that had different aspects depending upon how one encountered him. The man who read poetry with intense passion— the man who made her wonder if perhaps she might fall in love with him—was the same man who kicked an underling with undiluted brutality. How was this possible? How could both persons inhabit the same body?

And what was she feeling toward Mr. Thornton? Was it *eros*? That was precisely the issue, the fact that she was feeling. It had to be eros. There was that strange sensation she'd felt the night before last when she'd awakened to hear the sonorous tones of his baritone voice, a fluttering in her heart, and elsewhere. And when he'd read the poem to her namesake she thought her heart might burst. She'd never, ever felt such a directed, intense feeling. It was as though she had discovered she had six senses instead of merely five.

Was eros wrong?

No, surely not. Her father would have said something, just now. And he and Mama were married, after all, and must therefore experience eros themselves... Oh, she didn't want to consider that.

Was she in love with Mr. Thornton?

Was he in love with her?

His eyes— those arresting cerulean eyes— had a look, such a look! — when she took his hand that night. Even when he came upon her inspecting that gorgeous, and ridiculously overabundant bouquet of roses his expression had been sublime.

He must feel something. Surely something more than Henry had.

Margaret almost laughed aloud as she thought again of the roses. Fifty! And somehow he'd obtained them on a Sunday, which should be impossible.

If only Edith were here. The two might stay up half the night giggling. Of course, Edith would want the whole story. The entire story from snout to curly tail. How would she tell her about how she came to be on the porch with Mr. Thornton?

Why did she go there? Was she feeling something for him even then?

Margaret shook her head in an attempt to clear her mind—and body— of the memories that came rushing forth. Of John Thornton, manufacturer, facing a hungry rabble, defiant and proud.

What else did the verse say? Margaret spoke aloud:
"...doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

"Yes," Mr. Hale said, "I will agree, the King James version has a poetic beauty to it that is unsurpassed."

Dixon interrupted the pair, and Margaret noticed for the first time the look of mental exhaustion the heavy-set woman wore. She had burned the candle at both ends while Margaret was gone. Not only Mama's current condition but also the unreasonable tidiness of the house attested to that.

"Miss, would you take a turn with your mother while I go out to the market?" Dixon asked. "For a change, the missus has an appetite, and I would take full advantage of it, but we are out of fruit as I have not had opportunity to purchase provisions."

"No, Dixon. You look dead on your feet. I will go. I have spent the last three days resting. And truly I need the exercise."

The housekeeper raised her eyebrows at Mr. Hale in silent entreaty. But as usual, the absent minded academic completely missed the signal. Dixon glowered with frustration. What else could she do but speak up? "Now Miss, it would not do for you to fall ill again."

"Nonsense, Dixon." Margaret brought herself up haughtily. "It is my decision to make."

She left the room and quickly gathered her reticule and hat, as well as a basket from the kitchen, and quickly checked the larder to assess the condition of their stores. Bread, cheese, fruit, cream, bacon, eggs. All needed. Plus fruit. All this would require visits to several stalls. She grabbed a second basket, and a container for the liquid.

She was on her way quickly, with a purpose to her step and a smile on her face. The weather was lovely, and unusually for Milton, a blue sky was peeking through the grey veil that usually clung to the city so tenaciously.

The tone on the street was different than on Saturday, too. The day of the strike the air had been oppressive, but even from the people on the street had come an unsettling feeling— one which had culminated in the riot. Today townsfolk seemed so much more friendly. Four, no, five men had tipped their tall beaver hats at her, and several well-dressed women had acknowledged her with a smile. That usually did not happen. Milton folk were typically too busy for such social niceties.

Of course, with the strike over, people must be feeling much more relaxed. Certainly if she was in such a position she would be celebrating in mind, if not yet in body. The thought of a steady wage rather than an empty cupboard should put a grin on anyone's face.

Margaret entered the covered market to more smiles and several "Good days," from shopkeepers she had never purchased from before. That was a bit puzzling. Milton vendors were not known for their customer service.

More puzzling was the fact that the egg seller bade her come to the front of the queue, serving her before several customers who were clearly there before her.

Then the baker, Mr. Hart, said something mortifying.

"I'd like to be the first to offer you felicitations."

Margaret nodded, as she typically did when conversing with the man. His Yorkshire accent was so thick that it generally took her several seconds to translate his words into southern English.
Moments later she colored, profusely.

"Pardon?" she asked weakly.

"Upon your upcoming nuptials." At least that's what she thought he said. "Your wedding," he amended. *Those* two words were quite clear.

Margaret nodded again, deer-eyed, handed him payment and walked away just as quickly as her feet could carry her.

Unfortunately, she had three more vendors to visit.

Margaret wasted no time on the remaining task, and rushed home and back out again. In minutes she was at Bessy's doorstep.

Her friend was in bed, and in much worse condition than the last time she'd seen her.

"I didna think I would see you again," the girl said quietly, her voice hoarse from coughing.

"There was an accident. I have been ill," Margaret began. "I am so sorry, Bessy. I would have come-"

"You have troubles of your own, I know it." The nineteen-year-old invalid closed her eyes and Margaret was struck by how much more gaunt she seemed since the last visit. Margaret glanced across the room at the girl's sister, who swept rough flags inefficiently with an ill-made broom.

"Yes, my mother has been doing poorly. But today she is much better. I was much relieved to come home to find her in such good condition."

Bessy's tried valiantly to sit up in the narrow bed crammed into the tiny, curtained alcove. "But where were you, then? You did not say you'd been on holiday. And how could you afford it?"

"I wasn't." Margaret shook her head. "Where is Nicholas?"

Mary swept faster and Bessy let out a long sigh, which was followed by a bout of coughing. Margaret leaned her forward and rubbed the girl's back as the coughs racked the girl's slight frame. Finally the fit abated, and her body stilled.

"He's at the Golden Dragon, most likely," the usually quiet Mary answered for her sister. "He's angry about Boucher breaking the strike."

"But it wasn't Boucher-" Margaret stopped herself.

"How d'you know, Margaret?" asked Bessy breathlessly.

"What did you hear of the riot?" Margaret asked.

"That a crowd gathered. And they threw rocks and clogs at the master and his sister."

"No. Not his sister."

"How would you know?" Bessy's eyes widened. "Oh. It was you, then."

"The rumor is that it was his sister? Oh, please say nothing."

"I would not betray you. Nor would Mary. Oh!" Bessy tried to laugh, but triggered another coughing
fit instead.

"What would Father think to hear you were protecting the master?" Bessy finally gasped with a smile.

Margaret stayed with Bessy until her sick friend fell asleep, and then she did what she needed to do. She gathered up her considerable courage and made the half mile trek from the squalor of Frances Street to the orderly New Street and Marlborough Mills.

The remains of the large, wooden gate had been removed but the courtyard was as busy as ever. Therefore no one noticed as she slipped past the mill house and made her way into the office she'd visited once before.

Margaret did not bother knocking at the door, which stood ajar. Instead, she opened it quietly and stood silently for a moment, appraising Mr. John Thornton, magistrate and manufacturer. She should not be viewing him such, she realized, as he was in a state of undress, a state, she realized she had not seen in the three days they'd spent together. His frock coat was slung over an empty chair, and his shirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. His cravat was missing and his neck was therefore fully exposed.

Margaret found herself blushing as she noticed the dark hairs peeking out from behind the placket of his shirt, suggesting a foreign landscape she'd never before considered. But why should she blush? She found herself remonstrating with herself. He after all, had spent plenty of time with her in undress- true undress. Yet she had witnessed nary a blush. Nor, she belatedly realized, had she received the smallest of apologies for this transgression against her virtue.

Anger sufficiently stoked, Margaret entered the room.

"Mr. Thornton."

The manufacturer looked up, and a look of irritation quickly dissolved into one of complete happiness.

"Miss Hale. I did not think I would see you today. My mother said you had gone home."

Margaret nodded.

"What did you say?"

Mr. Thornton, looked at her quizzically. "My mother said you had gone home."

Margaret raised her voice just a bit. "To the shopkeepers. What did you say?"

He opened his palms to her. "I have not spoken to any shopkeepers."

Margaret shut the door, perhaps a bit more firmly than she might have. "Yes. You did. On Sunday. You went to a florist, to purchase those glorious roses. And then you went to an apothecary. I will ask you again. What did you say?"

Mr. Thornton stood and rubbed at the vertical line that suddenly appeared between his eyebrows. "Miss Hale, clearly there has been some misunderstanding. Will you sit down so that we can discuss this quietly, please?" He rolled down his sleeves and grabbed his frock coat from the other chair and then gestured to the seat.
Margaret sat, and waited for Mr. Thornton to return to his own chair, which he'd pulled out from behind the desk to move closer to her own. She tapped her finger on her chair's armrest impatiently. "Well?" she asked, finally.

Mr. Thornton looked at her with confusion.

"I am still waiting, Mr. Thornton."

He racked his brain. "I asked the florist if he would be kind enough to open his store for me, as I had given him a very good price on some fabric he intended to use as bunting in a pageant this past spring. He agreed. He showed me the flowers. I knew I wanted yellow ones. We agreed on a price. I left."

Margaret breathed a heavy sigh of frustration. "And the apothecary?"

"I waited for him outside of the church, and approached him about opening shop. Again, he owed me a favor. Most merchants in town do. He opened the shop. He read the note from Dr. Donaldson, he ground the turmeric and he measured out the other drug- the salicylic acid. He noted the amount in his account book and I went on my merry way. Miss Hale, will you please tell me what this is about? What has happened?"

"You have not talked to any other shopkeepers?"

Mr. Thornton shook his head.

"Not Mr. Hart, the baker?"

"No."

"Nor Mrs. Wright, the cheese monger?"

"No."

"Nor Mr. Jeffreys, the bu-?"

"The butcher? No."

"Then how is it, Mr. Thornton, that those three shopkeepers, and two others wished me the best on my upcoming nuptials- to you? And how is it that the ton of Milton- if Milton could even be said to have such a thing- has had nothing but smiles for me this day, when previously they have ignored my very existence?" Margaret burst into tears. "It is only a matter of time before this news reaches my family!"

"Oh, Miss Hale." Mr. Thornton's face fell, as simultaneously his color rose. "This is my fault. Dr. Donaldson must have-"

"Dr. Donaldson thinks we are engaged? You told him this?"

Mr. Thornton nodded. He reached for Margaret's hand, but she pulled it away. And she waved away his offer of a handkerchief as well, preferring to wipe her copious tears away with her fingers.

"Why? Why would you say such a thing?"

"I had to."

"You lied."
"I had to."

"Why? What reason could you possibly have had?"

Margaret looked scathingly at this man she loved, yet did not love. He was a man of honor, yet a liar. Like Janus, he had two faces.

And he had no answer, it seemed. He was silent, his head in his hands. She waited. And waited. Finally, she rose to leave.

Then she heard his quiet answer.

"You would have died."

Margaret returned to her seat, astonished. "You exaggerate."

Mr. Thornton looked up, anguish writ across his severe features.

"I do not. You cannot understand, Miss Hale. You were grievously injured. A decision had to be made."

"And this decision was yours to make?"

Mr. Thornton sighed. "Dr. Donaldson made me aware of your mother's condition. Your father is my friend. I could not ask him to make a life or death decision regarding your treatment. Not when so much else weighs on his soul. And there was also the question of cost."

"Cost?" Margaret raised her voice unwittingly.

"Miss Hale, I am aware of your family's financial difficulties."

Margaret flushed scarlet, but attempted to control herself. "You have no right to speak in this way, Mr. Thornton. You have no way to know of my family's income. Nor is it proper for you to make such assumptions."

"I may be a half-educated Milton man, but I can do sums. Your father has six students of which I am one. I therefore know how much he charges for his tutelage. My sister is a hypochondriac. I pay the bills, and an therefore intimately familiar with the cost of a house call from Dr. Donaldson. Your mother sees the doctor thrice weekly, and is likely to see him more often in the near future. It does not pencil out, Miss Hale."

"My mother has a small income. We manage." Tears flowed again. The nerve of this man. The absolute gall.

"You could not have afforded this treatment. Should I have let you die? Should I have placed that decision on your father's already burdened shoulders?" The master's voice cracked as emotion overwhelmed him.

Margaret struggled to keep her own voice even. "So what you are saying, Mr. Thornton, is that I am in your debt."

"No!" Mr. Thornton jumped from his seat, eyes flashing. His hands had balled into white-knuckled fists, Margaret noticed. Here was the man she'd met that first day in the mill. But he surprised her by quickly calming himself. When he spoke, his voice much calmer, and closer to the rumbling baritone she found so enchanting.
"Miss Hale, you misunderstand. You will never be in my debt. I am in yours. What you did for me-

"That was charity, Mr. Thornton. I simply acted in the way my father raised me. I would have done
the same for any man."

"Any man?" Mr. Thornton's eyes widened in disbelief. He paced the room. "I do not understand. I
thought...Even if you hadn't been injured I would have asked for your hand. I would have asked
because under the circumstances- after what occurred there was only one possible course of action.
This has nothing to do with debt. There is no statement of accounts, no debits and credits to be tallied
or audited."

She was hurting him, she realized. But she could not stop. Her pride was too injured.

"You make it sound as though those circumstances- as though what I did was sinful."

"No, not sinful," Mr. Thornton replied quietly. "Foolish."

"It is foolish to protect someone from harm?"

"It is foolish to risk your reputation for someone you do not love." He turned away.

But she did love him. Not then, perhaps, but now, yes. At least, she had thought so until a few
minutes ago. Now she was utterly confused.

"Miss Hale, I have acted egregiously. I can only beg your forgiveness. But what is done is done. Can
we not make the best of this situation?"

"How?"

"Allow me to court you for a time, for propriety's sake. Then we can end the engagement quietly."

Margaret folded her hands in her lap as she considered his words.

"But that will not work," she said finally, "as we are not equals. Were we to end the engagement you
would walk away unscathed, whereas I would be marked as a fallen woman."

"I would not allow that to happen. I would make it clear that you were without fault."

"But how?"

Mr. Thornton shrugged. "It would require some creativity, but I would find a way."

"You would do this for me?"

He simply looked at her, unblinkingly.

Margaret stood and collected her reticule. "Thank you for the offer, Mr. Thornton. I will think on it." She
turned back towards him as she opened the door. "My father asked me to inquire whether you
would be joining him tonight for your lesson."

"Would I be intruding, Miss Hale?"

"I would not wish to interfere with your education, Mr. Thornton."

"Then please tell your father I will see him at seven."
She did not want to join her father and Mr. Thornton in the study. Margaret sat with her mother and Dixon in her mother's bedroom instead, inviting huffs of disapproval from the caretaker and languid looks of concern from her mother.

"You always sit with your father when Mr. Thornton is here," her mother began. "Is something wrong, Margaret?"

"No, Mama, I am just more tired than I expected. I walked more than I intended this afternoon, and I don't think I was as fully recovered as I thought."

Her mother nodded in agreement. "You must not stress yourself. We depend on you so, don't we Dixon? I don't know how we survived your being gone these past days."

Dixon huffed again, annoyed to be displaced in her orbit around her sun. "I cannot take care of the missus and prepare the master's tea, Miss Margaret."

"But I can stay with Mama."

"Margaret," her mother pleaded querulously, "it is time for my bath and medications, and that is a job for Dixon, not you. It would be most helpful if you would tend to your father and his guest."

Margaret nodded, defeated, and went to the kitchen to prepare the tea. The men were laughing when she entered the room, although at what she had no idea. She poured the tea silently, studiously avoiding any contact with Mr. Thornton as she handed him his cup, and averting her eyes throughout the entire process. She had intended to retreat immediately, planning for this by placing only two cups on the tray, but her father insisted she fetch another cup and plate and return immediately to them.

She did as she was told, fetching her needlework, too, so she would have something to occupy herself as long as she must stay.

She took the seat closest to her father and farthest from Mr. Thornton. She tried her best not to listen, but was inexorably drawn into the conversation.

"Margaret," said her father, "John was telling me that he was able to show you his study at the mill house. It is marvelous, is it not?"

"Yes, Papa. It is more beautiful than many in Harley Street."

"John, that is high praise, indeed! I think I could spend many an hour in there, myself."

"Of course, you are always welcome, Mr. Hale." Mr. Thornton smiled graciously. "Miss Hale, I hope you do not think this too forward, but as you so enjoyed the volume of Tennyson you selected while at my house, I thought it only appropriate to loan it to you indefinitely."

"I- thank you, Mr. Thornton." Margaret crossed the room to receive the book from Mr. Thornton's extended hand and this time was unable to avoid touching him. His hands brushed past hers as he placed the large volume safely in her arms and she felt a frisson of excitement pass through her as his fingers lingered in their journey. He caught her eyes and she was lost in their pale blue depths. She pulled away reluctantly.

Margaret returned slowly to her seat, oblivious to the two spots of color high on her cheek. She could hear only the lingering memory of Mr. Thornton's voice as he read to her.

"Margaret? I asked if you would refresh our tea, please."
"Oh! Father, I'm sorry. I was far away."

"Yes, Margaret. That was fairly obvious." Her father chuckled, and quite possibly Mr. Thornton was smiling, too, although Margaret did not turn her head in his direction to check. Quite mortified, the dutiful daughter poured the tea, offered cream and sugar, then returned to her place.

She did not stay there long, however.

"Father," she said abruptly, "if you and Mr. Thornton are done with tea, might I ask if I may take my leave?"

"Of course, my dear." Margaret approached her father and was encircled into a hug. "I forget that you are still recovering."

"It is not that." Margaret moved to the doorway and regarded Mr. Thornton with a clear, blue-green gaze and the smallest of smiles. "It is just that Mr. Thornton has something of utmost urgency he needs to speak with you about. Good night, Papa. Good night, John."

Chapter End Notes

I think this chapter is in some ways a pivotal one, and although for the most part I have planned for this story to be relatively free of angst so that it can focus on the development of the love story between John and Margaret, the huge misunderstanding caused by John's misrepresentation needed to be cleared up. I am trying as much as I can to keep all of the actors in this story as three dimensional and in-character as I can, as OOC characters really bug me. As a result, there was quite a bit of emotion here, as John and Margaret are both very passionate people. Poor Margaret is in turmoil, and John is bearing the brunt of it. However, now that the storm has passed, I think we can move on to the relationship-building phase. Thanks for your patience! :)

I also thought it was important to Margaret's character development to emphasize the fact that she is the daughter of a minister and the profound effect this would have on her development as a person. Although I grew up in a religious family, I am not a person of faith at all. Still, the huge influence of Gaskell's Unitarian faith on her storytelling is not lost on me. Margaret-as-minister's-daughter strikes to the core of who Margaret is, and why she stands up for the poor, why she is so willing to throw herself in front of John, etc. It is a key motivator for her, in my opinion, so I did not want to ignore it, even though it might be more comfortable to do so. So, although I probably will not be mentioning much else about biblical passages again I wanted to bring in at least one, as I think Margaret might very well be considering the nature of marital love and how it relates to what she has learned at her father's knee. I hope my telling was not too heavy-handed. As a vicar of the Church of England, Richard Hale would have used the King James version of the Bible. In the 1840s, Unitarians used Archbishop Newcome's 1808 translation, which phrases many verses (including I Corinthians) slightly differently. I think Richard Hale is academic enough to appreciate these differences.

Next chapter will be John-centric. :) (yay!)
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John was elated. He had not expected Margaret’s quick response, and was quite taken aback to hear his name upon her lips. It was a pleasant surprise, however, quite a pleasant surprise. He bit back a hopeful smile as he regarded Mr. Hale. But for once, the older man, so often socially unaware read the situation correctly.

"Margaret?” the father cried out in astonishment. However, it was too late, as daughter had already left the room to leave the two men to their conversation. So Richard Hale turned to Margaret’s suitor instead.

"I had no idea, John," Mr. Hale said, removing his wire-rimmed glasses to polish their lenses. "Is this what I think it is? I had not realized Margaret had warmed up to you. In fact, I thought she seemed, well..."

John nodded in agreement, as he struggled to find words. Did Margaret want him to mention that their engagement would be time-limited, and merely a sham, as he had placatingly suggested earlier in the day? If so, why had she said his name just now? And what was that current of electricity that had passed between them only minutes before? John was certain she had felt it, too, and he was certain that it meant something. All of what had passed between them these past few days had to mean something, despite Margaret's protestations. He would not pretend differently to her father. At the very least, he knew his own feelings to be real.

"Yes," John said, finally. "Well, perhaps the fact that we seemingly clashed so vehemently over every little topic camouflaged a growing attachment."

"Indeed. It may have been proof of it."

"I would like you to know that my esteem for your daughter has grown steadily since the day I met her. I have known no finer person. She is truly a credit to you and Mrs. Hale."

"We have done our best to raise her as a good and moral person."

"She displays that at every opportunity. Even in situations where a weaker person would tremble, she stands tall. That takes integrity. Mr. Hale, you taught her well. I know that I am but a mere manufacturer, but--"

"John, do not talk like this! You know that I consider you as one of my dearest friends, despite the fact that our friendship has been short. You are like a son to me. If you are asking me if I would agree to you marrying my daughter, I must tell you that it would be in no way a condescension."

John sighed. "She is too good for me."

Mr. Hale laughed. "Nonsense. The two of you are evenly matched. I have often wondered if I made a mistake in raising my daughter to be as independent as I did. It would take a special man to accept her spirit and her outspoken nature. You are that man, certainly. I feel blessed our life took us to Milton and crossed our path with yours. To have you in our family would be an honor. Truly, John. It would be an honor."

"Thank you, Mr. Hale." John’s face was transformed as he smiled without reserve, his eyes crinkling
"Call me 'Richard'. Or perhaps, 'Father'?'" The older man replaced his glasses on his face and returned the smile. "I suppose continuing with our studies tonight is out of the question. I do have some recollection of young love and its capacity to turn the brain into a sodden pulp. I imagine you will have no more patience for Greek philosophy tonight. It is, I fear, a bit more dry than thoughts of wedded bliss."

John's color rose, and Mr. Hale chuckled.

"You are too easy to rouse, my friend. There is nothing wrong with being in love. I hope you will remember this. I, for one, cannot be happier for you and my daughter, although I know that you will treat her with the dignity and honor she deserves -"

"I would not do otherwise, Mr. Hale!"

"I know, John, I know. But it must be said. Reputations must be protected, and I hear no end of it from the women of this family. According to Dixon and my sister-in-law, who both unduly influence my wife, I should not allow Margaret to visit her friends unchaperoned. I should not allow Margaret to leave the house alone. I should not allow Margaret to leave her room, I suppose. Poor girl. Knowing you as well as I do, I am certain that entrusting her to your guardianship will not convey her into a form of bondage she has never experienced, John, but at the same time you may find that the months until the time when you are wed will be vexing--"

"I love Margaret as she is. I have no desire to clip her wings. And you must know that I am a man of honor. I would never impugn her virtue. I am not a boy of seventeen, Mr. Hale. I am familiar with self-denial." John understood the necessity of this conversation, but it was nonetheless uncomfortable.

"Let us speak no more of it. I believe that etiquette demands a visit from your mother to our household, but in the present circumstances..."

"My mother is aware of Mrs. Hale's condition. She will understand. Surely under these circumstances the rules of convention do not necessarily apply."

"I will ask Maria. She will know how these things are done correctly. She is quite the lady, you know. This despite the fact that she stooped so low as to marry a parson like me." Mr. Hale smiled again, and John was reminded of why he so valued the man's friendship. Richard Hale completely lacked pretension. There was not a shred of affectation in the man.

John stood. "I should take my leave. May I have your permission to call on Miss Hale this Saturday? Unfortunately, I will be quite busy with mill business until then, but I am certain I can rearrange things to spare the afternoon, should she be available. Perhaps we might go for a walk."

"Yes, I am sure you are busy getting the mill running again. You burn the candle at both ends-- I can see it in your face. I'm certain such an arrangement would be fine, John. Margaret's calendar is not so full that she would not be willing to prioritize her plans for her fiance. I will let her know. Shall we say eleven?"

John left, and was so caught up in replaying the day's events that he lost track of his surroundings until he was quite close to home. He found himself on the route he normally took between Crampton and New Street. The nearby Haight Street, with its profusion of dry goods establishments beckoned to him. The shops were long shut, but the bow windows set in cast iron facades held displays intended to enchant passersby.
One in particular caught his eye. Of course it was at the store Fanny most favored, Lewis and Farnett, the most expensive dry goods store in the row, and the one that had all the latest wares from London only a few months after their introduction in the capital. This window held a display of fitted wicker hampers from G.W. Scott and Sons, along with a placard describing how said hampers had recently been introduced at the Great Exposition in London. The hamper, intended for a pic-nic, was truly ingenious, as every space was put to use. The hamper contained compartment to hold three bottles, each covered in woven wicker for protection, plus four wicker-covered beakers. Each of these, in turn, held smaller jars for pickles and chutney, also covered in wicker. In the center of the hamper was space for six squared-off, covered silver dishes, each large enough to contain a hot entree or dessert. In the lid were place settings for four: ivory handled forks, spoons, and knives, and silver rimmed plates, all buckled into place with leather straps. John noticed that the inner lid buttoned to the wicker frame, with space above for a blanket. Next to the hamper, a pic-nic was set up, its contents displayed prettily on a buttercup yellow wool blanket that spoke of summers in someplace delightfully sunny and warm.

It was perfect, he realized.

John blanched at the price (although Fanny certainly would not have), but not before deciding that he and Margaret would be pic-nicking on Saturday. He had savings, the result of long years of fiscal restraint. Why not lavish a small fraction on someone he loved?

John hurried home, scrawled a hasty note to Stokes informing him of the small excursion the butler would need to take to Haight Street the next morning, as well as of the need to organize a menu for Saturday.

John slept very well that night.

The following Saturday John showed up in Crampton at eleven a.m. on the nose. He was punctual by nature, but in this case, he didn't want to miss a minute of his allocated time with Margaret. He’d ordered horses for the day, as the site he chose for the pic-nic was outside of Milton proper and as the hamper, fully loaded, was quite heavy. He'd checked with his mother, however, for propriety’s sake. He was happy to confirm that chaperones were not required for engaged couples during daylight, not even in covered carriages. That meant there was no need for Dixon or anyone else to blight their day together. He was looking forward to an afternoon alone with Margaret and the opportunity to get to know her better, unimpeded by the questioning looks and unnecessary comments of others.

It was a perfect day for a pic-nic and John was certain Margaret would be enchanted by the location he’d chosen. It was the ruins of a 15th century church in the hills just a mile to the south of Milton. It was located at the source of one of the streams that fed into the river that had allowed Milton to first become a milling town. The place wasn't quite bucolic, but it was as close as this part of the country came to that description. There were wildflowers at this time of year, and hummocks of moss that were perfect for laying out a blanket. Although most of the animals—apart from a feral cat or two--were long gone, there might be a few birds, and not all the trees had been harvested for firewood. The church itself was stone, little tarnished by the soot of Milton. Only two of its walls still stood, and those partially. All in all, it was as lovely as Milton and its environs got. John hoped Margaret would like it.

John took the steps to Margaret's Crampton home two at a time and rapped sharply on its door, only to be greeted by the dragon herself, who regarded him with a look that could sour milk.

"She's not here. She would have sent a note, but the missus is doing poorly today so there was no one to send it. We employ no servants on a Saturday." Apparently Dixon did not count herself
among that group. That explained much.

John was dispirited by Dixon's words, but he would not let the termagant see it. "And where is she?" he asked evenly.

"She went to visit her poor friend." The servant lifted her eyebrows as she partially rolled her eyes in disdain. "Bessy. The girl is not doing well today, according to her sister."

"Did she say when she would be back?"

"No." Dixon crossed her arms and smirked. "Miss Margaret said you would understand." I knew you would not, went unsaid.

"And I do. She is right to visit her friend." John thought quickly. It might be less bother to go back to the mill to check the employee records rather than continue to engage this unpleasant woman, but not every employee listed a place of residence. And in truth, residences changed frequently for many mill workers, as their finances were often precarious.

Dixon began to shut the door, but was stopped by John's query. "Tell me, you wouldn't happen to know where the Higgins girl lives, would you?"

"Of course I do," the stout woman said huffily. "As if I'd have Miss Margaret traipsing through that part of town without knowing exactly where she was going. We've only providence to thank that I haven't had to call a constable to search for her. The ruffians in that part of town-- the things they get up to! It's not safe, I tell you--"

"An address?"

"Frances Street. Behind the Golden Dragon. It's a questionable establishment, from what I've heard. Our miss should not be tarnishing her reputation by being seen in such places, and it's up to you, now that she's--"

"Thank you, Dixon." John turned on his heel with alacrity, and jumped in the carriage. If circumstances made Margaret unavailable to pic-nic with him, he would simply bring the pic-nic to her.

The carriage stopped some distance from Frances Street, when the hired coachman informed John that the streets were too narrow to continue. John stepped down from the carriage, and directed the driver to wait while he continued on foot. It took him some time to find the Higgins' domicile, as the streets were unmarked and the residents appeared to somewhat unfriendly to him. That changed when he removed his hat, did his best to soften his naturally severe expression, and pressed a few coins into hands.

It was truly a depressing place. Laundry, already soot-stained and more rag than clothing, crisscrossed the narrow streets which were in shadow despite the unusual brightness of the day. Refuse-- from scraps of newprint to feathers-- littered the street, piling up in the darker corners as if swept there by some slattern and immediately forgotten. Grime covered windows lucky enough to be glazed, while greased paper covered others, bashed out by violence. Paint, it seemed, was a rare accessory for many of these houses. Some windows and doors showed traces of past coats of blue, or brown or green, but most stood in disrepair, warped by winter rains, and rotting. The houses themselves seemed to sigh in despondency. They sagged against each other, not a plumb line in sight.

The Higgins home was in better shape than some. It stood relatively straight, and its door was almost fully green, and only chipped in a few places. Moreover, its windows were intact and moderately
clean. Once he was certain he had found the place, John returned to the carriage, and unstrapped the heavy hamper from its back. He sent the coachman on his way, instructing him to return with the carriage in two and one half hours. Then John retraced his steps to the Higgins, setting down the hamper several times on his journey. Finally, he rapped sharply on the door.

A teenage girl he did not recognize answered the door, and John wondered if he had been misdirected.

"Excuse me, but I am looking for Miss Margaret Hale."

"She's here." The girl did not motion for him to come inside.

"Will you tell her Mr. Thornton is here?"

The girl's eyes widened. The door opened wider and she backed away. "Bessy! Your ol' master!" he heard her cry as she flew across the room to a bed set in a curtained niche.

John stepped inside. And there was Margaret, perched on a chair in the dim, close room, next to a shadowy figure in the bed.

"Mr. Thornton!" she said in surprise. "Why are you here? Is something wrong? Is Mama--?"

"No, Miss Hale." Could he call her Margaret? This was mixed company and she had not formally said yes to him. "Your mother is well. All is well. I came because I heard that your friend was ill and I wondered..." He moved forward with the hamper. "You see, I had our cook prepare a pic-nic for today, and it would be a waste not to eat it. Would you and your friends care to partake? I will leave it with you."

"John." She said his name and his heart sung.

"Allow me to introduce you. This is my friend, Bessy. I think you know her. She used to work at Marlborough Mills," John moved closer to the girl in the bed, who was sitting up now. Despite her gaunt appearance, the spots of color high on her cheeks, and the fact that her hair was down, John did recognize her.

"Miss Higgins. You worked loom 17, did you not?"

"Yes, and sometimes loom 18." Bessy spoke reedily, and with effort. John shook her hand.

"And this is Mary Higgins, Bessy's sister. Mary, this is Mr. Thornton, my fiance."

The slovenly girl nodded her head and went red in the face. She did not extend her hand, but rather captured her grease stained apron, which she began to twist fretfully.

"Where is your father?" John addressed Bessy.

"He is at the Golden Dragon, most likely," came the uneasy and slow reply. "He hasn't been himself since the strike ended. He canna get mill work. He's been digging ditches. It pays half as much as mill work, and he drinks most of his wage." Bessy shook her head as she caught her breath and Mary looked away.

"Bessy," Margaret smiled brightly as she changed the subject. "And Mary. What do both of you think about a pic-nic, here in the house?"

"A pic-nic? You were going to have a pic-nic and you came here instead? But that weren't right.
You've only just gotten engaged and you said things were--" Bessy ended her sentence prematurely with a single, body-racking cough, then moaned in frustration.

"You are my friend, Bessy, and I knew John would understand." Margaret looked pleadingly at her fiancé, who nodded.

Bessy bit her lip, but acquiesced. "Well, I've always wanted to go on a pic-nic, although it's not something people like us would ever do. And I'm sure what's in that basket is far better than anything I've ever eaten, given how you masters live. D'ya think we could use my blanket as the cloth? I can't get down on the floor, after all."

"I brought a blanket." John leaned over to unlatch the hamper and produced the cloth, eliciting a smile from Margaret.

"What a perfect shade of yellow. Of late, I think that has become my favorite color."

"I thought you might say that." John smiled, then stood and grabbed his hat. "I will leave you to it, then."

"No, you mustn't," wheezed Bessy. "It's only right that you stay."

Margaret rose and placed her hand on John's arm. "Bessy is right, of course. How else will we know what delicacies your cook has prepared?" she asked playfully. But in his ear she whispered, "You are too kind, John Thornton."

Margaret unfolded the blanket and laid it carefully across the bed, and directed Mary to move the chairs placed by the open hearth closer to the bed. Then she asked John to move the table itself next to the bed. She began to unpack the hamper carefully, first removing each of the square silver dishes.

"Tell us, John, what did your chef prepare for us?"

"Cook made a pigeon pie."

"Pigeons? Those dirty things?" Mary queried incredulously, then blushed again.

Margaret laughed. "I believe these are different birds, Mary."

"And in here is lobster salad."

"I've never had lobster," said Bessy. "What is it, exactly? It comes from the ocean, doesn't it?" She began to cough and her sister immediately was at her side to soothe her.

"I think you will like it," replied Margaret once the attack abated. "It is very rich. In London it was only served only rarely, as it is very hard to come by." She raised an eyebrow at John. "Did you have to send to Liverpool for it?"

John shrugged. "You would have to ask Cook. I know better than to involve myself in her affairs."

He opened another silver container, this containing a trembling, molded affair of palest pink, adorned with berries in syrup. "And here we have a strawberry blancmange."

"I love strawberries," mumbled Mary as she moved closer to inspect the offering with greedy eyes.

"And here is bread and butter," John continued, "and an almond-paste tart, and finally, assorted fruits and cheeses." He opened the last silver container to show green and red grapes, small plums, strawberries, and raspberries along with Stilton, Dunlop, and Cheshire cheeses.
"I think I would like to try everything," Bessy said, and Mary nodded emphatically in agreement. John unpacked the plates and cutlery and Margaret served, then passed around the smaller containers of pickled gherkins, cherries and Indian chutney.

"I believe Cook has provided us with lemonade, claret and brandy," John said, as he removed the three bottles and uncorked each.

"Lemonade," said Bessy dreamily. "How perfect." Margaret poured her a glass and one for Mary, as well.

"I think I would like the claret for myself," Margaret said, allowing John to pour for her. She waited until John had poured his own glass, then spoke again. "I would like to propose a toast. To my dear John, who surprises me every time we meet. May such surprises continue."

Bessy and Mary giggled.

"And to my dear Margaret, whose beauty is exceeded only by her strength of character. May I live up to her example."

"And I will toast the both of you," said Bessy. "Even if I won't be at your wedding."

The room hushed at Bessy's words, and no more was said for several minutes. There were several moans of appreciation, however, and the lemonade, a commodity not often seen on Frances Street, was quickly polished off.

Bessy had eaten her fill and Mary had just put on the kettle and started on a third helping of dessert when the door crashed open and Nicholas stumbled in. His face darkened as he took in the scene.

"I never woulda thought a master would darken my doorstep without an invitation," he slurred as he approached John.

"He was invited, Father!" Bessy cried, the volume of her words precipitating a coughing fit. "You're drunk."

Mary huddled next to her sister, as Margaret soothed both of them.

"You have a lot of nerve," Nicholas continued, picking up steam as he eyed the remains of dinner. "You drive good men away from their jobs by hiring those knobsticks, and then you humiliate us by givin' us charity?"

"I've done no such thing."

"I offered those Irish work when you lot refused."

"We refused because you wouldn'a pay us a livin' wage." Nicholas' voice raised.

"I paid you all I could afford." John kept his voice low and even, but it was nonetheless icy. "You know nothing of the trade in cotton, or the factors affecting its global price."

"I know how much it costs to put food on the table. And I know when my neighbor's babes are starvin'. Tonight Boucher's body was found in the river. Who will feed his children now?" Nicholas swung wildly and John was unprepared. The blow landed at the base of his cheekbone. He reeled backwards as Mary screamed. Margaret ran to John's side, her countenance pale, eyes bright with fear.
The scream had some sobering effect on Nicholas, as he seemed to recognize what he had done. His
bloodshot eyes widened slightly and staggered past John into a chair. "Go," he mumbled. "Get out of
my house. You are not welcome here."

"We must be off," John said.

"The hamper--" Margaret began.

"I'll send someone to collect it in a day or two, once he's cooled off," John said quietly. "We need to
get out of here. Now." His tone brooked no dissension.

The carriage was not waiting for them when they extricated themselves from the warren of streets
comprising Milton's slum district. This was not surprising: John had told the coachman to return in
two and one half hours and barely an hour had elapsed.

"You need a cool compress on your face. Your cheek will swell, I think." Margaret said. "We can go
to my house, if you wish. Dixon will take good care of you. She has excellent nursing skills."

John recoiled at the thought.

"I'd hate to think our pic-nic is over already. Would you be amenable to continuing, minus the food
of course?"

Margaret looked down, and John noted the extraordinary length of her eyelashes.

"I'd like that, if you're sure you are well."

"I am. I know of a place." He offered her his arm and they walked.

The route was familiar to both of them, at first, as it cut directly though Milton's cemetery. It took a
turn that was unfamiliar to Margaret, however, down a path she'd never explored before.

They arrived at a section of the cemetery that was very well tended, if a bit desolate. Unlike most of
the location, the graves here were set well apart. The site John led her to was surrounded by a low,
iron fence. A single headstone stood inside the very large space, and to its right stood a much smaller
sculpture of a lamb. Across from both of these a large, evergreen magnolia was in bloom, a bench
below it. John led her to the bench and sat beside her.

Margaret immediately turned to him.

"Is it bad?" She asked, gingerly touching his cheek.

John shook his head. "It is not as bad as it could be. I am lucky Higgins is shorter than I. There was
not as much force behind that punch as there might have been, otherwise. Although I am certain I
will have a terrible bruise tomorrow, nonetheless."

"No broken teeth? Let me see." John complied, although baring his lips enough to show his teeth
was not an easy endeavor. He closed his mouth and breathed out a heavy sigh.

"Does it hurt to speak?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"Do not lie to me," she replied.
She surprised him then, with the gentlest of kisses to his bruised cheek. It was their first, John realized. He cursed his rotten luck. How he wanted to return this tentative kiss with an authoritative, passionate one. But sadly, he could not. It would simply hurt too much.

"I meant what I said earlier."

"What was that? That I am too kind?" John tried to smile, but his face would not cooperate. He only grimaced.

"No. Well, yes. You are too kind. Today, John, what you did for Bessy—I cannot tell you how much it meant to me."

John draped his arm over the back of the bench and allowed his hand to graze Margaret's shoulder. "I know you well enough to realize there was a good reason you broke our engagement for today. I assumed you were greatly concerned for your friend."

Margaret nodded. "She hides it very well."

"On the contrary. All the signs of advanced brown lung are there."

"You think so? I have been hoping against hope. But, somehow, I knew I was wrong. I keep thinking that each time I see her will be the last. So, what you did was more than a simple kindness. I think she felt like royalty this afternoon." Margaret's sad expression brightened. "You know, Bessy had very kind words to say about you from the start, and I think she was instrumental in changing my opinion of you."

"I must thank her, then."

"She told me why she came to work at Marlborough Mills. It was because of the wheel. She said she'd wished she come years earlier. That the wheel might have prevented her getting sick."

"It's not true, though," John said quietly, turning away. "The wheel helps, certainly, but you've seen the cotton in the air. Anyone spending time in there is at risk of brown lung, eventually."

"Even you?"

"I spend less time there, but yes, given enough time. I've had wheels in all my sheds for only two years. This is a risk we all take. I don't ask my hands to take any risk I would not take myself."

Margaret's brow furrowed.

"What I said before, when I toasted you--I meant it. You constantly surprise me. I think I understand you, but then some new facet of you is revealed to me and I see you in a different light."

John laughed. "That is an eloquent way to put it. A less erudite person might use the analogy of a layered onion, perhaps."

Margaret scoffed. "Why? Because facets describe something expensive, it is necessarily a better term? Do erudite people refer to more expensive objects, when they draw analogies, then? That sounds like London thinking, always equating rare and expensive with better."

"I is just that I had the same thought about you. Except I would have never used the word "facet" to describe your aspects."

Margaret laughed. "I'm an onion, am I? Well, I don't mind that. French onion soup is one of my
favorites."

"And now I have learned something new about Miss Margaret Hale, a fact I will put to good use."  

"And I have just learned something about Mr. John Thornton."

"And what is that?"

"You think you are less erudite, apparently."

"I am not learned."

"Sometimes it seems the things we like least about ourselves are the things others, perhaps, like the most. I like all that you have accomplished in your life under your own steam, for instance. That what you are, you have made yourself. I told my father I thought it fine."

"Did you?" John asked quietly. "Even then?"

Margaret did not reply. She blushed and intently inspected her hands, instead.  

"Tell me, then." John pressed. "What was this surprising thing that you learned about me today?"

"Two things," she blurted out, then was silent again.

"Which are...?" John prompted.  

She still did not look at him. "First, that you are a romantic. You had someplace special planned for today, did you not?"

John nodded. He would not deny it. His heart was on his sleeve.  

"Where?" She looked at him, finally.  

"I'll not tell you."

Margaret lower lip formed itself into a most pleasing pout, one he longed to kiss.  

"But I will take you there. I promise." This evoked a radiant smile, which John returned with his eyes.  

"You went a bit overboard, you know."

"You mean Cook did."

"I think we both know who is in charge, John." He loved how easily she said his name.

"Hmmm.

"I've never seen such a hamper before."

"I couldn't resist."

"You bought it especially for today?" Margaret's mouth opened as she turned her body to face his.  

"But you shouldn't have! It must have been such a ridiculous expense!"

"Did it bring you pleasure?"
"Yes, but..."

"And did it bring your friends pleasure?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Then what is the problem?"

"It's excessive." Margaret shook her head, and John smiled as he noted the parson's daughter in her.
"There is no need for such extravagances. I am not used to them and do not require them. You do not need to--"

"I do not need to. I want to. There is a difference."

"He won't sell it, you know. If you're worried about the hamper. Although the brandy might be a concern."

"You have a high opinion of this Higgins fellow." John raised an eyebrow. One thing he already knew about Margaret was that she was an excellent judge of character.

"I do. He is a person of integrity."

They sat quietly for a while, until Margaret said, "This is your family plot?"

John nodded. "Not my mother's connections. Only my father and sister are buried here."

"Your sister?"

"Emma. She died when she was a little over a year old, of scarlet fever. It was after my father..." Margaret reached for his hand and held it in her own. "She was our little lamb. We could not afford a grave marker for her for many years. Finally I was able to save up enough for the statue. And now that we can afford something much finer I find I don't want to replace it."

"I can understand it."

"My father left us with almost nothing when he died."

"My father told me how yours died. I am so sorry. I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been."

"We were lucky that in some fit of reason, several years before, he had bought a plot in the cemetery. He was not able to mortgage it when he began speculating, so he avoided a pauper's grave. We could barely afford the funeral and headstone, as it was. The plot was not so large, then. Those around his remained unsold, as there is great stigma in being buried near a suicide. So when I could finally afford it, I bought those plots up. If nothing else, it's a restful place to contemplate. Heaven knows there are few enough of those in Milton."

"It's lovely. The magnolia, in particular, is beautiful. We had one in Helstone, but I am surprised it can survive in this climate."

"But we are on the lee side of the hill, so the frosts are not as bad. I planted that for Emma, before I could afford the lamb." John turned to Margaret and gazed at her intently. "I would hope you would feel welcome to come here, if ever you need a quiet place to contemplate, Margaret."

Margaret squeezed his hand. "Thank you. I will."

"So what was the other surprise?"
"With Higgins. You held back. You had every right to give back to him as much as he gave and you did not."

"No, Margaret, I did not have that right."

An expression of disbelief clouded his love's face.

"Consider it from his point of view. I was an unwanted guest in his house and one of the men involved with the strike that cost him his job. Not that I am in any way claiming any responsibility for that, I should clarify. But Higgins has just found out his neighbor has committed suicide. On top of all of this he is drunk. Can you really blame him for acting the way he did? And would it have been fair for me to strike back?"

"I suppose not." Margaret sat quietly.

"Something is bothering you," John said. And he had a sinking feeling he knew exactly what it was.

"Why did you beat that other man? Stevens?"

Stevens. Blast him. If only the jaws of hell could open up and swallow that man retroactively.

"How many men do you think I have beaten in my lifetime, Margaret?"

"I do not know."

"One. And you walked in on it."

"Why him?"

"I told you. Because he put the lives of 300 men, women and children at risk. Because he put five minutes of pleasure before the entirety of those lives. Because in that moment I saw my hands laid out in the yard, just as I'd seen men, women and children—young children!—laid out on the hillside behind Crofton's Mill last May after it burned to a shell. That fire was an accident, Margaret. It wasn't due to some idiot lighting his pipe. It was probably just a spark, metal striking metal. But cotton fluff is highly inflammable, and when you have particles in the air, aflame, a mill can go up in a matter of minutes. The fire brigade is helpless to stop it. It took twenty. Twenty minutes. That's all."

John closed his eyes as he remembered that day, and the memories, still frighteningly vivid, flooded back. But her hand was on his back now, rubbing him, soothing him. He continued.

"So I snapped when I saw Stevens and his pipe. I saw those burned bodies in my mind's eye. I smelled them, Margaret. Children. You saw me at my worst, at my absolute worst--" He needed her to understand.

"But it was for a good reason." Margaret's voice was gentle. "To protect those who work for you. I see that now."

"Do you?" John gazed at her, his cerulean eyes wide in astonishment.

"Do you think I am so stubborn that my mind cannot be changed?"

"No, Margaret. At this point, I am certain it can."

John gathered her in his arms and kissed her again and again, ignoring the pain. She melted in his arms.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to everyone who is reading and to everyone who has left comments or kudos. Just a few notes this time: The fitted, wicker picnic hamper was invented in 1851 by the G.W. Scott company, and displayed at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace. They were obscenely expensive. The same company still makes custom picnic hampers and they are still obscenely expensive, but they don't have all the fittings anymore. The dishes and beverages packed in the hamper are all mentioned in cookbooks of the 1840s and 1850s, including Charles Francatelli's The Modern Cook (1846) and Eliza Acton's Modern Cookery for Private Families (1845). These selections in a picnic menu in the best selling Mrs. Beeton's Dictionary of Every-day Cookery. Although this book wasn't published until 1865, after the time frame for this book, it plagiarized Francatelli, Acton, and many other cookbook authors (in fact it is mostly plagiarized recipes!), so I think even though Francatelli and Acton don't specifically mention a picnic menu, what I've included is probably reasonable for 1845-1850 or so. About the lamb: My grandfather is buried in a cemetery that has Victorian monuments close by. I always found them fascinating, so much more emotive than modern headstones. My favorite was a tiny lamb that was placed as a marker for an infant. So sad! I always wondered about the story behind it. Now it is part of John's story. :)
The Shroud

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

John opened the gates to the mill at half past five. Normally this was a task for Williams, but the man was sick in bed with a summer cold. John was glad he had not caught it, as the illness had affected different members of the mill staff with varying levels of severity. John stood for a minute in the cobbled yard as he regarded the yellow-brown sunrise illuminating long strands of soot reeling forth from the many chimneys of Milton. Today was going to be scorchingly hot- he could tell after many years of living in the place. The grey, insulating batt laid down in great quantities by the factories made summer days worse than they would have been otherwise. But such was the price the city paid for progress, and the price England paid for its position as largest manufacturer in the world.

A cart pulled by two draft horses jangled to a stop in front of him, and a burly man, dressed in well-patched fustian jumped down from the pile of tools thrown in back. John recognized him instantly. It was Higgins.

John sighed. He was in no mood for a confrontation in the middle of the street, directly in front of his mill. The bruise on his cheek was beginning to heal, and had now entered its even uglier purple-green phase, but it had elicited any number of rumors that had been very difficult to put down. And now arrived the source of said rumors.

But Higgins had carefully uncovered the pic-nic hamper from the pile, John noticed, which he now carried toward the manufacturer. What's more, the man looked contrite.

"Might I have a word, Master?"

"You'd better come inside," John said begrudgingly. It was preferable, he knew, to move things to his own turf. That way any altercation would remain unseen by his workers and passersby. John led Higgins into his office and shut the door firmly.

The former mill worker set the hamper carefully in a corner and removed his cap. "You can punch me, if you like. You owe me at least that."

John raised an eyebrow. This was not at all what he expected.

"Is everything there?" he asked, instead.

"Ah. Yeah. All but the brandy. I'll owe you that, then."

John shrugged. "I expect it would have been consumed if you'd joined our party."

Higgins said nothing. Apparently that was the sum of his apology, John guessed. His tolerance turned to irritation.

"Where are you off to this morning, then? Fomenting more unrest?"

"Keeping my family fed as best I can, which is hard, as I can no longer use my hard-earned skills."

"That's no one's fault but your own." John did his best to control the sneer that threatened.

Higgins narrowed his eyes. "There's some would disagree. But I must be off. My team won't wait
forever, and there's ditches t' dig." Higgins returned his cap to his head, and left with haste.

John carried the hamper to his desk and opened it. Every dish and jar inside was spotless, he noticed, and replaced with care to its original location. And despite the fact that the hamper had traveled on the back of a cart destined for some construction site, the wicker container was itself as clean as it had been when it had arrived at the Higgins house. That had taken some ingenuity, given how filthy the streets of the Princeton district were. John realized that although he might not like Higgins, there was much to respect about the man. And there were some things the pair shared in common: pride, for one thing.

Margaret puttered around her mother's room tidying away the detritus of a several days spent abed. She would open the windows to clear the air of the sickroom smell, except in recent days the air outside had been more soot-filled than usual. It was strange: one might expect that in summer the usual Milton fog would dissipate, the warm weather carrying clear skies with it. But instead the city was enshrouded in a thick, sulfurous blanket that tinged the dawn and sunset skies with sickly tones of yellow, brown and grey. Even in full daylight the city and its residents seemed more sallow than usual, and sadly this look of poor health was mirrored in its residents' attitudes. People were ill-tempered, and more than one small altercation had broken out, even in the normally well-behaved streets near the Hale's residence.

Margaret rummaged through a bureau, until she found several sachets of lavender and one of dried roses. She poured their contents into a bowl and rubbed the tiny flowers between her hands in an effort to release the oils long-trapped in the tiny purple and pink buds. There. The air was smelling a bit more fragrant already. She turned to her mother with a smile.

"At what time does Mrs. Thornton arrive?" They had decided it would be best to receive John's mother in this room rather than the parlor, as Mama still was too weak to sit up for long periods of time. Surely Mrs. Thornton would understand.

"At half past one, Margaret. Not long, now. We do have a lot to discuss." Maria Hale regarded her daughter lovingly. "Margaret, please stop pacing and come sit with me. Surely there is no need to be so nervous. Mrs. Thornton is imposing, yes, but you are more than her equal."

Margaret perched on the edge of the bed and nervously twisted her skirt.

"Stop that. It will wrinkle," her mother chided her. "Besides that, you know better. Actions say so much more than words."

With difficulty, Margaret calmed her hands. "Yes, Mama."

Maria spoke softly. "Mr. Thornton- your John- is a good man. He has been so attentive to this family, and to me in particular. The lovely roses, and two gifts of fruit in so many days- and such fruit. I have not seen its like since leaving Helstone. But Margaret, I must ask. When did you know? Richard and I were wondering, as we saw no signs of your attachment."

Margaret looked away to hide the blush that crept across her face. "Mama, I do not know. It has come upon me gradually, I think. The story I constructed in my mind about John turned out to be wishful thinking. No, that is not correct. Perhaps it was malicious thinking, as many of the things I believed him to be were so utterly mistaken. I have begun to see that he is not the person I thought he was."

"No?"
"I cannot pretend that I understand the decisions he makes in running his mill. He is, indeed, a hard master. But I have talked to his workers- to his hands- and they expect this. In fact, they respect him for this hardness. It is hard to fathom. They expect him to beat a man who is insubordinate. Or to yell and act in other uncouth ways."

"And you can love such a man, Margaret?"

Margaret turned to her mother, eyes wide. "I...yes. I think so."

A smile spread across Maria Hale's face, while her eyes took on a far-away expression. "Do you remember in Helstone, when I suggested that we renew our acquaintance with the Gormans?"

"The carriage makers. Oh, Mama, will you remind me of my immaturity?" Margaret groaned in embarrassment as she remembered her many dismissive words about tradesmen, both in Helstone and Milton. What an arrogant snob she'd been.

"It is interesting to see how a person's perspective can change in just a few month's time, my darling. You would have nothing to do with the Gormans' son, as they were mere carriage makers. And yet the Thorntons-"

"Mama, do you think John is not good enough for me?"

"I did not say that, Margaret. But the question is, do you?"

"Please do not remind me again of my foolishness. I see now that a man who has made himself is worth ten- no, one hundred- of a man made by fortune's kiss. John may be rough around the edges, but look how he seeks to polish himself! And even if he did not..." Margaret's voice trailed off. She liked his roughness, she realized. She liked that John was not an effete London man, soft and untried by life. She liked that he was a man of passion, that he angered. And loved.

How he loved. Her hand moved involuntary to her lips, as she remembered the passionate embrace they'd shared days before.

It was terribly unladylike of her to allow it, but she had seen such pain in his eyes. In that moment she had wanted to heal him, both of his memories of the terrible mind-scarring mill fire, and of his memory of their first interaction. But there was more, if she were honest with herself. He'd surprised her with the first kiss, but she'd allowed the second, and the third, and all following. She'd felt wonder as her body responded to his and she'd not held back as a lady should. Even more disconcertingly, she felt no shame, even now. She was quick to rationalize: an embrace was acceptable between an engaged couple. Certainly, it should not occur in a public place such a cemetery, but no one had been watching. Her reputation, therefore, had not been further tarnished. All was well.

But what of this type of engagement? Mr. Thornton—John- had said it would be for the public's benefit, that they would appear as a couple for only enough time to quell any rumors related to her behavior at the riot and her short residency at his house. It was obvious he felt a strong passion for her. Perhaps this was the eros her father had spoken of. But love? He had made no such declaration. Margaret racked her mind. No, she was certain the words had never been said.

So, then. Perhaps it was simply passion on his part.

And what did she feel for this man? Eros, to be sure. But was there more? He brought a pic-nic to her invalid friend. He bought her flowers. These actions had made her feel so warm, so comforted. Loved. Yes, loved. But surely love was more about more than receiving. It seemed so transactional,
so closely related to buying and selling.

And while these actions did make her feel a way she was certain she'd never felt before, she could not forget the lying. Oh, that most egregious lie! Yes, he had saved her life, but the way he'd done it was heavy-handed, and had done much to land her in this predicament. These were the actions of an insufferable man, Mr. Thornton the manufacturer, the man who of necessity made decisions alone, using only his wit and his gut, and who had no time to listen to the counsel or wisdom of others. That was the way of the fast-paced and cut-throat world of business, was it not, where a moment's hesitation might cost a man a fortune? But was it also the way of a lover? Of a husband? Margaret found she still had not fully reconciled the two disparate aspects of the man's personality. And much of John's later actions—those that had so charmed her—could be viewed as mere mitigation for the faux pas made by Mr. Thornton in lying about their engagement.

One moment she thought she might be in love, and then next her stomach churned with anxiety. Why did this have to be so complicated? Surely for Edith, falling in love had been as easy as falling down.

"Mama," Margaret asked tentatively, "How did you know? About Papa? That you lov-"

The housekeeper interrupted their conversation with a knock to the opened door. "Mrs. Thornton is arrived. Shall I send her up?"

Maria smiled at her longtime servant. "Yes, Dixon, and tea in about ten minutes, please."

Margaret stood and plumped the pillows behind her mother, then fussed with the lappets of her mother's cap. "You look well, mother," she said to the woman, before kissing her gently on the cheek. She then pulled up two chairs, one on either side of the bed.

"Mrs. Thornton," she said warmly, as that woman entered the small room, "it is very good of you to join us."

"Miss Hale," the older woman nodded to her as she rustled into the room, immediately taking the seat offered to her, and regarding Mrs. Hale as she did so.

"I must thank you for the loan of the water mattress," said Maria. "It has helped tremendously these past days."

"Please think nothing of it. Although my daughter may think she has need of it, she does not actually require it, so I am glad it may be put to use. Are you improving, Mrs. Hale?"

This was the most solicitous Margaret had ever seen Mrs. Thornton. Clearly the woman was making an effort.

"Yes, a bit. I am sure that in a couple of days I will be back to my usual duties."

The black-clad woman lifted a disbelieving eyebrow. "I see."

"I must thank you for this visit you pay to us."

"Propriety demands it, as our children will be wed."

"Yes, this is true. And it is joyous news, is it not?"

Mrs. Thornton nodded. "My John is well-pleased."
"As are we. Mr. Hale tells me your son is the best of men."

Mrs. Thornton beamed, and Margaret noted how her normally harsh features softened upon smiling. The elder raven was much like the younger. "Your husband is a fine judge of character, then. Your daughter could do no better. Although I may be biased as a mother, I speak this truthfully."

Maria cleared her throat. "I believe we must consider the planning of the several events preceding the wedding."

"Has a date been set?" queried Mrs. Thornton.

"It has not," Margaret spoke up. "I believe your son and I would like the opportunity to get to know each other better. We prefer a long engagement."

A look of worry passed across Maria's face. "But Margaret, there is much to be said for marrying sooner. You have assured me of your feelings—"

Mrs. Thornton's eyes pierced Margaret. "I agree, there is little point in waiting. You cannot tell what the future may bring. It is folly to tempt fate."

"But surely it is the decision of the two who are getting married!"

Maria Hale smiled at her daughter's innocence. "Margaret, while it may seem that weddings- or for that case, funerals-are about the persons being feted, in reality, they are about the family. And in the end, family will have its way."

"Mama, that seems terribly unfair."

"Yes, but then you will have your own daughters' weddings to plan someday."

Dixon interrupted them again. "Miss Margaret, there is a grubby little urchin at the door. He has a message for you from your friend Bessy's sister."

Margaret jumped up. "Has she worsened?"

"So says the boy. You are wanted."

"I am sorry, Mama, Mrs. Thornton." Margaret bowed hurriedly at the guest. "My friend is quite ill. I fear the worst."

"Margaret has many friends among the poor," Maria said by way of explanation."

"So I have heard," Mrs. Thornton replied dryly."

"I apologize, but I must be off."

Margaret dashed from the house, after grabbing her hat and reticule, heedless of the warm, cloying day she stepped into. But she slowed down several streets from her house, as the air was harder to breathe than usual. How Bessy must be suffering on a day like this, she realized. Margaret pulled a lace-trimmed handkerchief from her sleeve to mop her brow, and remembered she had promised to bring a cap or other small token for the girl. Now the handkerchief itself would not do, as it was perspiration-stained.

Margaret continued on more slowly, stopping once at a pump to rinse out the handkerchief. She wiped her neck with the cloth, then rinsed it out again and placed it in her reticule for safekeeping. It was more hot than she had realized, or perhaps it was the poor situation of Frances Street, in a low-
lying location that made it warmer than hilly Crampton.

She knocked on the Higgins door, but as it was on the latch, she pushed it open gingerly and walked inside.

Bessy was coughing, more insistently than usual. A torn rag was to her face, and Margaret noted that the portion of her visage that was visible was red and blotchy, while her hair and bedclothes were drenched with sweat. Her younger sister sat with her, soothing her with a hand that gently patted her back with gentle, percussive effort.

Margaret quickly found a pitcher of water and poured a chipped, flowered teacup half full. She offered it to her friend once the fit ceased. But Bessy waved it away, sinking back into the bed again. The cloth fell from her hands as she did so, and Margaret's face paled at the quantity of blood that bloomed on its surface. But it wasn't just there. A trickle escaped from the corner of Bessy's mouth. Margaret took her own handkerchief, damp though it was and wiped her friend's mouth the corner, and then her face.

"Oh, Bessy." She lay the back of her hand across the girl's forehead and felt how feverish the girl was. "How can I help?"

"Please. Just read to me."

Margaret nodded, and found the worn Bible that Bessy kept near the bed. "Revelation?" she asked.

"I would like to hear 'bout what is waitin' for me. I have lived a just life, I think."

"I believe you have, Bessy."

Mary began sobbing and left the room. Margaret read quietly for quite some time. She read of trumpets, white raiments and golden girdles and Bessy smiled beatifically although her breathing grew more labored over time.

"Soon I will see the twelve gates. And the street a pure gold. I know it." She closed her eyes.

Margaret had never been with a dying person before, and had never witnessed a person passing from this life to whatever awaited them in the next. But Bessy, she noticed, passed quietly. It was as though she fallen into a restful, peaceful sleep.

Margaret rose, opened the front windows despite the oppressive, sulfurous heat, and climbed the narrow stairs to the small, attic room where Mary hid.

"Please come," she said quietly.

Tears stained the younger girl's face. "She's gone, isn't she?"

Margaret embraced the girl.

Nicholas had entered when they returned to the small room below.

"I came home to check on her. I had a feeling-Was she alone?" he asked, his voice cracking.

Margaret shook her head. "She was not. She went peacefully." She closed the windows she'd opened earlier and drew their grey, threadbare curtains in respect.

Nicholas twisted his cap in his hands and his face twisted equally in anguish. "I am glad of that small comfort to her. You have been a good friend to my Bess."
Nicholas sunk into the rush-seated chair that stood next to the empty grate. His hands, Margaret noted were covered in earth, his clothing and boots as well. His face was equally covered, although his tears had already begun to wear pathways through the dirt. He had not found mill work, then. But he wasn't drunk, she noted. This was a small consolation.

The father slumped forward in his chair and held his head in his hands. "My Bessy. Poor girl. Fathers don't bury daughters- 'tis not the natural way of things!"

Margaret sat next to him, but dared not comfort him. The man's pain was his own.

He laughed then, bitterly. "Mary and I are lucky, we are. When me wife passed I had a terrible time finding the funds to bury her. We barely avoided a pauper's funeral." Nicholas raised his head and looked Margaret squarely in the eyes. "And I needn't tell you why we would want to avoid that, am I right?"

Mary shuddered as Margaret looked at the pair questioningly.

"Y'do not know?" Nicholas looked at her incredulously. "The resurrection men. They steal bodies from graves for your fine doctors to carve up, they do."

"But there was an act of Parliament. The Anatomy Act."

Nicholas nearly spat. "Aye, an act that gives away bodies of all so unfortunate as to die in the workhouse. If the rich want to carve up the dead so badly, mayhap they should give up themselves."

He calmed himself a bit and continued, "Even with this act, we still hear stories 'round here of paupers' graves desecrated, that we do. Better not to risk it, I say."

Nicholas found a chipped cup and poured himself a glass of water before continuing.

"I joined a club, and have paid dues weekly to make sure of a casket and a plot for me girls or myself. And I'm glad today I did. There's little enough food to put on the table, but dear Bess will not lie in some beggar's grave. No, she won't." He wiped away a tear.

"I am glad of your foresight, Nicholas." Margaret placed a tentative hand on the older man's back. "Who will make these arrangements?"

Nicholas crumpled. "I canna."

"Do you have family, Nicholas? Is there someone I could write to?"

His words were muffled as he'd buried his face in his hands. "Only my wife's family in Manchester. But they will na come. We are on our own, as always."

Margaret stood. "I will go. Who is in charge of this club?"

"Jenkins, at the Golden Dragon collects the payments. He will help you. Truly you're a friend to my sweet Bess."

"Mary, will you stay with your father?" The girl nodded.

Margaret stood to take her leave, but was stopped by the touch of Nicholas' hand on her sleeve.

"Will you sit with Bess tonight? I canna. And I don't think Mary-" The younger girl looked at Margaret in horror.

Margaret looked back at the pair gravely. "Yes, I will sit vigil with Bessy. The funeral will be
tomorrow, I think. The warm weather will not allow for four days."

She stopped at the door and turned the small, tarnished mirror that hung just to the door's right, so that the glass faced toward the wall. Then Margaret hurried off and found the Golden Dragon straightaway. She'd avoided the place on her earlier trips to the district as she'd been warned away by both Dixon and Bessy. There were several men outside, already in their cups despite the early hour. They had coarse words for her as she moved past them into the dimly lit establishment.

A good number of men, presumably out of work, given the hour, sat at tables inside. Some drank ale, others whiskey, still others both.

"I recognize ya, lass!" slurred one drunkard from across the room. "You're the one protected Thornton. Isn't she lads?" His two comrades whistled.

All heads swiveled in Margaret's direction.

"I am looking for Mr. Jenkins," she said in as proud and haughty a voice as she could muster. "My friend, Mr. Higgins, is in need of his-

"Ya canna be friends with masters and weavers both, lassie! So which is it?"

"Are ya truly Thornton's friend?" shouted another. "I saw different, I did!"

This is what John was protecting her from, Margaret realized, just on a much grander scale. She felt herself growing faint and clutched the column closest to her.

"I'm Jenkins." A tall balding man came out from the back room and Margaret breathed a sigh of relief.

"My name is Margaret Hale. My friend, Nicholas Higgins is a patron of this establishment. He said he is a member of your burial club."

"What of it?" Jenkins glared at her suspiciously.

"His daughter, Bessy, is dead."

"The sweet thing." Jenkin's demeanor changed immediately. "You lot, settle down!" he bellowed at the trio in the back of the pub who had continued their taunting of Margaret, although in more subdued voices now that the publican had arrived.

"You'll be wanting Turner. Does odd jobs, including carpentry. All the funerals round here. Builds coffins and has a cart and team, he does. Now let me check." Jenkins pulled out a ledger and paged through it. "Nicholas has not paid the past few weeks. But given as he'd been payin' in for years I'd say he's due a coffin and plot. We'll not be providing any frills, though."

"Frills?"

"Turner'll take the coffin to the cemetery, dig the hole and so forth. But no shroud, no mourners, no clothing to hire for the family, that kind of thing. No headstone, neither. Nicholas will have to scrounge that up hisself. But Bessy won't be buried a pauper, that's the most important thing, yeah?"

"But what about a service?"

"Graveside. We provide a minister, or you can bring your own. Although our man Higgins is a bit of an infidel to my knowledge." Jenkins grinned.
"Not his daughter." Margaret shook her head vigorously.

"Just tell Turner what denomination you require. Anglican or dissenter, he'll oblige." Jenkins snapped the book shut with a heavy thud, then wrote out directions to the shop of one Mr. Turner, erstwhile funeral director, as well as a note indicating the details of Bessy's situation.

It did not take Margaret long to set up the funeral itself. It would be the very next day, thankfully, although later in the day, as Turner was already double-booked. Apparently his low-rent funeral business was booming.

Margaret found herself mentally exhausted as she headed out of the Princeton district and into the smarter part of town. She would need to purchase fabric and thread before heading back home to tell her parents the news. They would not be pleased to hear that she would be attending a wake for Bessy. But surely it was wrong to ask her family to sit with Bessy, and they had no one else to ask. Her parents would understand. They must.

Margaret found herself tearing up, as she had not yet allowed herself to consider all that had happened this day. Bessy was gone. Surely that was a good thing after all her friend's suffering but still, selfishly, she would miss her. Tears started to fall and Margaret searched for her handkerchief as she continued to walk, her vision blurred by grief. The cloth was with Bessy, she realized belatedly, stained with that girl's own blood. Margaret sobbed as the reality of her friend's death struck home, and she closed her eyes to hold back the tears.

"Shhh."

Margaret felt strong arms embrace her, and opened her eyes to see bright cerulean ones gazing concernedly into her own.

"Margaret?"

She leaned into John, burying her head in his frock coat. He held her for a moment, but cognizant of the public place where they stood, soon coaxed her out of the intimate posture.

"Come with me," he urged in a soothing voice. Soon they were on New Street and had entered Marlborough Mills. He led her into his office and offered her his own chair. "Tell me," he said quietly.

"It is Bessy," It took Margaret some time to say the words, as her voice betrayed her repeatedly.

"She is gone?" John asked. Margaret nodded miserably.

He took her hand in his own. "And you were with her?" Again Margaret nodded. "I am sorry. I know how much she meant to you." He pulled his handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and offered it to her. She wiped her face and John marveled at how beautiful she was, even with swollen, reddened eyes. "How can I help you?"

"Where were you going?" Margaret asked, her nose stuffy. "I interrupted some errand, didn't I?"

"I was returning from the post office. Williams would normally take care of such tasks but he is ill today, so we are understaffed."

"Then surely you have better things to do than sit with me!"

"I do not, Margaret. My mother is back from her visit with yours. She can adequately supervise. Please. Sit and calm yourself. You are not well. Such events are not easy."
"No." Margaret stood and took a deep, but shaky breath. "I must go. I have much to do. The funeral is tomorrow, and I must sew a shroud." Her lip trembled. "Yet I have never done so. There is fabric and thread to buy, and I must purchase ribbon and crape and yew for the door. And I must talk to my parents about the wake--"

"The wake?"

"It would not do for Nicholas and Mary to stay with--with--" The tears started to flow again.

"With the body?"

She nodded. "They are distraught."

John grabbed her hand and did his best to purge the vehemence from his voice. "And you are not?"

"I am not a member of the family. It is not right to ask them to do such a task. It falls to me, a friend."

"Oh, Margaret." John shook his head. He rose and offered her his hand. "Please come with me."

John led Margaret through the sorting room and into the main space of the weaving shed, where he asked her to wait while he approached his mother. He ascended the cat walk and talked quietly with the older woman and Margaret was struck by how much the pair resembled a medieval lord and lady surveying their desmesne. He looked in the direction his mother pointed and frowned.

John was not gone long, tarrying just long enough to berate the object of his mother's interest.

"I'm sorry, Margaret," he said upon his return. "Needs must." He escorted Margaret out of the weaving shed and across the courtyard to the imposing house he called his own.

"I understand," his fiancee replied. "This is how the business works, is it not? It has been explained to be by several different people. A mill master must be harsh."

John frowned. "You think I am harsh?"

"In this regard, yes."

"I see." He invited her inside the house and gestured to a chair in the preternaturally white front drawing room.

"Please sit. I'll be just a moment." John returned a few moments later with a book that seemed familiar to Margaret.

"This is my mother's. Although we had a copy at the draper's where I worked years ago." The manufacturer paged through the book until he found the information he was looking for. "Plate 20, Figure 39. A breadth and half, two body lengths." He snapped the book shut, and held out his hand.

"Come with me, please."

"And where are we going now?"

"To the warehouse, of course. There is no need for your to purchase fabric when it is in abundance all around you. We make shrouding flannel right here, Margaret." They walked the distance of the courtyard and he unlocked a door to a building contiguous to the mill. John beckoned for Margaret to step inside and shut the overlarge door behind her. Margaret saw row after row of shelves in the sunlit room, each containing paper-wrapped bolts of fabric, as well as carts to hold these bolts, most empty. John walked among the shelves until he located the correct bolt, which he hefted easily to his
shoulder. He carried it to a large, oak table adorned only with a ruler on one end. He unwrapped the fabric and unrolled a long length of it.

"Two body lengths of a breadth and a half is six yards, generously." John removed a large shears from a peg on the wall and sliced into the fabric, then neatly folded into into a square and set it aside. "You will need thread as well." He quickly walked to the other side of the room, where shelves were filled from floor to ceiling with spools of cotton thread." He brought back one, and Margaret noticed the words Marlborough Mills engraved on the wooden spool end in gilt. She smiled at the man's eagerness, despite herself, despite the dismal day.

"John," she demurred, "this is unnecessary. You do not need to supply me with these things. The drapers is just down the street."

"But why would you go there when what you need is here?"

"Because, because you give too much. I do not need these displays of, of- I am not sure what. I know you are a wealthy man. You do not need to show me this at every opportunity."

John's expression grew icy. "Is that what you think I am doing?"

"Yes. No." Margaret shook her head. "I do not know!"

"You think of me like a bower bird, assembling a bundle of presents to win your affection."

"A bower bird? I have no idea what that is."

"It's a bird discovered in Australia. It builds a shelter of grass and twigs and attracts a mate by decorating the bower with the most beautiful shells and berries it can find, in shades of white and purples and blues. The male with the most attractive pile of goods wins."

Margaret pressed a knuckle against her lips as she tried not to laugh.

"Do I amuse you?" John was not smiling.

"Yes, actually. You claim to be ill-educated, but I think you are the widest-read man I know."

Margaret shook her head. "I don't think you are a bower bird. You are definitely more of a raven."

Her words elicited a small smile.

"Although I hear that ravens do like shiny things..."

John laughed at her gibe, and Margaret realized she would like to hear the rich baritone sound much more often.

"I was only trying to help, Margaret. Nothing more. You needed fabric. I have fabric. I know fabric. I was a draper's assistant, after all. And now I make the stuff."

"I know, John. I'm sorry. What I said was harsh and unfeeling. It's just that... you overwhelm me, at times."

"I overwhelm you."

Margaret nodded.

"You burn the candle at both ends, do you not?" Margaret touched his hand in conciliation. "And I would imagine it's been said that you never do a thing halfway. Am I correct?"
John sighed. "You are correct."

"Well, that takes some getting used to."

"I see. I think the same could be said about you, however."

"About me?" Margaret scoffed.

"I would not think Miss Margaret Hale has done a thing halfway in her entire life. She is all passion, all dedication. And most importantly, she is all integrity."

"You do not know me as well as you think."

"I know you better than you realize." His gaze was penetrating and discomfiting. Margaret turned away.

"Will Mary wear a hood?"

"A hood?" Margaret turned around to see John paging through the Workwoman's Guide. "Have you never been to a funeral, Margaret?"

"No ladies I know have ever been to a funeral. And my family has not yet been touched by death. In fact, before today, I had never seen..." She was like a statue of the finest marble, Margaret thought, so lifelike, yet unbreathing. Margaret blinked several times and willed herself not to cry. This weakness was foolishness.

"Forgive me, Margaret. I thought that because your father was a vicar you might have seen such things, as your father undoubtedly has officiated over dozens. You said that you accompanied him on his visits to parishioners. He anointed the sick, did he not?"

"Yes, but he did not allow me by the bedside when people were so gravely ill. I was to wait, either in the kitchen if it were a large enough house, or outside. He protected me, I realize now. But what is this hood?"

John turned to the plates in the back of the book and pointed out the unusual garment to her.

"This is normal for a family member to wear?" Margaret queried.

"It is commonly worn by female mourners who are close to the family, in pairs. The bows down the side are asymmetrical on each garment, but are of a set, together."

"I think Mary will want this. And if it must be worn in pairs, then I will need one, too. But I wonder if someone might have some we could borrow."

"No. It is customary to discard such clothing once mourning has ended as it invites death to keep it."

John pointed to the rows of shelving.

"Will you allow me?" he asked.

Margaret nodded. It was pointless to say "No."

John left Margaret's side and procured the finest cambric, which he cut according to the directions in the book, and folded as neatly as before. Then he pulled brown paper and twine from rolls stored nearby and secured the fabric and thread, book underneath, as he'd done years before at the draper's
shop. He handed her the bundle with the same neutral expression as before.

"Thank you, John. Once again, I am unable to reciprocate your kindness."

"There is no need. I will walk you home."

Margaret shook her head. "I have errands yet to run."

"Let me. I am sure you are tired. I can purchase the other materials and bring them to the Higgins' house later."

"I do not think he will want to see you, given your last meeting."

"We have made amends. Besides, you cannot stay in the house of a widowed man and his daughter without a chaperone."

"With you present I would still require a chaperone. We cannot be in the same house together after dark. You know this."

John sighed again. "It will be done, then." He pulled his pocket watch from his waistcoat pocket. "It is half-past three now. My mother and I will come by the Higgenses at six, well before sunset."

"Nicholas will not be pleased."

"If that be the case, then Nicholas can sit vigil with his own daughter." John smiled appeasingly. "My mother can help you with the sewing. She is swift with the needle."

"You are sure she will agree?"

"I am." John smiled. He had no doubt of it.

"But then," Margaret asked, "what is the need for you to spend yet another sleepless night?"

Margaret regretted her words as soon as she said them. He winced as though she'd cut him.

"You do not want my company?"

"People will talk. They already are. In the Golden Dragon—"

"Why were you in the Golden Dragon? That is no fit place for a lady!"

"Nicholas asked me. His burial club is sited there."

"And you were abused there, no doubt. Verbally assaulted." John eyes flashed in anger.

Margaret looked down at her hands. "Not assaulted. But the words were not kind. So, it would not do for us to be seen in the same house after dark. Even with your mother, I fear." She placed a consoling hand on John's arm. "Much as I would like your company."

"You would like my company?" John looked at her appraisingly.

"Do you have to question it?"

"In that case, will you do something for me?"

Margaret looked up at him and said earnestly, "Of course."
"Come with me." He offered his hand and led her away from the cutting table and the many-paned windows flanking it, to a solid brick wall that was out of eyeshot of any potential onlookers." As consolation for the loss of your company, kiss me."

She hesitated.

"Well?" John asked.

Margaret ran her finger over his bruised cheek. "All this time we have been talking about my concerns. I haven't even asked you how you are feeling. How selfish I am."

"Not selfish. Distraught. Saddened. Overwhelmed. And right now, reluctant." His look was searching.

"My friend has died today."

"Yes," he said quietly. "But still the world turns. And there is comfort in togetherness."

"Is it not wrong to delight in another when a body lies cold, not a mile away?" A single tear fell to her cheek, and John brushed it away with the gentlest of caresses.

"The world is filled with light and shadow. But we need light to see the shadow, do we not?"

Margaret touched her lips to his in answer, and he marveled at their feather softness.

"Again, Margaret."

She complied, this time pressing a bit more firmly. John longed to deepen the kiss but restrained himself, instead focusing on the perfect fullness of her embrace.

"Again."

She attempted to pull away, but found herself unable to do so. His hands held firm around her waist.

"Why do you order me? I am not your employee."

"No. Never that," he murmured. "I wanted to know if the kisses we shared last time were mine, or yours."

"Oh." Margaret lowered her eyebrows in confusion, then lifted her gaze to John, wide-eyed. "Well?"

"I do not know."

She regarded him for a moment, then slowly smiled.

"Then kiss me."

He obliged, and Margaret closed her eyes.

"Again," she whispered.

He did, and she felt a curious, tingling warmth envelope her.

"Again."

He left her breathless.
"Well?" She asked, finally. "Mine? Or yours?"

"What do you think, Margaret?"

"Ours?"

His smile was brilliant.

"Yes. Ours."

He offered her his hand. "Come. I will walk you home."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who continues to read, kudo and comment. If you do not know how much your words encourage me, please allow me to tell you- your reviews play the largest role in motivating me to write. Even the shortest of comments make my day, because they give me a link to an actual person who is reading, and they make me want to continue to share this story with you. So thank you for taking the time to tell me your thoughts- it really does motivate me, especially considering the crazy real-life schedule I have for work, which does not leave a lot of time to squeeze in writing.

I didn't think it would be appropriate to include a scene of great passion between John and Margaret on the same day as Bessy's death. But in the end, as this is a love story, I thought five simple kisses would not be too far wrong. I hope that Margaret's ambivalence stands in for any ambivalence you may feel about this juxtaposition.

A paper on the scientific discovery of bower birds was presented to England's Zoological Society in 1840. As John is quite the learner, I decided he might be aware of this.

Some notes on Victorian funerals: Body snatching was an issue in the early 1800s, because medical students needed bodies to dissect (just as they do today). However, people did not will their bodies to science back then, because most English people believed in the resurrection of the body after death, and felt that dissection would interfere with that. Medical schools were automatically given the bodies of executed murderers, but there were not enough of them to go around, so medical schools, and artists, and anatomists turned to body snatchers or "resurrection men" to illegally procure bodies for them. Wealthier people tried various methods to prevent grave robbing, including heavy stones and metal bars across graves. But the poor, and paupers in particular, had no means of protection, and their graves the ones most often preyed upon.

In 1832, Parliament passed the Anatomy Act to circumvent the problem of body snatching. By this law, families of the people who died in prison or in the workhouse had to pay to claim their loved one's bodies. If they could not afford to do so, the body was turned over to medical schools for dissection. The act was quite successful, but the public, particularly poorer segments of society continued to protest the act in the 1840s
because they continued to believe that paupers' bodies were still being sold without their consent. And in a way, they were right, as Higgins points out, because if a workhouse inmate's family could not afford to claim the body, the deceased was no longer even afforded a pauper's burial. And if a person was already in the workhouse, how likely was it that his or her family could afford to claim his or her body? The Act therefore enshrined into law the likelihood that the body lying on a dissection table was likely that of a poor person.

As the Victorian era continued, funerals became more ostentatious and it became more and more important to be sure that one's family was buried appropriately. For that reason, the poor often formed burials clubs, a type of early insurance, really to make sure that funeral expenses were covered. Families often did without to be sure that were able to pay into these schemes, because burying the dead appropriately was all important, even more important than eating enough to stay healthy.

The customs I mention relating to death (such as opening windows, drawing curtains and hanging yew) were common in Victorian times. John refers to the book The Workwoman's Guide for the information relating to the yardage and directions for the shroud and hoods. This book was published in 1838 and contains directions for most types of Victorian clothing of the era. As a draper's assistant, I think it reasonable that he might have been familiar with the book, as individual clothing patterns were not sold back then. I also think it likely his mother might have had a copy, given her frugal nature. Also, the fact that they had lived on so little for so long suggests she would have made her own clothing.

This is all really ghoulish, isn't it? But considering the number of deaths in Gaskell's novel, maybe that is okay.
Margaret was not herself. This was obvious to John, upon hearing about the wake. It had gone off successfully, if such a thing could be said about an event that was necessarily so mournful. Upon her arrival back at the mill house, John's mother had remarked immediately on the fact that Margaret had not wept once as they spent the night together sewing and then preparing Bessy's body for the burial. This behavior, and more, had made a positive impact on Hannah Thornton over the course of those long, wakeful hours. John had learned that although Margaret's sewing was only "serviceable," it was far better than Fanny's, and that she now believed that the girl was not haughty at all, but rather, "poised," and "self-assured." Margaret had not shrunk back at the sight of a dead body, had not demurred at the task of washing or clothing it, and had behaved in a manner John's mother never would have expected from her own daughter. His mother's words had elicited an immediate smile from her son, as John knew them to be high praise despite their cold expression.

But Margaret's lack of emotion concerned John, as she had behaved so differently earlier in the day. Surely something was amiss.

At the funeral later in the day, Margaret remained tearless. She stood at the graveside silent, her arm in John's, not even mouthing the standard prayers she should know well as the daughter of a vicar. Her eyes were dimmed by lack of sleep and sadness, and devoid of the normal sparkle they carried. She was not present, John realized, but somewhere else, someplace desolate. Perhaps she thought of her mother's impending death, or perhaps, John thought, she was thinking of her own present and of the bleak place she had been forced to call home.

The manufacturer looked around him, at the rangy clumps of crab grass springing up in this poorly-maintained hillside portion of the cemetery, and then beyond, to the sea of blackened rooftops and chimneys extending in uneven waves towards the horizon. John had no pretensions about his native city. Milton was not a beautiful place, nor was it intended to be. It was born of and begat industry: its sole purpose was to be an engine of commerce, not succor to the soul. But for a person used to beauty, as Margaret was, it must be a difficult place to call home.

A breeze disturbed John's thoughts. Thankfully, the afternoon was a bit cooler than the last, due to a light wind, and the beribboned hoods Margaret and Mary wore kited in the occasional gusts like doves eager to take flight and leave the sooty environs of Milton for a cleaner, purer place. Presumably Bessy had done the same.

Mr. Hale did not join them graveside. He had complained of indigestion that morning, and apart from that it was likely better for him to stay by his wife's side. That left a party of only Higgins, his
daughter Mary, John and Margaret, plus the grave diggers supplied by Jenkins, and a pastor of indeterminate lineage. Words were words, though, as far as Higgins was concerned. He claimed he did not mind that the man was not a Methodist, which Bessy might have preferred. She'd be going to heaven no matter what, if such a place existed.

Silence abounded, apart from the pastor's words, and Margaret clutched John's arm more tightly as the casket was lowered slowly into the grave on thick, hempen ropes. She turned away before the ragtag lot of teenage boys employed by Jenkins began to shovel dirt onto the plain, pine box that held her friend's remains. Her face was a mask, a dry, affectless mask.

But Margaret needed to weep.

John knew she must. What's more, he guessed her own home was not a place where she would feel comfortable grieving so openly, given the competing needs of her mother. So instead of walking her home immediately after the service, John took her to the place he'd decided was their own.

And once Margaret sat on the bench below the magnolia he'd planted many years earlier, he was proven correct. She clutched the lapels of his frock coat and buried her face against John's chest, damping his shirt front thoroughly. She sobbed, and sobbed, and he did his best to soothe her. He allowed his arms to encircle her, and he spoke quiet, soothing words of nonsense in an attempt to ease the spasmed breaths that shook her intermittently.

Eventually, she calmed. The ragged breaths evened, the tears abated slightly and she looked up at him, her face red and blotchy but as beautiful as he'd ever seen it. John offered her his handkerchief.

"I am sorry..." she began.

"Do not apologize, Margaret. It is not wrong to feel grief over someone you loved."

"To express such intense emotion so publicly is not- is not- and yet I have done so twice!"

"We are not in public now. It is just you and I."

"But I should not be showing such a side of myself to you. And I should not have done so yesterday. It is not ladylike. It is in no way-" she took a deep, ragged breath, "appropriate."

"I want you to show all sides to me."

Tears flowed again. First a few, then a flood. She applied handkerchief to face, but the cloth was sodden almost immediately. Margaret turned away from him as she attempted to regain control over her runaway emotions.

Her back to him, head bowed, she said finally, "Why are you so good to me?"

"You do not know?" was John's quiet reply.

She did not reply, and her posture remained rigid.

"Margaret, look at me." John placed a hand on her shoulder. She slowly turned to face him.

"I love you."

Again, she was silent, and he could not read her expression.

"Do you not know this?" he asked gently.
"I thought... you did not say so. And then you offered to release me."

"Only because our engagement seemed so offensive to you."

"Not offensive. It was just a terrible shock. The decision was so very-one sided."

"I know I can be overbearing. I have a tendency to take what I want. But in this case-"

"I know, John. I know you did not. I have reconciled that you are two disparate people."

"You have?" John lifted an eyebrow in wonderment.

"John the student and friend is not Mr. Thornton the manufacturer. What's more, I know that what you did after the riot, you did out of concern. I no longer hold it against you. And my feeling for you..." Margaret blushed, and John found himself gazing at her raptly, watching every small movement of her face for messages uncommunicated.

"Margaret?"

"I think that I could be happy with you." Margaret twisted the handkerchief, then smoothed it in her lap. She blushed even more profusely, and John realized she had more to say.

"I have known for a while that I feel a certain... attraction to you and I thought perhaps that you did for me, as well..."

"Oh, you thought that? Was it so obvious?" John laughed quietly, as his arm encircled his love.

"But I worried that this was all it was, given your earlier words. I have never been loved before. Nor have I loved."

"Margaret, let me reassure you. I do not think that man has ever loved the way that I love you. You have my entire heart, and always will."

John's heart soared. She had not said so explicitly, but there was the implication: *Nor have I loved.* She loved him. She just was not ready to say so yet.

He pulled her closer, and lay a chaste kiss on the top of her head, then settled back against the bench to sit quietly for a while. She leaned against him, eyes closed, restful.

Despite their funereal surroundings, despite sharing in her grief, John found that he was happy. He could feel that their future was already recorded in a steady, flowing hand. He felt a such an unshakable sense of serenity and purpose around this woman that he could not fathom a future without her. And now, she had told him, he would not need to try. She was his.

Margaret needed her spirits lifted after the death of her friend, and John found himself willing to do almost anything to accomplish this. He spoke to Mr. Hale at his next lesson and arranged for a surprise: John would pick up Margaret at noon on Wednesday, and the Hales would make sure that she was present at the appointed time, but none the wiser as to the engagement. The thought of surprising her made John smile at odd moments, and surely surprised his hands, as well. They must be growing chary of his mood swings of late. But then again, given all the tittle-tattle surrounding Margaret and him, the hands had probably surmised the cause of his erratic behavior.

It took some rearranging of his schedule to accomplish the necessary time off. Work was backlogged
and the lack of skill of the remaining Irish workers was turning out to be a major stumbling block. Too many bolts of cloth had been ruined by weaving errors. While the cloth could be sold as seconds, the mill would need to reweave each order, as only first-rate cloth would do for those. As a result, both labor and supply costs were mounting and the likelihood of meeting the schedule was growing less and less likely. However, by working late into the night for the past week, at least John had the books up to date. And he had no compunction about leaving the mill in the capable hands of Williams for an afternoon. Between that man's supervision and his mother's there would be no issues.

John had Stokes direct Cook to prepare another pic-nic, this one different than the first, apart from the strawberry blancmange, which Margaret had clearly enjoyed, while he himself walked down to the mews to ensure that a coachman would be available for his carriage.

It was there that he found himself wanting to become indebted to Watson. This was a strange sensation, and one he had never experienced before, although Watson easily was the least objectionable of his competitors. It was just that in the carriage house was a half-top barouche that would be the perfect conveyance to the site of the pic-nic. It was clearly brand-new, as John had not seen it on any previous visits to the mews. It was easily the most elegant carriage he'd seen in Milton, and so much more elegant than the rather staid brougham he'd purchased for his mother's use. The vehicle's sleek exterior was painted vermilion and well-varnished, and lined with a fine stripe of black; the interior was black satin, to match. Its hood, of course, was collapsible, which was what made it so perfect for a summer's journey. It would not be hot and claustrophobic like the brougham, but rather a pleasure to ride in.

John's first urge was to purchase a vehicle similar to Watson's for Margaret's exclusive use. There was a carriage maker just down the road, and they'd likely have something just as fine on display. It was not unheard of for someone of John's status to have two carriages: one for business within town, and one for pleasure in the countryside beyond Milton. Watson did. And how Margaret would look in such a carriage! But John immediately tamped down these feelings of pride and avarice, as he knew that now was not the time to be spending his savings on such frivolous goods. The mill was not yet in trouble, but it would be foolish to continue to diminish his savings, particularly as there was a wedding to be planned. The Hales would not be asked to foot that bill given their financial circumstances.

Still, the barouche beckoned to him.

John found himself walking first to Watson and Co., and then, finding Watson not at his own mill, John journeyed on to the house Watson was currently refurbishing, the same house John had grown up in.

"And what brings you here?" The portly man asked, as he finished rolling up a technical drawing. He gestured at the large, open space where the pair stood, where the traces of several demolished walls could still be found. "What do you think of the changes I've made?"

John hardly recognized the place. Although the exterior shell of the building was unchanged, the interior was completely rearranged from his childhood. In this room, for instance, once parlor plus study and hallway, all finished surfaces were interrupted by niches, ogees and every other form of architectural flourish. It was quite dizzying to the eye, even though at the moment it was all painted a harmonious white. But given Watson's lurid taste in waistcoats, that probably would not stand.

"It is ambitious," John said finally.

"Well," replied Watson as he puffed up his chest with pride, "that can be said of me, as well. Now what can I do for you?"
"A favor. Your barouche-

"The Gorman? She's a beauty, isn't she? Cost a pretty penny, she did. Eight hundred pounds trimmed out as she was. You'll be wanting to impress some lass, then. Oh, it's that Hale girl was at your dinner, isn't it? I'd heard there was something between you two. So when is the big day?" He elbowed John in the side, and John mustered a friendly grin.

"Yes, Margaret and I are engaged. My mother is planning a dinner to introduce her to our associates-you'll be receiving an invitation soon enough."

"Well, seeing as you broke the strike with your Irish hands, I'd say all of us manufacturers owe you a favor or two. But my Gorman? That's a lot to ask. I haven't even broken in her myself yet, apart from a couple of rides around town. You'd have to owe me, I'd say." Watson eyed John shrewdly. "You know, there has been something I've been wanting to ask you."

"And what's that?"

"Your sister."

"Fan?" John asked incredulously. What could a middle-aged man such as Watson see in a vapid nineteen-year-old such as his sister?

"Is she- well, does Miss Thornton have an intended?"

"She does not. But I must tell you, it is not my place to be bartering my sister's affections in this way."

Watson harrumphed. "I would not ask you to do so. I'm only asking if you would have any objections to me approaching her."

"That would be entirely her decision. But if she were amenable, I would not stand in the way."

"Good man!" Watson thunked John on the back with a clap of an oversized hand. "The Gorman is yours. When did you need it?"

"Wednesday next."

"Take the horses, too. My blacks suit her best. I wouldn't want your bays spoiling her looks."

Watson guffawed, and John recalled why he spent so little time in the man's company.

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"I am not dressed appropriately," were the first words out of Margaret's mouth on Wednesday.

"Is that your carriage?" were the second. These last were said in a rather accusatory tone, and John was glad he had not acted on the passing fancy of buying a similar carriage to complement Margaret's beauty. He breathed an internal sigh of relief. Apparently, two coaches would have been seen as a sign of nouveau riche ostentation. She was difficult to understand.

"Do not fear- your bower bird brings no gifts today." Margaret smiled at these words, despite herself, and John produced a paper-wrapped package. "Well, not for you at least. These are for your mother. I took the liberty of procuring her some cherries." John handed the package to Dixon, who stood ferociously at the door, like a German guard dog.

"The coach," John continued, "is Watson's. Given the excellent weather, I thought a barouche might give us a nicer journey than a closed up brougham. He was kind enough to offer it. But if you are
unhappy, I can have the driver go back to the mews and bring the brougham. It's rather too far to walk."

"No, no. That will not be necessary." Margaret smiled reassuringly at the driver, who looked a bit put out at the thought of unharnessing the horses and readying another carriage in short order. "I was just surprised, as I had not seen it before. I did not think your household had multiple carriages. If you do not mind how I am dressed, I suppose I am ready to go." Margaret smoothed her skirt, then touched her hair self-consciously.

"You look lovely, Margaret. I do not understand your concern."

Margaret's smile quelled, and John made a mental note to avoid any and all surprises in the future. "I am dressed to do chores, John. In fact, that is what I was doing until you arrived. Really, I am not fit to be seen in public. I do not know why my parents would not have suggested I dress a bit more nicely today, as clearly they knew you were coming." She turned back to frown at her father, who peered out from behind the lace curtains of the front window and waved at her. That immediately turned the frown into a most becoming smile. Apart from the moodiness, she was so much her father's daughter, John mused. The bond between them was as close as between himself and his mother.

John smiled, too as he helped Margaret into the barouche. While it was true that he was smitten, and therefore potentially biased, Margaret was such a beautiful creature that she would look lovely wearing rags. And she was not wearing rags now, just a simple brown gown, of a plainness that showed off her figure to perfection and made the russet highlights in her hair more evident. She looked like a duchess as she took her place in the barouche, as the red played off perfectly against the brown fabric she wore.

She tapped the picnic hamper placed opposite her with a brown clad foot as they got underway. "Another pic-nic? But where are we going?"

"It is a surprise."

"Will you blindfold me, then?" Margaret asked laughingly. It seemed her initial irritation with him had completely worn off. John was glad of it.

"That won't be necessary. This is not a kidnapping," John replied dryly.

"I do not think I have seen many carriages as nice as this, even in London," Margaret pronounced, as she ran her hand over the black satin upholstery. She peered at the silvered name plate fastened just above the door handle. "Gorman? How strange. In Helstone there was a carriage-maker by that name. My mother wanted us to renew our acquaintance with them. I wonder if this is the same concern."

John quirked an eyebrow. "Given your mother's initial welcome to me upon your arrival in Milton, I should not have thought she would have wanted to associate with tradesfolk."

"You are too perceptive." Margaret looked away. "It wasn't for herself that she wanted this acquaintance."

"I see." John felt the faintest trickle of jealousy begin to flow through his veins. "So what was he like, this Gorman? Fred Gorman, was it?"

"I never met him. But why would you think his name was Fred? I think it was Carl, actually. Or Peter?"
Luckily, John had always been a quick thinker, even in gestating a baldfaced lie. "Frederick Gorman is the maker of these carriages. I assumed your introduction was to him."

"I never met anyone. I had no inclination to marry, as I thought myself too young. And..." she blushed crimson, "I'm sorry to say this, but before I knew you, I was a terrible snob."

It took a while to leave Milton, for as usual, the streets were clogged with carts filled with cotton in various stages of preparation. But once they were outside of the city, their destination was only a few miles away. Their driver led the pair of horses slowly up a hillside road as Margaret and John walked beside the carriage. It was such a fine, sunny day that it seemed a shame not to do so. A hay meadow spread out before them, its knee-high greenery littered with blooms of blue, pink, yellow, red and white.

"The air is so clear here." Margaret pointed to the pall hanging over the city just to the north of them.

"The wind typically blows from west to east so the land here is free from Milton air," John explained. "It's only during a winter storm that they'd be affected by our soot."

"Look," Margaret said as they walked alongside the ruts made by the carriage. She bent over the verge to examine a plant with small, pea-like leaves. "What a strange flower." She plucked the stem and handed it to John, who examined the unusual orange and red, tusklike blossoms.

"Granny's toenails," he said, handing it back to her.

"We didn't have that in Helstone," Margaret mused aloud. "What is this place?"

"You'll see." John offered her his arm. "Just a bit farther."

They reached the crest of the hill, and John smiled in satisfaction. It was just as he remembered. He glanced at Margaret and noticed that her mouth had opened slightly.

"It's beautiful," she said, after a while.

Just on the other side of the hill stood a partial ruin of a church, its white walls gleaming in the afternoon sun.

"This church is all that is left of St. Catherine's Abbey," John said. As the coachman attended to the horses, John offered his hand to Margaret and they slowly descended the hill to view the building more closely. "The first church on this site was here before the Norman Conquest."

The pair toured the perimeter of the building, pausing every now and then to gaze at the enormous pointed arches comprising the windows and the gothic scrollwork that resembled the elaborate royal icing decorations on the Queen's wedding cake.

"Was it destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries?" Margaret asked.

"Yes. The abbot had too much power. He even had a seat in Parliament. The king could not let that stand. The abbey wasn't destroyed, though. The buildings were simply unroofed, as the lead had value, and the abbey's contents were looted. The abbey fell to ruin on its own, and served as a quarry for a while."

"Papa taught me the history of Henry's dissolution. Of course, Papa expressed some ambivalence in his lesson, as it pained him to think of destroying a place of learning. It reminded him too much of the destruction of the library of Alexandria by Aurelian. There was probably a scriptorium on this site and many hand-copied bibles and other ancient texts. One would hope they weren't destroyed"
during the looting."

"It is like your father to see both sides of an issue. That must be where you have learned the skill, Margaret."

The pair continued walking around the site. Soon they found a mossy location in the shade of the church walls to lay their blanket. Margaret smoothed her skirts in a graceful arc as she tucked her feet under them, and removed her gloves and the unfashionable straw hat she usually wore in place of bonnet. John joined her on the blanket, removing his hat and gloves as well. He leaned back against the church wall as he extended his long legs, relishing the feel of the limestone as it cooled his body through his coat.

Margaret immediately busied herself with unpacking the hamper, passing John napkin, fork, and knife before asking, "How is it that you are not working today, John? I would think that you are terribly busy right now, recovering from the damage done from the strike."

"I am. But I did not want to neglect you." he smiled as he accepted the beaker of ginger beer she offered. "It is true that we are well behind on orders. I have been thinking of offering the hands—the workers- extra hours should they be willing to take them on."

"I would think they would be glad of the extra income. So many of them seem to be struggling, as their families are overlarge."

"Yes. And I would not like to take workers for an extra shift only to let them go when we are on our feet again."

Margaret nodded. "That would hardly be fair. And I suppose there is also the issue of training. It takes a many hours to train up a hand, does it not?"

John nodded, a smile quirking his lips. How fast Margaret caught on.

"But if you have to send these hands packing when business contracts, you have effectively trained them for someone else."

"Precisely." A toothy grin replaced the tentative smile.

"But is it difficult to work in the mill at night? Surely lamps increase the risk of fire given all the fluff in the air?"

"Yes," John replied. "But we already work until seven at night, and in winter this is long after nightfall. With care and covered flames, we will be fine."

Margaret opened a container and found tongs to place salad onto two plates. She passed one to John, along with tiny cruets of oil and vinegar.

"But if they are tired after having already worked a full twelve-hour day, will they not be more likely to make mistakes? Or to knock over the lamps?"

"Yes, that is a concern. The inexperience of the Irish have already set us back substantially, although they are learning. But I have mulled it over and can see no better alternative to the solution as I have laid it out. Can you?"

Margaret shook her head. "I know I have not a fraction of your experience in these matters, nor do I have the expertise."
"Regardless, you have interesting ideas, and your experience outside of Milton is valuable to me. I do not want you to shy away from offering your thoughts, Margaret."

At this, the brown-haired beauty blushed, and busied herself with inspecting the other offerings packed in the hamper: asparagus (how Cook had obtained it in full summer was a wonder), potted ham with mustard, a roast duck, cucumber pickles, chutney, a cheese cake with cherry sauce, the requested blancmange and almond tart. Margaret piled both plates high with the savories and John was happy to see that she appeared to be hungry.

Then she rose and climbed the hill to take one of these plates to the coachman, along with another beaker of ginger-beer. John smiled. It was just like Margaret to worry about a servant, even though the man was required to pack his own lunch, and had been expressly told to leave them alone (although not in Margaret's earshot).

"You could hang the lamps," she said on her return. "The wall-mounted ones would appear to be the greatest hazard."

"But the swinging of the lamps makes dizzying shadows."

"Could you not hang them from a rod rather than a chain?"

"That would make them harder to light, but yes, I think that would be a reasonable alteration." John leaned over and kissed Margaret full on the mouth, quite surprising her.

"What was that for?" she asked.

"For your creativity, darling. And your outspoken nature. I could not imagine a better partner."

Margaret did not answer. Instead she prepared a plate of food for herself, but picked at it.

"You are not hungry?" John asked with concern. "Or do you not like what Cook has prepared?"

"I am not a picky eater. I just have very little appetite, of late. I am worried about Mama." The look John saw in Margaret's eyes at the funeral returned as she spoke and John cursed himself silently for even bringing up her diet.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked.

"I do not know what Papa will do without her," she replied. "He loves her so. He was devastated when he found out how ill she truly is. He blamed me at first, for withholding the truth from him. But both Mama and Dr. Donaldson asked me to. They did not think he could bear it."

"It is not right to ask a daughter to take on her parents' worries, Margaret."

"My family is not like yours. Everything is upside-down."

"What do you mean?"

"I know that you and your mother are honest with each other. You tell her everything, do you not?"

"Not everything." Not certain thoughts about Margaret, for instance. He wouldn't share what he was thinking of doing to Margaret's lips right now, or the feeling that gripped him whenever he glanced surreptitiously at the curve of her breasts. His eyes traveled there now, involuntarily.

"No, not your innermost thoughts. But you do not withhold key information from her, do you?"
John lifted his pale gaze to her blue-green eyes. "No. Of course not. A relationship must be built on trust."

Margaret nodded.

"Papa would not tell Mama that we were leaving Helstone. He left that to me. Mama was terribly hurt that he confided in me instead of her. And then Mama would not tell Papa that she was ill. That she was so very seriously ill. She let him believe..."

John took her hand, but she shook it away.

"I am in the way," Margaret continued, as she looked down at her plate, and used her fork to uselessly stir the food in circles. "Yet I am placed in the way. I do not know how they managed when I was in London. Perhaps Dixon was their intermediary."

John nearly barked a laugh, but stopped himself. He could not imagine the fearsome Dixon stooping to play carrier pigeon between the two Hales.

"Our union will not be like that, Margaret. You know this, don't you?"

Margaret raised her head, and slowly nodded.

"I must tell you the other reason I took you on this pic-nic luncheon today. Quarter sessions are next week-"

"What are quarter sessions?"

"Magistrates' duties. We are seated four times a year to hear cases. I will be busy for three to four days, and I must burn the midnight oil to be sure the mill is prepared for my absence."

"You do not need to explain. I understand how busy you are." Noticing his plate was empty, Margaret opened up the containers of dessert and sliced him first a piece of cheese cake, which she covered with several spoonsful of cherries in syrup, and then a large helping of blancmange and a small slice of almond tart. "But tell me, how is it that you became a magistrate?"

"I was appointed," replied John between bites. "It is an honor, of course, and I was the youngest ever appointed in Lancashire."

"When was this?"

"When I was five and twenty."

"So young. I am sure your mother was very proud." Margaret smiled. "As she should be. And what does the work entail?"

"Normally, I am responsible for things like issuing search warrants to the constabulary, and the crimes I punish are petty offenses, things a jury would not decide. But if there is a need for an indictment, that case is referred to the quarter session. Three of us hear the case and if necessary commit it to the Crown Court."

"The lives of men and women hang in the balance." Margaret regarded him gravely.

"They do. But respect for the law is what allows our society to function. If men and women were allowed to take the law into their own hands without consequence, anarchy would prevail."

"But what if the law is unjust?"
"Then we must work within the system to make those laws just."

"I see." The distant look returned to her eyes and John wondered as to its source.

"It is not a perfect system, but England's system of common law has functioned satisfactorily for hundreds of years." John smiled apologetically. "I do not mean to lecture. As you can tell, I take this work very seriously, although I am but a lay man."

"Of course you do. You are a person of integrity."

"I like to think I am. But then again, so are you. We are well-matched in this."

"Yes," said Margaret, as she stood, clearly ready to change the subject. "Is there a brook nearby? I would like to rinse off these plates, if possible."

"If I remember correctly, there is one at the base of the hill." John pointed to a line of shrubbery below them.

"You have been here before, then?"

"Many times, when I was a boy. It was a favorite outing for my parents. I learned all the flowers. I can show you, if you like. I am certain I remember them."

John rose and stomped his feet to dispel the pins and needles that clamored for attention. He picked up the stacked plates, carrying them easily in one hand, while taking the two wicker-wrapped beakers in the other utensils within. The coachman's plate could be left for later, he decided.

"Come. It's this way." He beckoned to Margaret with his head, and strode off through the grassy meadow.

Margaret lagged behind to pick flowers along the way, but ran forward every now and then to consult with John about her latest acquisitions.

Beauty was the key, John realized. Margaret must be surrounded with beauty. It had a transformative effect on her, releasing her from the unhappy dream that had clung to her of late. John watched as she moved, childlike, through the field, exclaiming over every new flower, happy- so happy!- for a change.

The fringed, thistle-like ones were saw wort, John remembered, while the clustered purple flowers were milk wort. Margaret announced her favorite was pepper saxifrage, was it was soon replaced by the profusion of bell flowers that met them halfway down the slope.

She set the flowers down as the pair approached the brook. They made quick work of the dishes, as the rapidly flowing brook was quite efficient at scouring away the remains of their meal.

Margaret used a napkin to dry the dishes, then set them on a mossy hummock to dry.

"What is that plant over there?" Margaret asked, pointing to an area shaded by one of the few trees remaining in the area, this one a willow. Grass covered most of the ground, but a few rosettes of leaves poked up here and there, with spikes of flowers at their centers. She wandered away to inspect these plants.

"I know this flower!" Margaret said, as she dropped to her knees to inspect the insignificant pink blossoms. John joined her, curious. He'd never noticed it before.
"It's a bee orchid. We had these in Helstone! Do you see how the flower has a special part that resembles the insect?"

"So it does," John said. "But they must be somewhat rare here. I've not seen this flower before."

"But look, here are twenty more of them!" Margaret beamed as she pointed to similar rosettes. "Thank you, John."

"I would like to take credit, but I did not know they were here."

"Not just for showing me that something I remember so fondly from Helstone grows so close to Milton. Thank you for this day. For your company." She kissed him lightly on the lips.

His kiss was not so light.

He could not help but enfold her in his arms, and he could not do anything but deepen the kiss. His lips pressed against hers with poorly concealed urgency, and he was surprised to find that she returned his passion. How perfectly ripe her lips were. How perfectly ripe all of her was.

First they were kneeling, but in moments, they'd lowered themselves to the ground. Margaret arched her neck in offering, and John greedily accepted, peppering her alabaster flesh with an abundance of kisses, but found he wanted more. Her earlobes were his, as were her temples, including the still-red scar that spoke of her accident. Still, he needed more. Her collar was too high, her sleeves too long. He kissed each finger tip, her palms, her wrists. He groaned in frustration.

"Margaret, I do not think you know what you do to me."

"Do you know what you do to me?" she asked in response.

John leaned over her, resting one forearm on either side of her face and kissed her insistently, again and again. When her lips parted, he tentatively ran his tongue along their softer, inner flesh, eliciting a heady sigh for his efforts. But she did not pull away, and so, encouraged, he deepened the kiss and earned the softest of moans as his reward.

He pulled back, only to find her hands running through his hair, insistently pulling him towards her again.

"We must stop," John said.

"Why?" Margaret asked.

"Because...I am at my limit, Margaret. I do not think you fully understand how difficult this is." He sat up and ran his hands through his hair in a vague effort at straightening the errant locks. "The things I want to do to you."

"Tell me."

John hesitated as all manner of improper images flashed through his mind. These were not scenes he was ready to share, although he was certain he would show her, eventually.

"I would you make you my wife," he said, instead. "I would love you fully and completely, Margaret."

"Our parents want us to set a date."

John nodded.
"I think they would want it sooner rather than later. Mama, especially. She wants to see me wed."

"Would that be acceptable to you, Margaret? To wed quickly?" John looked at her hopefully, yet tried to hide this expectation from her.

His love nodded. "I think so."

John reached inside his frock coat and pulled out a small velvet bag. Inside was a filigreed platinum ring with a solitaire of a cushion-cut diamond with a small, triangular carnelian placed to either side.

"John, this is too much!" How her eyes shone.

"It is not enough, my love."

Margaret looked at the ring, then at John again, tears in her eyes.

"You have said you will be my wife," John said quietly. "Will you tell the world of this commitment?"

"Yes," Margaret whispered. She held out her hand, trembling, and John slipped the ring on easily.

Then they kissed again, as a couple truly betrothed. He felt himself on the verge of losing control once again. How he wanted her, all of her. Now.

But he held back and kissed her, slowly and tenderly.

"What is the significance of the stones?" Margaret asked when they finally parted.

"The diamond is for you. Your father was happy to tell me your birthday is in April. The carnelians are for me."

"August?"

"The twenty second."

"It's beautiful."

"It suits you." He offered her his hand. "We should be going. It is getting late." John chuckled as he noticed the peat moss clinging to Margaret's hair and offered a helping hand. She brushed her dress herself vigorously, not stopping until John had assured her that every green fragment was removed.

"You have not gotten off easy, yourself," Margaret noted, flicking away tiny green plantlets from his shoulders and back.

They were interrupted by a loud caw and thrumming wing beat.

"Oh, look," laughed Margaret. "It's a Thornton." The bird perched in the nearby willow, and turned its head as it regarded them with dark, glassy eyes.

"I thought you had decided I was a bower bird."

"No, no. Well, yes, but just for today." Margaret wiggled her fingers of her left hand as she giggled. The ring sparkled in the golden afternoon light.

The raven cawed again and flew away, but placed them within its flight path. A feather dropped at Margaret's feet and she stopped to pick it up, adding it to the bouquet she'd set aside earlier.
The couple climbed the hill hand in hand, and packed up the hamper quickly. They were back in Crampton within the hour.

John accompanied Margaret up the front steps to her home and knocked briskly on the door. Her parents would be pleased to hear that they were ready to set a date: they would share the news straight away.

However, Margaret and John were unready for the news that greeted them, as they did not notice the carriage standing nearby.

A florid Dixon opened the door, tears in her eyes.

"Mama?" cried Margaret with trepidation. John saw her begin to sway.

"No, Miss," said Dixon, her voice cracking. "It's Mr. Hale."

Margaret fainted in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to everyone is reading and especially to those of you who continue to review! You make my day! Someone asked me how long this story is likely to be. Right now I think it will be at least 30 chapters, maybe 40. Yikes! But we'll see. At least 25?

I hope I have conveyed Margaret's despondency and moodiness in this chapter. As someone who has recently been through mourning myself (my dad) I know that moods can change really quickly and can be trying for others. Grief is not 100% sadness all the time. There are highs and lows, with the highs colored and often interrupted rudely by the lows. And some people, like Margaret intellectualize as a way to try to get around their grief for a time (although it usually doesn't work for long). However, I think the grieving process would be much worse for a nineteen-year-old who has lost a best friend and is in the process of losing her mother than for most modern people who have a lot more support. John has his work cut out for him.

About the barouche: A barouche is different from the carriage you might have seen in the BBC mini series, as unlike that carriage, a full-size barouche seated four (vis a vis, so that the two benches faced each other) plus the driver, and had a collapsible hood over the rear half. The book Hints to Horse-keepers, published a bit after this era (1859), gives details of the types, prices and paint jobs of carriages, as well as all sorts of other interesting details about the harnesses, and horses needed for each type. I cross referenced with Carriage Terminology: An Illustrated Dictionary, and the History of Coaches (1877) to make sure that a half-top barouche would have been driven in about 1851 or so, and would have been seen as a desirable purchase.

About the church: I based St. Catherine's Abbey on the real St. Mary's Abbey in Yorkshire, a Benedictine abbey that was dissolved by Henry VIII in the 1530s. Its ruin is gorgeous, gothic limestone and dates from the 11th to 15th century, although most of what is still standing is 15th century construction.
I based the flowers found in the location on those found in a Lancashire hay meadow and blooming in July, as described by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. The bee orchid Margaret notices is also found in the New Forest, where Helstone is (fictionally) located. It is somewhat rare in Lancashire.

The additional picnic foods are from Beeton (and, as mentioned earlier, plagiarized from Acton and Francatelli).

About the quarter sessions: In the mid 1800s, there were two types of magistrates: lay and stipendiary. Lay were drawn from the upper classes, but were not trained in the law. They were unpaid. John would have been drawn from this group. Stipendiary were paid, and were typically barristers. All magistrates were appointed through the crown, and it was a great honor to be selected. Normally, an individual magistrate could hear a petty case, as John describes, but for indictment, groups of three magistrates per city (usually lay, but sometimes with the assistance of a stipendiary) met quarterly to review cases. During the 1850s cases would include misdemeanors- things like spousal abuse, petty theft and burglary, etc. The dates set for were originally based on key quarterly events of the year: Epiphany, Easter, Midsummer, and Michaelmas. However, based on the records I have examined the dates were typically pretty flexible: several days in January, April, July and September. The length of the session depended on the docket. The more cases to review, the longer the session.
"It's Mr. Hale."

Three small words had unraveled the day.

John laid Margaret on the worn settee that took up much of the space in the tiny parlor of her home. He observed her carefully and observed that her face was bloodless, her skin moist and cool. John knelt by her, fanning her with a newspaper he found nearby, supplicating her back to consciousness.

"Dixon! Some water, please," he called, but quickly realized the servant was nowhere nearby. The portly woman was probably waiting on one of the two invalids of the house, and did not hear him. John hesitated, and wondered if he should leave Margaret's side. It would not be good for her to awaken on her own, not after the news she had just received.

John waited, instead, and after glancing over his shoulder to be sure the resident Gorgon was not present, he took the liberty of unhooking the lace collar fastened high around Margaret's neck. His love breathed more easily after that, and the color quickly began to return to her.

Her dark lashes fluttered and blue-green eyes, so soft and grave soon focused on him. But John quickly noticed that the light returned to her eyes by their afternoon pic-nic was now extinguished.

"Papa!" Margaret sat up directly, but John did not allow her to rise from the small couch, cognizant as he was of the likelihood of dizziness. Instead, he took one small hand in his own as he soothed her.

"Tell me he will not die, John, please." Margaret's eyes welled with tears, and John wished that he could own her burden. He joined her on the settee, and took her into his arms, but found that she did not continue to cry. She calmed herself swiftly, as she must have done so often within the walls of this home. Soon her countenance appeared almost placid, apart from the tell-tale trembling of her lower lip.

"We must hear from Dr. Donaldson," she said after a few moments. "But first I must wash my face. Papa must not see me like this. If he is awake." Her hand covered her mouth and she turned away from him as she attempted again to master her emotions.

Dixon entered the room and John stood.

"The doctor says he would like to speak to you, as you're the man of the house, so to speak." Dixon was an irritable sort, but even John could see she was more put out than usual. She'd answered the door in a state of distress, to be sure, but now she seemed downright angry. At what, John had no idea, but Dixon soon elaborated as she began to complain under her breath as she puttered about the room tidying up the small odds and ends of the day's business.

"You'd think that man would have the common decency to wait until his wife were well to get ill. But no. The selfishness, as though I have time to take care of both-"

"Dixon!" Margaret's eyes were wide with disbelief, her expression livid. "How dare you speak of
my father in such a way!" She shook in anger as she continued. "You forget yourself. You are not just my mother's companion. You serve this family. This entire family. Should you wish to continue, you will say no more."

"Miss Margaret-

"No more! You will stay out of my sight. John, let us go upstairs to see my father." Margaret lifted her chin and rustled past the obstreperous servant.

Margaret climbed the stairs quickly, and John fell behind her. She did not sway, or hesitate, he noticed: her anger had fully resolved any lingering faintness she might have felt. At the landing, she hurried into what John realized must be her bedroom. He did not follow, nor even peer inside the room as the circumstances had purged him of any immediate need to know the décor of Margaret's most intimate retreat. His friend—Margaret's father—was ill, and might be dying. John closed his eyes as he said a quick prayer for the man he'd known for such a short time, who'd nonetheless influenced him so greatly. Their lessons had soon become the highlight of each week, and not only for the opportunity to spend time in the company of his daughter. Richard Hale had quickly taken the place of the father he'd lost, the father with whom John had never been able to have a single conversation of substance. Even as a fourteen year old, the young John Thornton had noticed the great mismatch in personalities between himself and his father. In high spirits George Thornton had no time for philosophy. Nay, he had no time for anything but gambling. And in his cups, things were worse. But Mr. Hale had a spirit that complemented John's own. His quiet, contemplative nature drew out John's inquisitive disposition. In truth, John owed Mr. Hale more than that man would ever understand. Education was more than disciplining the mind, as Mr. Hale had claimed. It had done so much more than that. It had freed him.

John opened his eyes to see Mr. Hale's daughter emerging from her bedroom, collar fastened, face damp and free of the evidence of her grief. Clearly she was frightened of the potential news that awaited her. John took her arm in his own in a small effort to bolster her courage.

They found Dr. Donaldson next door, next to an unconscious Mr. Hale. "I have given him a sleeping draught," the physician said quietly, as Margaret knelt next to the bed and grasped her father's limp hand. "Mr. Thornton, would you care to continue this conversation elsewhere?"

"Without Miss Hale? But she is his only daughter." John's forehead creased as he considered the doctor's words.

The doctor stepped into the hallway. John followed, closing the door behind him.

"I am concerned about Miss Hale's mental hygiene. A stress of this magnitude is likely to cause the fragile edifice of her psyche to come crashing down."

"And why would that be?" John was nonplussed.

The doctor sighed, as though it were self-evident. "She is of the weaker sex. It is well-known, and very much my experience that a woman's constitution cannot withstand the continued onslaught of such stresses."

"You have visited this house on many occasions and therefore know well that Miss Hale has been running this household these past months. She is more than capable of making decisions on on her father's behalf. Her strength is enormous." John pushed past the doctor and stepped back inside the room.

"Darling," he asked, "are you ready for Dr. Donaldson to brief us on your father's condition?"
"Not here," said the doctor. "There is a chance Mr. Hale may awaken, and even as he lies there he may be somewhat aware of our conversation. We should withdraw to another room. If you would ask your servant to return..."

The defiant look on Margaret's face informed John that she would not be collecting Dixon.

"I must see Mama," she said.

John therefore offered to locate Dixon himself. He found the red-faced woman in the tiny scullery, washing dishes, sobbing.

John rapped on the door frame to announce himself, and to give the woman a chance to collect herself. She turned away and dried her face on her apron before turning back to him with a supercilious glare.

"What are you wanting, then?"

John said nothing. Instead, he reached for a beaker he found on the draining board and poured from a pitcher of water. He regarded Dixon as he drained the cup, then set it back on the counter.

"I know you why you said what you did," he offered quietly, "although you do owe Margaret an apology."

"Oh, do you?" Dixon crossed her arms across her chest. "I'm sure you'll tell me."

"Two reasons. First and foremost, you resent Mr. Hale."

"I do not!"

"You do," John continued calmly. "It's clear to anyone who enters this household. You hate this place, and him for bringing your family here."

The lack of ready retort from the normally vituperative servant confirmed the veracity of his statement.

Instead, Dixon slopped soapy water into the beaker laid so unceremoniously into the sink and quickly washed it, her back to the overbearing manufacturer.

"And second?" she asked, finally.

"Clearly, you are overworked."

Dixon's shoulders sagged.

"I will send a servant from my house at first light to assist you. I assume a maid-of-all-work would be most useful, rather than an upstairs girl?"

Dixon turned around, her eyes narrowed. "Why would you do this for me?"

"Margaret needs you to take care of her mother. She will need to take care of her father, assuming he survives. That leaves no one to do the household chores."

"Thank you, Mr. Thornton."

"You will apologize to her."
"Of course I will. I don't need you to tell me that!" Dixon's face reddened immediately, and a workroughened hand flew to her mouth. "I am sorry. I did not mean to say that. I owe you my respect. And you will have it. I promise."

"You are wanted upstairs, by Mr. Hale's side." John chose to ignore the outburst. If Margaret could do so for so many years, so could he. Clearly there was more to this woman than met the eye, although presently he could not see what these traits might be.

"Mama was sleeping," Margaret said, when she and Dr. Donaldson joined John in the parlor.

Dr. Donaldson nodded. "Your Dixon informed me that Mrs. Hale was not doing so well this afternoon. She gave her a dose of laudanum just before your father took ill."

"So she does not know?" Margaret asked, worry writ across her fine features.

"I am afraid not." The doctor opened his satchel and rummaged within it.

"What happened to Papa?"

"Your servant heard a thud and found him lying supine on the study floor. She helped him sit up, and he began to clutch his arm and complain of a weight on his chest."

"What is wrong with him? Dr. Donaldson-" Margaret grasped John's hand as she spoke, "is my father dying?"

"We will have to wait and see, Miss Hale. We will watch him carefully, won't we? Cases such as this are somewhat rare. Your father's symptoms are consistent with a disease called angina pectoris. It is a condition where the heart does not get enough blood."

"But he has not been bled recently. Papa has not been cut, or ill."

"No, Miss Hale," the doctor said with an indulgent smile, "I mean that his heart is not working efficiently. However, I must ask, has your father ever suffered from the gout?"

"The gout? Like Mr. Bell? No, he does not eat such a rich diet. He has never complained of gouty pains."

"There are some that think angina pectoris is due to the gout spreading to the heart. But if your father has never had the gout, this would not make much sense." The physician made a note in the small, leather-bound notebook John had seen before.

"What is the treatment?" John asked.

"He must rest, and regain his strength. I recommend brandy and hot water to improve the circulation, a snifter three times a day. You may have noticed the mustard plaster on Mr. Hale's chest. Those should continue to aid respiration, as well as massage of his limbs to help his blood flow." He wrote in his notebook as he spoke, then tore out the page and handed it to John. "But you should also know there is some evidence that this disease is exacerbated by excessive emotion. In fact, there are those that would say strong passions are the immediate cause of the loss of blood flow to the heart."

"You are saying that father's worry over Mama has caused his illness?"

The doctor nodded. "Possibly."

"But we cannot take away this worry. So how will we mitigate the illness, then?" Margaret's voice
rose in agitation, and she began to twist the diamond and carnelian ring she wore on her third finger.

"We cannot," Dr. Donaldson replied. "But it is likely all of the damage that could be done has been done. There is that." Dr. Donaldson placed his notebook inside his satchel and buckled the bag shut.

"I will see you out," said John. He collected the physician’s hat and cane from the hallway stand, and spoke quietly to the man. "Please send the bill to Marlborough Mills. Our households will be joined soon enough."

The doctor nodded and was on his way.

John returned to the parlor to find Margaret pacing the cramped room, weaving a circuitous path amongst its furnishings.

"I should have been with him today," she began. The impervious facade she had shown to Dixon and the doctor crumbled now that they were alone.

He was at her side immediately, embracing her. "Don't say that. You do not know what this day would have brought otherwise."

"I was not there! I should have been." Her head bowed, and her forehead bumped against his chest.

"Do you regret the time we spent together today?" John asked, fearing the answer.

"It was selfish of me. My mother needs me. I knew that, and yet I left. But my father needed me, too. And I should have known that."

"How, Margaret? Are you omniscient? Are you alone among humans in not needing some time to yourself and some joy in your life?" He placed a finger under her chin and lifted it upwards until their eyes met. "Do not berate yourself. You are a good daughter. No one would claim otherwise. Even my mother thinks so."

Margaret's body shook with a silent laugh, although it was clear that she was on the verge of tears. "Really? Your mother?" She nestled herself against his lanky frame and her wrapped his arms tightly around her.

"But how will I take care of both of them? How can I?"

"Margaret."

"With Papa ill, there is no money, and I were to find work, there would be no one to take care of Papa."

"Margaret-"

"It is just not possible."

"You act as though you are all alone. But my darling, you are not alone. Do you not see that?"

"We are not married, John. They are not your burden."

"But we will be married. And they are."

Margaret shook her head. "But this may be a sign saying that it is wrong to do so. Like the raven."

"The raven?" John's stepped back from her, and gazed at her intently. Maybe Dr. Donaldson was not
wrong. Perhaps the stress of two ill parents was simply too much for Margaret to bear.

"Yes, the raven we saw today," Margaret continued. "That cawed at us and dropped a feather. It flew directly in our path. And I picked up the feather." She pointed the bouquet of wildflowers John had laid upon the occasional table. The dark feather stood out among the pastel blooms like a streak of machine oil, sullying them.

"The raven," John repeated incredulously. "A blighted black bird? There are millions of those! You are not making sense, Margaret." John rubbed the small vertical crease between his eyebrows as he willed himself patience.

Again she twisted the ring on her finger. "The raven portends death. It may be a sign that Papa will die tonight."

"No, it portended that there was carrion in the neighborhood of the pic-nic. A rat, perhaps. Or a hare. I'm sure we would have smelled it, if we'd stopped to investigate. Margaret, look at me. Do not think of him dying tonight. Do not. Your fancy will bring you nothing but worry and sadness." She unnested herself from her cozy lair and John saw that once again she'd begun to cry.

"Do you love me?" John drew her to him again and murmured in her ear.

She nodded.

"And you know that I love you? More than anything?"

Again she nodded.

"I know that you are frightened. I do not want you to be alone with your fear tonight. Margaret, I would marry you this day, if I could, so that I might be by your side this night."

"You would?" her tearful smile was heart rending. "Papa will likely not see us marry. I so wanted him to. I cannot tell you how much I love him."

"I know, Margaret. You are your father's daughter. It is most evident."

"But you would marry me today, if you could?"

He guessed her thoughts. "You know that a special license is only for the peerage. Or by dispensation. But I am certain we would not qualify." Margaret interrupted his explanation, as eager as she was to solve their conundrum.

"Yes, but with a regular license we could still marry tomorrow morning, here at the house. At Papa's beside."

John remained calm. "You are not of age, Margaret, and therefore cannot apply for the license yourself. It would need to be your mother or father who did so."

"But you could apply."

"If I were Church of England, yes."

Margaret looked at him questioningly. "I did not realize you were a dissenter."

John stepped away from her and drew himself up to his full height. "My family is Presbyterian. Is that a problem?"
"Papa is also a dissenter. That is why we came to Milton." Margaret laid her hand on his arm reassuringly. "How could it be a problem, John? I simply did not know."

"Although there is far more religious tolerance than a twenty five years ago, ones faith does make a difference in matters of marriage. Dissenters and Catholics must wait a week after applying for a license. And of course, the cost is more. But if you would like to marry a week from today, I will go to the Superintendent Registrar immediately." John consulted his pocket watch. "There is time. It is not yet four o’clock."

"Then we can be married next Wednesday morning?" Margaret asked. "If I tell Papa this, perhaps he can cling to life."

John sighed. "You forget the quarter sessions. It is possible that they will run through Friday. In summer they often do."

"Saturday, then." Margaret smiled through her tears. "I once said that a perfect wedding day for me would be the most simple affair, that it take place on a sunny morning, that I would wear my favorite dress and simply walk to the church. This will not be much different, will it?"

John said nothing, taking the opportunity to kiss his love gently instead.

These were not passionate kisses, not at first. Their intent was to warm, and heal. He kissed each tear away, and erased the trails made by those allowed to journey the soft planes and valleys of her face. The touch of his lips against hers was feather light, and held no urgency. There was no need for it do so.

"Do you have any idea how much I love you?" he breathed.

"I think I know, for I feel the same."

John’s lips journeyed to her neck, which arched back readily, but as passion began to overtake him he realized that in ten days time such delectations, however pleasurable, would simply be the start of his lovemaking.

He pulled away from her.

"I must go, if I am to obtain that license before the close of business."

Margaret nodded.

"Would it be acceptable for me to come by quite early tomorrow to check on your and Mr. Hale?"

"Of course, I will be waiting." Margaret threw her arms around him and kissed him once, twice, over and over. "I do not want you to go."

But John did, as it was some distance to the registrar's office.

He was back at home, however, within an hour and a half, having visited not only that office, and Outwood Station to send a hastily worded telegram, but also the meeting house, whose minister was more than happy to called upon to officiate at the wedding of one of his congregation's most upstanding members.

The smell of his favorite dinner reminded him of how long it had been since his luncheon with Margaret, and he handed off the emptied hamper to Stokes with a frown.
His mother and Fanny were already seated in the dining room, although the meal had not yet been served. He was late, as usual, and they had not stood on ceremony. Of the two, it was only his mother who noticed his mood, however.

"John," said she, "what is wrong?"

"It has been a very long and trying day," John replied, taking the liberty of removing his frock coat, now that he was among family.

"Your pic-nic with Miss Hale did not go well?" Fanny asked with a smirk. "I would have thought even she would be impressed with the barouche you brought round. Is it true that it belongs to Watson?"

John stared steadily at his sister for a moment, realizing that indeed she and Watson would be a fortunate match. She the mercenary and he the vault would get along splendidly. John shook his head and turned away without a word to his sibling.

"The pic-nic went well, Mother. Cook did an excellent job, of course, and Miss Hale was most pleased. We went to St. Catherine's, which was much unchanged. It was a lovely, perfect afternoon."

"What, then, John? Something has happened."

"Upon our return, we learned that Mr. Hale had fallen ill." John did not speak for several minutes as he collected his emotions. His mother leaned forward, silently urging him to continue.

"That family should put Dr. Donaldson on retainer! Although, one wonders how they can afford him!"

"Hush, Fanny!" Hannah Thornton shot a glare at her daughter as she rose from her seat to kneel near her son's side. "Does he live, John? Will he live?"

John nodded. "He was resting when I left. But Dr. Donaldson had no prognosis to provide. Margaret is beside herself with worry."

"Understandably so." Hannah directed her attention to her daughter. "Fanny, will you ask Cook to hold dinner for a half hour? And then leave us, please. John and I need to speak privately."

Fanny looked from her mother to brother with her jaw set in anger. "You never include me," she said tightly. "Everything is private between you two. That is fine. Have your conversation. Have the evening. I will have Cook send a plate to my room." She left the room in a huff, sliding the pocket doors shut behind her so violently that they bounced open again.

Hannah stood and closed the doors properly, returning to John's side again before she spoke.

"Do you think it is likely that Margaret will return to London with her mother?"

John's shoulders sagged. "That was my immediate fear. But Margaret hoped we might marry tomorrow. Which, of course, is not possible." He pulled a paper from his pocket, and showed his mother the license, filled in with his name, Margaret's and other pertinent details. "We will marry in ten days. That is the soonest I could manage between regulations and magistrate's duties."

"Ten days is not much time to plan, John."

"Margaret does not want a big wedding. She is not a person of extravagant tastes. She will be happy to be married by her father's bedside. In fact, this is what she has requested."
"But it is not her requests that are paramount here, John. We have your standing in the community to consider."

"Mother." John gazed at the Thornton matriarch in amazement. "You would consider propriety at a time like this?"

"We must. The mill is just getting back on its feet, and is a long way from showing a profit. You cannot be seen to be cutting corners. A wedding of some substance is in order."

"The Hales cannot afford to host a wedding breakfast of any size, let alone of the magnitude you are suggesting. Nor are they in any state to travel to a meeting house."

"Obviously we would pay for the breakfast, and all other necessaries."

"I do not think they would agree. Margaret wants a small wedding."

"Her mother feels differently."

"I do not think her mother has a feel for their financial situation. I would not suffer Mr. Hale the humiliation."

Hannah ignored her son's protests. "A britzka could be hired for the Hales if it were necessary. And as for the meeting house, aren't Miss Hale and her vicar father Church of England? I hardly would have thought she would agree to be married in a lowly meeting house such as ours."

"Mr. Hale is a dissenter. It is why he left the church, mother."

Hannah was chastened. "Mrs. Hale said it was a matter of conscience, but I did not believe her. " She considered how fragile that woman was the last time they had met. "Perhaps for the Hales' sake it would be better to have both the ceremony and the breakfast here at the house. It would be much easier on the two of them."

"About that, Mother." John rested his hand on his mother's. "This is difficult to ask, but I must."

"What is it, John?" Her son did not often ask her permission in this way, and the look in his eyes indicated that his question was of great importance. She told herself that whatever his request might be, she would grant it, as surely it would grant him happiness. And happiness he surely deserved.

"I have sent a telegram to Mr. Bell, to ask him to come to Margaret's side, as I will not be available to her for much of this next week."

"And?" Hannah shrugged one shoulder. This was a matter of no consequence, as far as she was concerned. Mr. Bell was a gadfly, nothing more. Each year he turned up uninvited to her masters' dinner with a clear mission to stir up trouble, and a smile that brightened each time he succeeded in irritating. But that was a gentleman's game, and in the end such games made no difference to the balance sheet. It therefore mattered to Hannah not one whit whether Mr. Bell remained cloistered in Oxford or buzzed about Milton like a fly drawn to offal.

"When he gets here, I will request that he allow us to make certain renovations to the mill house."

"Renovations," Hannah echoed.

"The Hales cannot stay in Crampton after Margaret and I are wed."

"Her parents will lodge...here?" Hannah made the ready inference from her son's words. She closed
her eyes as she struggled to maintain her composure. Would it not be enough to be removed from her role as mistress of the household? She would already be shunted to a siding, like a disused rail car. But with the girl's parents present, how much further would her role diminish? She might as well be a guest in her own home.

Her son's sonorous voice interrupted her thoughts. "There is no other way, Mother. There will be more expense in maintaining two separate households than in bringing them here. And this way, Margaret's attentions will be undivided."

"I see." That was the crux of the matter, Hannah realized- Margaret's attentions. Her son was right. The girl would spend every moment of her waking hours by her parents' side until they passed. That was no way to begin a marriage.

Hannah swallowed her pride.

"If you will allow me to plan this wedding to my satisfaction, I will welcome the elder Hales into our home."

"Thank you, Mother. I knew you would." John hugged his mother tightly, and kissed her forehead.

The elder Thornton smiled a rare smile. "Ten days is not long to plan a wedding, son."

"Perhaps Fanny can help you?" John directed his gaze toward the ceiling, as he remembered his sister's earlier words.

"Perish the thought." Hannah rolled her eyes. She *would* find something for Fanny to do, but it would be insignificant and time-consuming enough to keep her daughter out from underfoot. The wedding favors, perhaps.

It would be hard enough to plan the wedding with the Hale women, as the older one was likely to reminisce impractically about days of yore as a "fine lady", while the younger was likely to be so practical as to be an obstacle to any progress.

Nonetheless, in just ten days time, Hannah Thornton's first-born son would have a wedding commensurate to his stature. His mother would make sure of this. Milton would know that their best was being married.

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes.

This chapter is a bit shorter than the last, but this was the most appropriate stopping place. Obviously, the next chapter is a very important one. :)

Thank you again to everyone who has taken the time to review. It truly makes a difference to me- each one puts a huge smile on my face!- and they help me commit to putting out a chapter each week.

About Mr. Hale's illness: Although today heart disease is a leading cause of death for both men and women, in the early Victorian era it was quite rare. Diet and activity levels
were different then, and there was much more infectious disease, so the chances of a long life that was rich and sedentary enough to result in heart disease was pretty slim. It did occur, however, particularly in those who were more sedentary, like scholars. To find out what terminology was used in this era (the term heart attack was not used then, although clearly that is what Mr. Hale had) and how doctors thought about heart disease I referred to A Short History of Cardiology by P. R. Fleming and the paper Angina Pectoris and the Arnolds: Emotions and Heart Disease in the Nineteenth Century, by F.B Alberti. Both of these sources discuss the idea that many doctors thought that strong passions (not diet, lack of exercise, genetic issues, etc., as we know today) were the cause of heart disease. Dr. Donaldson is echoing this view, but at the same time bringing in some of the newer knowledge that was coming to light, for instance, that when hearts of people with angina were examined after death, issues were seen with arteries that supply blood to the heart. The treatment Dr. Donaldson recommends is what was traditionally used to improve circulation and heart function.

About the marriage license and John's dissenting: The book The Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony: with a complete guide to the forms of a wedding (1852) gives the details regarding the different types of licenses in this era, and how a person's religion affected their availability. The reason I have written John as a Presbyterian is because his mother has the multi-volume set of Matthew Henry's Bible Commentaries on the dining room sideboard. Henry was a dissenter and founded a Presbyterian church, so it would make sense that Hannah and family are not Anglicans. When John mentions there being more religious tolerance act than 25 years prior, he is referring to the 1753 Marriage Act. This act stated that only marriages performed by Anglican ministers were legal. It wasn't until 1823 the act was repealed, allowing dissenting ministers, Catholic priests and Jews to perform weddings.

About the britzka: this is a type of carriage that was very large, and in some ways could almost be considered a motor home, as it could be set up to allow passengers to lie flat inside. It could therefore be used for night travel or to transport invalids.
Margaret was burning the candle at both ends.

She stayed up all night with her father, first sitting idle as she contemplated the sleeping man. He did not seem to be in any pain, but perhaps that was due to the sleeping draught Dr. Donaldson had given him before she had arrived home. Margaret smoothed a stray strand of hair from her father's forehead and tucked the covers around him as she considered how central her father was to her life. When she was a child, they were inseparable: she'd accompanied him everywhere. And while it was true that she had gone for many months at a time without seeing him in the years she'd lived in London, during that time he was never really gone. He was always right there, just a few hours away, in Helstone. At any time she could conjure an image of him sitting at his coromandel desk, working on a sermon, or out among his flock, wearing his broad-brimmed hat. Now that image was shaken, although the person lay right before her.

This frail man was not the Papa her imagination drew. This was a vessel of flesh and bone, and one quite possibly too weak to contain its soul.

But he could not die tonight. Life simply could not be that unfair.

Margaret chided herself. How selfish she was being. Life was terribly unfair- look at the Higginses, and the Bouchers, and almost every other family in Princeton, for that matter. When had life ever been fair to any of them? Margaret had three meals a day, two fine parents, a servant, and had experienced an upbringing in a luxurious London house. That was far more than most people could even imagine.

But above all of these things, she had John. She was lucky. She was blessed, and Margaret was thankful for this.

But what a selfish girl she must be, because still she wanted to cry over the potential loss of her father. Margaret bit her lip and clenched her fists in an effort to stop the tears from flowing. She would not allow it. It would not help Papa, or Mama, or even Dixon for her to fall apart. She needed to stay busy, to do something to keep her mind off the present situation. But reading to herself was out of the question. Although it was only half past ten, she was already dead tired. A morning spent doing chores and an afternoon with John had seen to that, to say nothing of the stress of hearing the news about her father. She knew she would fall asleep quickly over a book, when she should be watching over her father. And while reading aloud might keep her awake, it might also waken Papa.

Margaret gathered her skirts and left the room, and hurried to the parlor, as an idea presented itself to her. She scanned through a stack of The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine until she found the pattern she remembered, then rummaged through a work basket until she found a length of even-weave linen and the other materials necessary for needlepoint. She quickly stretched the fabric within a frame, and returned to her father's side, a small smile on her face. She might as well make a birthday gift for John, as he'd mentioned the date. He might appreciate a pair of petit point-embroidered braces- she could order the leather fittings by mail in the morning, if time permitted.
There was an address listed on the pattern. Certainly the blue shades of floss she'd chosen would harmonize with the color of his eyes. And surely braces were not too intimate a gift to receive from a fiancee? Margaret realized with some astonishment that the question was moot, as she and John would be married for weeks by the time the gift was given.

Margaret collected the Argand lamp from her father's study, and set it on the table farthest away from her father's bed, so that the bright light it emitted would not disturb him. She turned her chair so that she would be able to keep one eye on him and spent most of the rest of the night embroidering, considering the two men she loved most on Earth, a fond smile on her face.

It was her father who awakened her, at a little past seven.

"Margaret, I think someone is at the door."

"Oh!" Margaret jumped at her father's voice, then winced, as her head had lolled against her shoulder as she slept, producing the most terrific crick. She rubbed her neck, then rolled her shoulders carefully in an attempt to ease the stiffness away.

"I will see who it is." Margaret straightened her skirts as she stood, and paused in the hallway to tidy her hair as best she could. She looked a fright, but that was to be expected after spending the night in her clothes. She hurried down two flights of stairs to the door to find John standing there, hat in hand. A servant Margaret recognized as Martha stood next to him, basket in hers.

"Good morning," John said, with a look of concern on his face. "You look tired. Were you up with your father the night long?"

Margaret nodded as she welcomed them inside. She immediately directed Martha to kitchen with instructions to black the grate and set the small room in order.

Once she and John were alone Margaret fell into his arms.

"He lives," she said, embracing him tightly. "And he is awake. Would you like to see him? I am sure he would not mind."

She and John tread lightly on the stairs, as it was clear Dixon and Mama were not yet awake. This was not surprising; Mama never woke early, and after the prolonged stress of the previous day, her servant must be exhausted.

"Papa?" Margaret asked quietly as the pair entered his room. "Are you still awake? John is here."

"John." Richard Hale's voice was weak, but the smile on his face suggested he was pleased to see his friend. "I am afraid I have given all of you quite a scare."

"This is true, Mr. Hale. We have been quite concerned."

"I thought we had settled on 'Richard'? Come, son. Pull up a chair." Margaret hastened to hide the embroidery project she'd left on the table.

"Sit here," she offered, patting the chair next to her father's bed. "I will see about breakfast. Papa, are you hungry?"

"A boiled egg might do nicely."

Margaret smiled. An appetite was surely a good sign. She left the room to give directions to Martha, her smile widening further as she heard the low murmur of conversation between her father and
John. How good the two were for each other, and how fortunate their friendship.

The young lady returned shortly with a tray set for two, with teapot, egg cups and toast.

"I thought you might be hungry as well, John," she offered.

"No, I ate at five thirty, as I usually do."

"So early?" Margaret raised an eyebrow. Clearly she would need to adjust her schedule once she became John's wife, as she looked forward to starting each day with him.

"Yes. The mill opens at six, weekdays, seven on Saturdays. Except next Saturday, of course." He winked at Margaret and she blushed. "I have something to show you. Don't let me forget."

Margaret fussed over her father, helping him sit up in bed, then cracking the soft-yolked egg for him and arranging the cup and buttered toast on a plate. She perched on the side of his bed as she offered the plate to him. John looked on, a light in his eyes.

"May offer you some tea, at least?" Margaret asked her husband-to-be.

The manufacturer nodded, and smiled as his hand brushed hers as she passed him the teacup. Their eyes met as they both recalled a similar occasion in the recent past. All that was missing was the bracelet.

"Margaret, John," Richard interrupted. "You know, I am perfectly fine eating breakfast on my own. It is not as though it is a great opportunity for conversation. And I feel there is something you two would like to discuss."

Margaret blushed. "Yes, Papa." She and John quickly left the room, the tea disregarded.

"Mama is still asleep, I think. Step close to the edges of the stairs," Margaret instructed in a whisper. "They are much less likely to squeak that way." John obliged, as the pair descended to Mr. Hale's study. Once there, John removed the marriage license from the inside pocket of his frock coat.

"Saturday," he said. "I wish it could be sooner, for your father's sake."

"It does seem a very long time from now. But Papa seems better, does he not? He is weak, but surely he will recover." Margaret took the document from John and read it, noting with a smile how her name appeared so close to his. Soon their names would be linked forever.

"It is out of our hands, darling, but I hope your father will be at your side for a very long time."

Margaret pulled him close, resting her cheek against the starched linen of his shirt front. "I hope so, too."

He bowed his head to hers in hopes of a kiss, but she turned her head away.

"Excuse me. It's just that-" she blushed. "You woke me up. I had not even brushed my teeth. Please give me just a moment." She left the room and entered her own chamber, across the hall.

She hurriedly brushed her teeth and washed her face, embarrassed that she had foregone two such basic aspects of hygiene. Then she spied her disordered hair in the mirror and pulled the pins from it impetuously, allowing the warm brown strands to cascade down in a riotous tumble. She picked up a wide toothed comb to attempt to wrestle her hair back into some semblance of order but was interrupted by a low, but authoritative command.
"Don't. It's beautiful as it is."

Margaret turned around to find John leaning in the doorway, his eyes raking over her hungrily.

"I had no idea your hair was so long. Or so curly." He approached her after quietly closing the door behind him, and her brow lowered momentarily at the breach in propriety at his entering her most private space. Her cares were forgotten in the immediacy of his caresses, however. He led her to the bed, his weight causing the springs to groan and sag, and pulled her onto his knee.

"I dreamed about you last night," John murmured as he coiled a chestnut curl around a finger and released it.

"You did? What did we talk about?"

John laughed quietly. "No words were said."

"Oh." Margaret blushed.

"I've never had a dream so intense," he continued. "It was as though you were in my arms, and I- we-"

Her clear, blue-green eyes locked with his. "What was it like?"

"I hardly think that is a maidenly question, Margaret." She had never noted that wicked smile before. She lifted her chin defensively. "Is it wrong to be curious?"

"No," John conceded. "Do you dream about such things? About me?"

Margaret's blush deepened and she looked away. "Vaguely," she answered quietly. I am afraid I haven't been provided much information... that is, in Helstone I'd seen animals, of course—"

"Do you think that is what love is like between a man and woman? That it is like animals rutting?"

"The word pleasure has come up at time or two," Margaret whispered in a voice so soft it was almost inaudible. "Mama said the duty of the marriage bed would lead to the pleasures of motherhood, and my cousin Edith did say that marital relations could be quite pleasurable...but she did not elaborate."

"I want to show you, Margaret." He gently turned her face to meet his own and kissed her tenderly. "We need only wait a week, John."

"Nine days. It may as well be an eternity." John rained kisses over every inch of flesh available to him and groaned. "This is not enough. I want you, Margaret. All of you."

Margaret giggled nervously as she pulled away, then lifted her skirts just enough to display her ankles and the brown silk boots she'd worn since the day before. "All of me?"

"I will admit, I am least interested in your feet, Miss Hale," John whispered. He unbuttoned the cuff of her bodice sleeve and kissed the pulse point of her wrist, then pushed the sleeve back further and slowly worked his way up the tender skin of her inner arm. Margaret shuddered at the sensation he produced in her. It was dizzying, yet electrifying.

A knock at the door brought her back to reality.

"Margaret? Are you awake?"
"I was up all night with Papa. My clothes are wrinkled so I am changing, Dixon. I will be out shortly."

"I saw a hat in the front hall."

"Yes." Margaret looked at John in terror.

He smiled back as he mouthed a single word at her. Margaret nodded, relieved.

"It is Mr. Thornton's. He is visiting with Papa."

"Well, he's not there now."

"He is likely indisposed."

"Indisposed?"

"Visiting the privy, Dixon. Must you be so obtuse?"

Margaret stifled giggles as the servant walked away. After hearing the woman's heavy tread on the stairs and her footsteps in the room above, she addressed John in a whisper. "You must leave, now. She has gone upstairs to Mama. Go down quietly and shut the front door. Then return to Papa. Oh, you are making a terrible liar out of me!" Margaret wrapped her arms around her lover and pulled him close to kiss him once more. "Now leave, before we get into trouble."

John nodded after repaying her in kind, twofold. "I should tell you, I won't be able to visit tomorrow or Saturday. There is too much to do at the mill to get ready for the quarter sessions. And it is doubtful I will see you next week."

"Oh." Margaret's face fell.

"But I did take the liberty of sending Mr. Bell a telegram. I had a return one early this morning. He will be arriving on the evening train."

"I am glad of it. He will be a great help in your absence, and Papa will be pleased."

"When he arrives, please ask him to pay me a visit. There is a matter I must discuss with him. And I will see you Sunday?"

"I would very much like that. And I am sure Papa would, as well."

"Then I will pay my regards to your father, and be on my way. A mountain of work awaits me."

John kissed her again, as consolation for the words that must come next. "Margaret, my mother has asked to be involved in the wedding preparations. She will likely visit on Saturday."

"But I only want a small wedding." It concerned Margaret greatly to plan a large wedding while her father lay ill in bed. It seemed to be tempting fate.

"It would mean a great deal to her. And to me. If you are concerned about the cost, don't be. The bride's family does not have to bear all of the cost of the wedding."

Margaret nodded. The man's generosity was simply overwhelming.

"Of course, John. If it is important to you..."
"Thank you." The earnest fullness of his smile made Margaret's misgivings fall away like autumn leaves.

After a night spent entertaining Mr. Bell and a third night spent at her father's side, Margaret was not in the best frame of mind to be making wedding arrangements. It was one thing to be in a room with the formidable Mrs. Thornton, but still another to be with that woman and her daughter Fanny. Margaret's mother, propped in a chair and less drugged than she had been of late, was ostensibly overseeing the formalities, but in practice she deferred to every request made by Mrs. Thornton. And in truth those requests were phrased as recommendations, if not outright commands.

The first order of business was the venue. Mrs. Thornton first offered her home for both service and breakfast, expressing concern for the health of both Mr. and Mrs. Hale. But in her offer she made it clear that a church was the superior location for the actual wedding, and Mrs. Hale readily agreed to the plan. For her part, Margaret had no problem with the service being held in the Presbyterian building. A church building was like any other as far as she was concerned— it was the community within that formed the real church. And Margaret simply felt no connection to the people in the parish church she attended with her family. To be sure, she had planned to discuss with John the idea of converting to his faith, as his beliefs seemed to be very important to him. And given her father's own dissension, Margaret felt it might do her good to reconsider her own beliefs. But the way Mrs. Thornton presented the idea— as though there was no room for discussion—rankled. It irritated like a stone in a shoe, building slowly over time until she wanted to stop and shake the offender away from her. Still, Margaret held her peace, for John's sake. Clearly, it was important to him that his mother plan this occasion. She would let Mrs. Thornton cherish her small victory.

But it was the first of many.

Next came the flowers. Fanny cried out at first for a profusion of colors, but with one reproving glare from her mother, the daughter's mouth closed tight and she went back to the stack of lithographs she'd brought with her, and began sorting them into two piles for Margaret's perusal. Margaret's wish was for roses from Helstone, but of course this was not to be, so she did not even voice this small request. Whatever was in season would be fine, as far as she was concerned. Mama wanted pink roses and orange blossoms, and Mrs. Thornton solely white roses. White roses it was. Margaret regarded her mother, concerned that Mrs. Hale might be offended that her wishes were being so efficiently denied. But Maria Hale was unreadable, apart from the clear signs of tiredness already showing on her person.

The afternoon progressed in the much same way, as Mrs. Thornton had very definite ideas about what constituted an appropriate wedding. A cake with ornate royal icing, much like that served at the Queen's wedding was apparently de rigeur at Milton nuptials: therefore, there was no question that such a cake would be on display during the breakfast, along with the traditional bride's and groom's cakes.

"But how many guests will there be?" Margaret asked. "Surely only one cake will be necessary for such a small gathering?"

"This will be done correctly, Miss Hale. My son's position in society demands it," Hannah Thornton had responded in a voice that brooked no opposition.

Margaret sighed and turned to the younger Thornton, instead. Apparently Fanny had appointed herself haute couturier, and had brought along a collection of all the latest Parisian fashion plates. Margaret noted quickly that every single style was overdone, with an abundance of lace and ruffles. The gowns were almost wider than they were tall, and would look ridiculous on someone as petite as she. She scanned through the stack of plates Fanny suggested as possibilities and bit her lip. Fanny
was dreaming if she thought any of these could be sewn in under a month, even with a team of assistants.

Margaret wanted something much more simple, something befitting a parson's daughter.

"The dressmaker, Madame Coleridge, will be here within the hour. You must decide, Margaret. Don't you think this one will do nicely? If I were getting married it is what I would choose!"

Fanny pointed to an atrocity so overdone with lace that its wearer seemed wedged into a gigantic snowball. Margaret tried not to laugh as she examined the drawing. If an idealized sketch looked this bad, how would it look in reality?

Margaret regarded Fanny shrewdly. The young woman seemed bursting to share some information. "Would you care to step my father's study for a minute?" she asked. "I would like to ask your opinion on something."

They walked upstairs to the study, out of earshot of Mrs. Thornton. Margaret picked up her petit point and showed it to Fanny. "I am making John a pair of braces. Do you think they will suit?"

Fanny rolled her eyes. "Oh, I am sure he will love whatever you make him. Truly, he is smitten. You could give him a piece of burlap bag from the sorting room and he'd treasure it, I'm sure, as long as you embroidered your initials on it. But you and John are not the only couple, you know."

"Oh?" Here was the secret.

"Mr. Watson has asked me if he may court me." Fanny smiled archly.

"And you have said yes?"

"Why wouldn't I? He is a bit grey, but he's very well set up. He buys me anything I want and he's very amusing, too. For an old man. You saw his new coach, I know."

"Yes, it's quite beautiful. I don't think I ever saw one lovelier in London." Fanny beamed at the compliment.

"I'm very happy for you, Fanny. When do you think you might marry?"

"Well, we've only just begun courting, and I suppose John will have some say in things. But as soon as Watson asks me, I will be ready. I see no point in waiting."

Margaret smiled at Fanny's eagerness to be out from under the thumbs of her mother and brother. Clearly she did not see the benefits of a love match, or realize that in marrying Watson she might well be placing herself beneath a new thumb. It was not for Margaret to interfere, however. She knew enough about the girl to know she would not listen to another's advice, however well-intentioned. So Margaret thought she might as well stick to the immediate problem at hand.

"But in that case, shouldn't we set aside the dress design you showed me earlier, as it is the one you most favor?" Margaret asked instead.

Fanny considered Margaret's words seriously, golden ringlets bouncing as she nodded. "I think you are right," she conceded.

"A dress like that, with so many ruffles really needs someone tall and thin to wear it correctly, don't you think?" Margaret continued.
"Yes," Fanny agreed emphatically.

It was too easy to flatter Fanny, Margaret realized. John's sister would be in trouble if she ever moved to London. People would take advantage of her left and right. Margaret felt a sudden rush of protectiveness for the flighty girl, who until this day had never been the least bit pleasant to her.

"Someone as short as I am really needs a much plainer skirt," Margaret continued. "I think something without ruffles would be much more suitable or I may end up looking like a child. A few bows perhaps, but not much else. Perhaps some lace across the shoulders."

"We will ask Madame Coleridge. I am sure she can work with your figure flaws," replied Fanny magnanimously. "We should be getting back. I don't want Mother to be wondering if something is going on. I haven't told her about Watson yet."

With Fanny now on her side, the rest of the day passed more quickly. Margaret found she did not much care what foods were to be served at the breakfast, or what music was to be played, and found herself commenting only to support her mother, on occasion.

The elderly Madame Coleridge arrived with two assistants, three chests of fabrics and trims, a tape measure and a pin cushion strapped to her wrist. Her Yorkshire accent belied the "Madame," but it was clear the woman knew her fabrics. Margaret quickly learned the reason- her late husband had been a draper, and John's first employer. She'd first worked in his shop, and then had branched out into dressmaking, and had become quite successful over the years, gathering quite a large clientele among Milton's well-to-do. But as John had been quite special to her husband, she was more than willing to push other work aside to make a dress in short order for his bride-to-be. Somehow, these words did not surprise Margaret. Clearly John had not been dissembling when he'd told her most Milton tradesmen owed him a favor. He seemed to have a habit of obliging people.

With a paucity of words, Madame Coleridge directed Margaret to disrobe so that she might get a better look at her figure. Margaret did so, removing her outer garments until she was clad only in corset, chemise, drawers, and hose, blushing all the while. It would have been polite for Mrs. Thornton and Fanny to leave the room, but they stayed. But perhaps that was allowable, Margaret decided: they were almost family now. Madame Coleridge rattled off measurements as her tape measure flew over Margaret's form. Then, still, not allowing her to dress, the woman began holding up silks to her face. Of course, all of them were some shade of white, from ivory to milk. Yet another decree had been issued by Mrs. Thornton, that like the Queen the next Mrs. Thornton would wear white to her wedding.

Madame Coleridge settled on a warm ivory, to Mrs. Hale's approval. "It sets off your hair beautifully, Margaret," she said in a fatigued voice. A single, sharp nod was Mrs. Thornton's signal of agreement.

With Madame Coleridge's continued consultation, it wasn't too difficult to obtain a dress that was somewhat to Margaret's liking. The final design was not as plain as Margaret would have liked, thanks to Hannah's insistence that the skirt have some kind of decoration, but it was much more plain that it would have been had Fanny or Mrs. Thornton had been given full rein. They settled on a bell-shaped ivory taffeta skirt, with pinked ruffles of self fabric running lengthwise up the cloth, so that the skirt somewhat resembled an inverted tulip with frilled petals. The bodice was likewise taffeta, covered across the shoulders in fine Chantilly lace. This was a small victory for Margaret: Mrs. Thornton had argued vigorously that it should be Honiton, just like the Queen's. The dress would button down its back with a myriad of tiny covered buttons. The bridal veil would be of matching lace, with a planned coronet of orange flowers. In all, Margaret was pleased, and she hoped John would be, too.
Both Margaret and Mrs. Hale sighed in relief as the Coleridge entourage, and then the Thornton women left the tiny Crampton home after their marathon visit. Mrs. Thornton would handle the bulk of the invitations, she had decided, as the Hales would only be inviting Edith's family. Apart from that, the immediate wedding preparations were complete.

"That was not quite as bad as I expected," said Mrs. Hale tremulously, as Margaret prepared her a cup of tea. "Margaret, your wedding day seems more and more real, does it not?"

"Yes, Mama, it does." Margaret wondered what it would be like to share a home with the senior raven. As a visitor she was domineering. What would she be like in her own habitat?

Margaret would find out in seven days.

The candle was burning low for John.

He'd put in nineteen-hour days over the past week, first to prepare for his impending absence, then to get some mill work in before and after each day at court. He was at his desk each day by 5:30 a.m., at the bench from 8:00 to 6:00, then back at the mill by 7 p.m. each evening, to work until 12:30 or so. It was only by sticking to this grueling schedule that he was maintaining the books, and keeping up with orders.

That had left no time to see Margaret this week, although he had seen her Sunday. The Hales were well, thankfully. Mr Hale (he still could not bring himself to call the man "Richard," let alone "Father") seemed less tired, and Dr. Donaldson had sent John quite a positive report on his condition. With rest, he'd written, the older man would recover, although he would need to be continue to be careful not to overexert himself.

John was relieved, both for his own sake and for Margaret's. She had experienced too much grief of late, and too much worry. Her mother's illness still lingered, although it had been eclipsed of late. But Maria Hale seemed to be rallying for her the sake of her husband and daughter.

Maybe it was on account of the wedding.

John smiled as he thought of the day.

"Thornton?"

John's reverie was interrupted by the query from his fellow magistrate.

"I asked, are you in agreement regarding the tax for the Grant Street bridge repair?"

"We need four to vote, do we not?" John lifted his eyebrow at this deviation from policy.

His colleague sighed at John's unwillingness to bend. "Some of us were thinking Davis could add his vote later. But you are correct. We'll need to wait until he rejoins us."

John sighed internally. The week had been much like this day, and had dragged on interminably. Apart from civic matters and the usual cases of spousal abuse, simple assault, robbery, and theft, there had been a rash of pickpocket arrested on Monday to be arraigned. And as his colleague Davis was absent, only three of the normal panel of four justices was seated, which had made it impossible for John to recuse himself when the men involved in the Marlborough Mills riot were brought before the bench. John had felt great discomfort sitting in judgment of these men, particularly as he knew Margaret would expect leniency. But the law was the law, and they had broken it. In the end, he had deferred to his colleagues' assessment. The men got off with time served and a fine. Of course, as
each man was impoverished, and therefore unable to pay such a fine, they were remanded into custody for an additional month's time.

Normally, John enjoyed his duties as magistrate. But this month, when the mill required extra attention, and this week, when Margaret needed him close by, it was simply the wrong time for such an additional demand on his time. John was worn out by the unremitting pressure.

The fact that the few hours he spent sleeping were filled with vivid, riotous dreams of Margaret did not make things any easier. Those dreams! He'd never dreamed so brightly before. It seemed that every glimpse of any statue, renaissance painting, or sighting of the female form over the sum of his one and thirty years had somehow lodged themselves in his brain. They now nightly stirred together into an approximation of the beauty that lay hidden beneath the yards and yards of fabric that served as barrier between himself and his love. John's unconscious mind had no problem interpolating the missing data. Margaret was a Titian one night, a Rubens the next, Venus de Milo the third.

John woke up deeply frustrated every morning. He could only count the days.

This day, Thursday, was darkened further, when Watson showed up in the back of the courtroom, waving his hands in a most ridiculous manner.

"Do you know that odd fellow?" Kirk, the lead magistrate asked.

"I'm sorry to say I do."

"Approach," boomed the older man, and Watson hurried forward with a note for John. The younger magistrate read it quickly and frowned. He had no time for a meeting of mill masters that evening, however important. He was simply too tired. John crumpled the note and shoved it into his trouser pocket, and continued on with the day's work.

But at six he found himself walking towards Herald Street and the Manufacturer's Association building, where his colleagues were meeting. John had one day left of quarter sessions, then the wedding. He could spare an evening with his colleagues, he reckoned. Surely there must be some urgent reason to call a meeting on such short notice. Perhaps there was news he had missed as a result of his time spent on the bench this week. John lengthened his stride and wondered if the price of cotton had risen again, and quickly began calculating margins in his head.

He found Watson was waiting for him in the club lobby, his face already ruddy with the signs of drink.

"Good man," he slurred. "I knew you'd join us."

"It must be a meeting of critical importance if they've already broken out the claret," John said sardonically, as he mounted the stairs.

"Bet I know what you've got in your coat pocket," Watson said. "Lemme see." He barreled uncoordinatedly into John's chest, nearly toppling the pair down the stairs.

"Pull yourself together, Watson. How much have you had to drink?"

"It's a momentous occasion, y'see. We're celebratin'!" The man winked. "Got my invitation on Monday."

"Oh. I see." John had not expected this. He braced himself as he entered the dining room, and was immediately assaulted by a tone deaf rendering of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," followed by whistles and cheers.
Apart from Watson, Henderson was there, and Hamper and Harkness, and the odious Slickson.
Strangely, too, was Mr. Bell, who got up and seated himself beside the position of honor.

"I couldn't stay away once I heard about this little gathering from Harkness," Mr. Bell said with a sly
smile. "And as I own the building, I didn't think there would be a problem admitting me to the club
for an evening."

John shook his head at the man's easy ability to tread all over social norms for his own enjoyment.

"I wouldn't think an Oxford scholar such as yourself would find a gathering of boorish cotton
manufacturers suitable entertainment," John replied, the start of a scowl gathering on his forehead.

"Don't sell yourself short, Thornton. If my dear God-daughter can find something of interest in you,
surely I can, as well." He clapped the younger man on the back and poured him a glass of wine, then
pointed out the chafing dishes sitting unopened on the buffet to the side of the table. Dinner had been
provided, but was being ignored by most of the room in favor of liquid sustenance. Both men rose
from their seats and prepared themselves a plate, then sat back to watch the tom foolery.

Watson led off. He struck his glass with a knife until the revelers came to some semblance of
attention.

"Thornton, I say this to you: To Venus and love!"

"Hear, hear!" All drank at once, and faces reddened incrementally.

Henderson called out next. "One wife, one bottle and one friend: the first without a tongue, the
second never empty, and the last ever faithful."

"But I think she'd need a tongue!" hooted Slickson, wagging his, earning a glare from John.

Mr. Bell chuckled. "Now, now, John. They're just getting started."

"To love's slavery!" cried out Watson. All glasses emptied, and the claret was passed round again.

"Is he in love?" Asked Mr. Bell quietly. John lifted an eyebrow.

Harkness stood next, his voice more strident than his colleagues, his words more crude. "May
woman's bosom be pleasure's couch!"

"You dog!" Glasses lifted again, and were emptied in short order.

"I'd like to milk those dairies! She's a fine article you've got, Thornton!"

That was Slickson's idea of a toast. John's fists clenched.

"Serious- seriously, Thornton, I'd like to make a real toast now," Watson slurred. He struck his glass
again. "Is everybody lisning? I have reason to think that someday- someday you 'n I will be brothers-
"

"Heaven help me." John rested his head in his hands.

"-and although that day may be far, far away, as a brother I want to give you some, some brotherly
advice." Watson paused.

"Yes?" John asked after some time, afraid of the reply.
Watson sat down abruptly. "I forgot. What were we talking 'bout?"

"If you'd given us more warning we would have taken you to London," Harkness interjected. "To Covent Garden, on a junket." He pulled out a well worn copy of the *New Swell's Night Guide to Bowers of Venus*. "You would not have regretted a night at the Town Tavern, Thornton. Your Margaret may be fair, but think about what you are giving up."

"I'll thank you not to compare my future wife with the lowest of women, Harkness."

"Cyprians, Thornton. These are no dirty girls."

It took all of John's will not to leap up and strike the jackass. He pressed a hand to his forehead instead, and rubbed insistently at the headache he felt beginning to form there.

"Thornton's not interested in buying what he can get for free," pointed out Henderson. The men around him hooted like howler monkeys in heat.

"I'm not interested in purchasing something that shouldn't be sold," John growled.

"It's not worth arguing," Mr. Bell said in a voice so quiet only John could hear him. "They would never understand. But," he continued with a smile, "for Margaret's sake I am happy to hear you say those words."

"Would you honestly think otherwise of me?" John looked around the room in disgust at the men who were continuing to carry on about their Covent Garden escapades.

"No, Thornton. I've always figured you to be a rare bird. You've only confirmed it."

When the men pulled out cigars and began to discuss Margaret's physical attributes John thought it best left the room for a time, as he preferred the cleaner air of the room overlooking Herald Street to the likelihood of fisticuffs. If he looked out the room's leaded-glass window he could imagine Margaret standing on the nearby Lyceum stairs. She'd felt his gaze upon him, even then. He wished he were with her now. Or anywhere else.

John returned to the dining room to find it was time for the bestowing of highly inappropriate gifts. He took his seat reluctantly and opened the first paper- and string-wrapped parcel. John's only consolation was the knowledge that these gifts were usually an insight into the giver. Henderson's gift was a case in point.

John remembered *The Bagnio Miscellany* from his days at school. An classmate had filched the book from an older brother while home on holiday and the book had quickly made the rounds of the dormitory. It contained two stories, but the main attraction was the one that told of students at a school for girls with a headmistress who had a penchant for whipping her beaux with bundles of birch twigs. It was so poorly written and its actors so insipid that even as a fourteen-year-old, John had set it aside as too ridiculous to contemplate.

John thanked Henderson as politely as he could, but blanched at the reply.

"Well, we all know you've not had much experience with the ladies, so hopefully this will make some difference!" There was laughter all around.

"You're right," John replied. "I've not birched a woman, nor have I any desire to do so. But perhaps you'll share your expertise with these fine men someday."

"Don't be such a stick in the mud, Thornton! We're all just having fun," Watson muttered before
issuing forth a prodigious belch. Apparently Fan had shared with Watson her favorite appellation for her brother, while he, in turn, had just shared it with Milton's foremost cotton manufacturers. What a fine, fine brother-in-law Watson would make.

Hamper's gift was just as telling as Henderson's. It was truly an insight into the workings of the man's soul. *The Lustful Turk* was another story that had made the rounds at school. This one was a series of letters between a young English woman and her friend. She had been captured at sea- by a Lustful Turk, no less- and recounted the loss of her virginity and that of her harem-mates. Oddly, their stories were almost identical. All involved horrific assault by a mighty "engine," although somehow the women grew to love the adulterous owner of said engine.

Harkness slid his copy of *The Swell's Guide* over to John. The skinflint.

Slickson's gift was the most disturbing of the lot. It was set of playing cards with filthy images taking the places of the normal suits. Worse still was the leer on the man's face as John opened the gift.

"You'll probably want to hide those from the missus," the giver offered helpfully.

"Oh, I'll do that," John agreed. "Thank you all, most heartily." The husband-to-be bundled the gifts into a tidy pile and considered the most efficient way to rid himself of them. He stretched, and yawned, and once again thanked the men for the gifts and Watson for organizing the event.

Mr. Bell caught him on his way out.

"Not so fast, Thornton." He held out a small key, embellished with a yellow silk tassel. "I tried you at your office today. I'd forgotten about quarter sessions. You'll find a gift from me on your desk."

He smiled that sly smile once again. "I didn't think it was something these men would appreciate, but as you've been studying the classics, I think you might."

John tilted his head warily.

"Oh, and you received my reply to your earlier message, did you not? I trust the work is going well."

"It is," John nodded. "But it is intended to be a surprise."

"I will say nothing, then. You have my word of honor."

The pair said goodnight, and John made his way home, glad of the opportunity to be alone with his thoughts. He dropped the night's gifts—apart from the key- on the first refuse pile he encountered, and felt his step lighten.

His headache was almost gone by the time he entered the mill office and lit a lamp. He found Mr. Bell's gift prominently displayed on the center of his desk. It was an ebony box polished to a high shine. A gold plate was secured to the lid, engraved with the word "Liebe," with a scrawled signature just below. John pulled the tasseled key from his waistcoat pocket and engaged it in the lock. He found three thick envelopes inside the box, and one thin one.

John sat down and opened the first, removing sixteen sepia and white lithographs. His eyes widened as he examined the prints and his face reddened abruptly, from chin to hairline. Apparently this was Mr. Bell's idea of a joke at his expense, some mockery of his attempt to educate himself by studying the classics with Mr. Hale. The images, each labeled as "postures," showed gods and goddesses engaged in carnal acts. Very athletic acts, John noted, as he turned one card ninety degrees to examine it more closely. He wouldn't have thought the contortions of Bacchus and Ariadne depicted were physically possible.
The cards seemed to be a primer of sorts. They were devoid of passion, and focused more on the cold, classical perfection of the bodies involved than any spiritual connection between the souls within. In that regard, they were much like the books he'd read clandestinely in the school dormitory, a disappointment for one wondering what love was really all about.

After a night of mortification, here was one more.

Perhaps Bell meant these cards as some kind of instruction- or even remediation- in recognition that John had lost his father at a young age. John quickly dismissed the thought. That was not Bell's *modus operandi*. The man was a trouble-maker by nature, a genteel trouble-maker, but a gadfly nonetheless.

John ran his hands through his hair in frustration, then took up the cards again. Despite their coldness, he seemed inexorably drawn to them.

How was it possible to be so repulsed and mesmerized at the same time? John found himself examining every card in detail, noting how their artist had done his best to elevate a scandalous subject by including classical references wherever possible. These prints were meant for an audience far more erudite than the typical customers of Dugdale or Ascham. And they had probably cost Bell a pretty penny, too. It was curious that the man had time to plan such an elaborate and expensive joke. Surely this type of material was not available at Oxford. He would have had to approach some type of specialist to procure it. But when had he had the time? Presumably he'd been busy with Margaret for most of his stay in Milton this past week.

A sinking realization crept upon John. Clearly these were from the man's personal cache, no doubt collected from the study of his seldom-used house in Milton. A shudder of revulsion chilled John's spine at the forced intimacy of the situation. He was not surprised at the behavior of his manufacturing associates, in hindsight. They were crass, boorish men. But Bell? This behavior went far beyond the man's usual pot stirring. It was downright tasteless, and far beneath a gentleman of his status.

John carefully replaced the prints in their envelope. There was no question he'd be returning the small casket to Bell in the morning. He'd demand an apology, as well.

John sighed before removing the second packet from the small ebony chest. The joke was in four parts, he realized. It had only just begun.

This envelope was engraved with the same signature as found on the chest's gold plate. Below it was printed, "Mihály von Zichy. Liebe. Magyarország, 1847." Inside were twelve lithographed drawings, tinted in pastel shades, as completely inappropriate as the previous set. But these were much different from the classical "postures" in the previous envelope. They were intimate drawings of people in love, unaware of their illustrator. These were real people, not gods. And this was passion John was viewing. The curve of this woman's neck as she threw it back with abandon said so, as did the arch of her back as her lover covered her front in kisses, and oh, the place he was kissing her in this next print. And the caress of her mouth in the third!

Yes, John realized, this was Mr. Bell's attempt to educate him. But John had not known he'd needed edification.

John stared at the prints for a while and imagined Margaret, his Margaret, in their marriage bed. He wanted her more than ever. Would she respond to his touch this way? Would his caresses bring her to such ecstasy? He fervently hoped so. He thought back to the prior Thursday morning and his aborted attempt to explore the delights of her flesh. Dixon, damned Dixon. If only she had not interrupted. Margaret had been so eager until they were interrupted. But it would have been wrong to
continue, and truly, if that servant had not knocked at the door, he was not certain he would have been able to control himself. Perhaps Providence had intervened, for Margaret's sake.

John could wait another day. He was a man of discipline, after all. This hunger was nothing compared to the real hunger he'd borne in his adolescence.

He replaced the second set of prints in their elegant envelope, but reconsidered his earlier thought of returning the chest to Mr. Bell. He would need to study Zichy's work some more, he knew.

John opened the third envelope and again his eyes widened. This time it was not due to anything he would want to hide from his future wife or mother, however. As he unfolded the document he recognized its meaning immediately: clearly, it was legal due to the fine roundhand writing and many flourishes. A cursory glance informed him that this was the deed to Marlborough Mills. And there, on the third page, was his name, with Mr. Bell's beside, the man's signature below that. The man had signed the mill and its environs over to him.

John tore open the last envelope in search of an explanation.

The letter he read aloud was much as he might have expected from a man who loved the sound of his own words:

"My Dear John,

If you have opened these envelopes in the order in which I intended, you may have been annoyed, if not outright angered by my presumption in seeking to further educate you in the classics. Clearly Mr. Hale has done an inestimable job at that in his own right. However, he cannot provide you with everything, and as I have some means at my disposal, I thought it only right that I step in, as well as take you into the modern era.

It is clear that my God-daughter and you are well-matched in spirit, wit, and person. However, there are other realities to consider, and with the enclosed gifts I have attempted to address these. It is for this reason, too, that I have endowed Margaret with the property you hold most dear, and, as she is not yet of age, I have deeded it to you. I trust that this mitigates the difference in circumstance between you and puts you on a more equal footing.

I also trust that you will do everything in your power to make sure my God-daughter lives the life she deserves- one filled with beauty, passion, kindness and love. Truly, she is one of the finest creatures I know. Please take care of her.

Sincerely,

Adam Bell"

Apparently he and Adam were now on a first name basis, John noted as he returned the deed to its envelope, and that to the chest. He locked it, pocketed the tasseled key, and placed the small box in the fire safe for safekeeping.

Then John readied the office for the evening and returned to the mill house for another restless sleep. He was certain this night's dreams would be even more vivid, thanks to the night's education. Until tonight, he would not have thought that possible. But there was only one day left until the wedding. He would survive.

Author's Note: The title has dual meaning- thank you to everyone for waiting an extra week for this chapter as I got over the flu. And thank you for all the well-wishes, too! I am feeling better, and I
I am posting this with a fair amount of trepidation. For many reasons, my plan has been for this story to be rated T. But at the same time I have wanted it to remain true to the reality of early-Victorian sexuality. John and Margaret are both passionate people, and I see John, in particular, grappling with the inconsistencies presented to him by Victorian culture. But as I intend this to be a love story, not erotic fiction, I want to present their story in a way that leaves a great deal to the imagination. I have written both rated T and M stories before and I think I have a pretty firm grasp of the differences between them. To me, the trick to a rated T story is getting the idea across using only allusion and suggestion (a lot like a classic movie). As the parent of a teenager, I have a pretty clear idea of what T entails, so I think I what I have written here is not overstepping. Obviously, sex happens, as it is a part of life. Therefore, I don't pretend sex doesn't exist when talking with my child- I just don't talk about it in intimate detail. That is the standard I have attempted to apply here. Please let me know if you feel differently, after reading this chapter. If most people feel this chapter has bumped the story over to an M I will adjust the rating. However, the scene I am planning for the next chapter will most likely still remain a T. :

I have been contemplating Victorian sexuality quite a bit recently, both for this chapter and for the upcoming ones and thinking quite a bit about the duality of the Victorians when it came to thinking about sex. The book The Other Victorians provided me with a lot of information about the Victorian underworld during this time, and Henry Spencer Ashbee's detailed bibliographies of the books available at the time gave even more info. Prostitution and pornography were rampant in Victorian England, and utilized by some men within all levels of society, but at the same time medical literature and household texts suggested that sex was something that should be participated in only rarely, and could actually harm both men and women if participated in too frequently. Additionally, these texts suggested that unlike men, women were not interested in sex, but also that men also should do their best to limit their interest in sex- that even to have sexual dreams indicated a defect of character. But at the same time, young women were thought to get a disease called "green sickness" if they delayed marriage (and sex) for too long. Very contradictory. Additionally, household texts of the time like Aristotle's Masterpiece (not written by Aristotle, and not a masterpiece by any means) contained a great deal of misinformation: for instance, women were thought to have the same sex organs as men (but only on the inside), and sexual practices beyond the most ordinary, or even thinking about certain subjects during sex were thought to result in birth defects.

It is interesting to think about how a person (in this case John, but also Margaret) would reconcile the conflicting messages sent by society with his or her own instinct.

Regarding the gifts received by John: In 1851, stereo-daguerrotypes (that would be show a 3-D image when examined with a special viewer) were available, but were likely too expensive for all but connoisseurs. I didn't include them for that reason. However, lithographs of pornographic images could be found in stores like Ascham's and Dugdale's in London, along with books, of course (since the 1700s!). The most famous erotic images of the era are rather crude and rude images made by Achille Deveria. I imagine the deck of playing cards covered with his images. If you Google publicdomainreview dot org and Holywell Street you can find an interesting M-rated article about these topics, and you will also see that I chose the book titles I included carefully. Some of those titles are completely inappropriate for a rated-T story! (Be warned...)

*The New Swell's Night Guide to Bowers of Venus, Curious Account of the Cyprian Beauties and Their Little Love Affairs* was published in 1847, and was a guide showing men where to go in London to find women of the evening.

*The Lustful Turk* was published in 1828, and *The Bagnio Miscellany* in 1830. Both, therefore, would have been around when John was away at school, and might have been passed around the
dormitory. If you are interested in a (somewhat warped and NOT T-rated) peek inside the early Victorian mind, they are available online.

The lithographs given to John by Mr. Bell are meant to be erotic, not pornographic. (But where is that dividing line, exactly? The first set don't make the cut, in my opinion. I think John agreed.) The original version of the first set, called *The Sixteen Pleasures*, was created in 1524 by Marcantonio Raimondi, but all but a few fragments were destroyed by the Catholic Church (and Raimondi was imprisoned for creating them). A copy was created later, most likely by Agostino Caracci, in 1798. Because these images showed married gods in a classical setting they were deemed to be more respectable than ordinary images. Hence Mr. Bell joking to John that he is giving him this gift because John is interested in the classics. I think it is reasonable that John would be shocked and mortified by this gift.

The second set of lithographs, entitled *Liebe*, or Love, are by Hungarian artist Mihály von Zichy, who lived from 1827-1909. When I first saw his prints I hoped that he had done some around the time frame of this story, because they are not crude like most of the other "art" of this era. I was happy to find out that his *Liebe* series was printed as early as 1847. They would have been scandalous in their time, and hard to get a hold of, and also subject to the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 (just after the time frame of this story).

I pulled the toasts used by John's associates from *The Social and Convivial Toast-Master; and Compendium of Sentiment* (1841). Slang used by the more crude masters (Slickson, mostly) is from several Victorian dictionaries.

You can see I did a lot of research while I was sick! Thanks for reading and please let me know what you think in general, and of the rating.
Margaret woke just before dawn to the sound of a steady rain. "So much for walking to the church on a bright sunny morning," she said with a yawn as she observed the rivulets of water washing the window clean. At least the streets would not be dusty. And in truth, her half-dream of walking to church would never have been realized, not in a place like Milton, and certainly not with her parents so ill. Today, she knew, was about making the best of things. A wedding, as her mother had pointed out was not so much about the bride and groom as about those surrounding the happy couple. For Margaret and John, therefore, it was a morning not so much to enjoy as to experience. Still the outcome would be exceedingly happy. She was to be joined with the man she loved at the morning's conclusion, after all.

Margaret closed her eyes and listened to the soothing patter of the rain while considering if she might eke out a few more minutes of rest before beginning the day. This was the first time in a week she'd spent more than four hours in her own bed, but still, she was tired. Although her father's condition had continued to improve steadily, Margaret had not once allowed herself the luxury of an early evening, preferring to stay by her father's side long after he'd fallen asleep, just to make sure there was no sudden change in his outlook. This led to her being overtired each morning, particularly when combined with the fact that she'd been wrong in assuming there was little left to do to prepare for the wedding.

She really should have known better. She'd been through Edith's wedding, after all.

Mrs. Thornton and Fanny had returned on Monday, press-ganging her into a shopping exhibition, to Lewis and Farnett, no less, a dry goods establishment Margaret had never before had occasion to visit. Its stores were far out of the Hale family's price range, and Margaret found herself blushing when Fanny loftily-and quite loudly-told each shop girl to "Charge the purchases to Marlborough Mills!" The trio of women formed a procession of sorts as Fanny steered Margaret through her favorite place to throw away money, and a pile of necessaries soon accumulated. Clocked silk stockings, kidskin shoes and gloves, crinolines and garters were in order for the wedding, as well as new chemises, drawers and nightgowns for daily wear. Mrs. Thornton seemed a bit annoyed by the need for the latter, as she noted that the cotton lawn fabric made at the mill was of much finer quality
than found in the garments they were examining.

"You might have sewn such simple garments yourself," the raven had stated dryly, "assuming you'd had the time. It seems a waste to spend so much on simple rectangles of cotton plus scraps of lace."

Margaret wanted to point out that she already owned quite serviceable garments, but then realized that Mrs. Thornton had seen some of these garments the previous Saturday. This was a judgment, then, of the fact that her chemise, although of fine, London quality was a bit threadbare after several years of washings. Margaret said a quick prayer for patience, and realized it would probably not be her last.

All of this shopping had taken hours, of course, as Fanny had insisted the shop girls display each and every item before pressing Margaret to select the most expensive.

"It's what I always do," she'd explained, as her mother rolled her eyes in disdain. "It's not like John can't afford it. And as the wife of a prominent manufacturer, it is critical that you dress the part. All eyes will be on you."

"It is not often that I agree with my daughter," Mrs. Thornton had murmured then, "and in this case I do not do so completely. But it is true that as John's wife you will need to dress in a more appropriate manner. However, any of the goods sold by this establishment is of fine enough quality to suit our household." She'd run her eyes up and down Margaret's length critically. "We will visit Madame Coleridge's establishment sometime after the wedding to order you a more appropriate wardrobe." At that they'd left the dry goods store and spent another two hours at the corseters. Luckily, in that case, and despite the figure flaws Fanny had pointed out earlier, Margaret's measurements were standard enough that the maker had a sample he could readily alter in time for the wedding.

All in all it was an exhausting day, topped off by a request from Fanny that she be allowed to choose the music for the wedding itself. Margaret readily agreed. The simple wedding she'd imagined was not a musical one, but even if she had a preference she was so worn down that she could not mount an argument.

Now Margaret wondered what daily life would be like in the Thornton household. John would be at the mill from sun up to well past sundown almost every day. That meant that the two Thornton women would be her immediate—and intimate—companions. Fanny was intense, and Mrs. Thornton was cold, and so unlike Margaret's own mother that it was difficult to understand her. It would be a struggle to adapt, but for John's sake, Margaret knew she would.

Heavy footsteps in the hall were the indication that Dixon was already up and moving about the household. The faithful servant would have much to do in the hours before the wedding, as she would need to dress not only Margaret but Mrs. Hale to fairly exacting standards. It was clear the stress of caring for both Hales had been wearing on Dixon, even with the added assistance of Martha. Clearly she was feeling more strain than usual. Margaret stretched and rose from the bed. There was plenty she could do to lighten Dixon's load this day, from bathing herself, to laying out her own clothes. Even if it was her wedding day there was no need to act the spoiled princess. Margaret set about making her bed, then retrieved the many boxes and parcels from atop the small armoire, and laid them atop the bed.

Then Margaret's glance fell on the letter she'd left on her bedside table. She was unable to stop herself from picking up the gold-edged stationery, engraved with the monogram EL. Margaret bit her lip in an effort to fight back tears as she reread the missive that had arrived in the prior evening's post:

*My Dearest Margaret,*
How shocked I am by your announcement!

Darling cousin, you know that you are much more to me than child of my aunt. Indeed, I love you almost as a sister, and over the years you have been my confidant in all things. I am strong in the belief this relationship has not been one-sided.

I therefore must speak frankly, as I am certain you would do the same for me.

I have long hoped you would come back to London, as I have missed you so. You were always so agreeable, Margaret, and such good company, and now I will be bereft of it. Worse, you have never even met Sholto, and I am sure you would love him. He is the dearest child and he would benefit greatly from your attentions. But how will that be accomplished with you living in a smoky, industrial city that is not fit for children to visit? London is your true residence, Margaret. I know Henry would have made a perfectly suitable husband for you. Then truly we would have been sisters! We might have bought adjoining houses, or sold the Harley Street house and bought an even larger and more fashionable one to live in together. What a delight that would have been. You would be my steadfast friend and companion as you used to be, and Sholto would be almost like your own child. But that dream is vanished now.

I am sure I do not understand how your opinion of Mr. Thornton could change so rapidly in such a very short period of time. A few short months ago you spoke of the man as a brute, and of Milton as a hellish place. You write that family circumstances are such that you wish to marry this man now, and that you will tell me all when we meet. I can only wonder what this means. Cousin, I am worried for you, and about the implications of such a sudden change of heart, although I will say no more on the subject, for propriety's sake.

You speak of love, but how could you love such a man as you have described, someone whose life is consumed by buying and selling? I wish that Mother were not in Baden-Baden for the summer. I have no doubt that she would rush up to that dreadful place your family calls home and rescue you, over your parents' wishes if necessary! I know that Mother would not allow you to degrade yourself and your station by marrying beneath you in this way.

I know these written words are harsh, and I wish that we might have spoken instead so that I might have convinced you to give up this plan. I recognize that this letter will be unable to do so as it will scarcely arrive in Milton before the wedding itself. For that reason, I must accept the inevitable, that I am losing my dearest friend. My heart is weeping, Margaret. However, I will support you as much as I am able.

I am sorry that I must decline your invitation to be matron of honor. It will have to be enough that I come to Milton on such short notice. It would cause the Captain and me harm for an item to appear on the society pages naming me as the the matron of honor to a tradesman's wife, however wealthy this tradesman may be. As you well know, the nouveau riche are not highly esteemed among the ton.

We will take the late train, and stay at The Grenoble Hotel, which I have been advised will adequately meet our needs. I will see you at the wedding and breakfast. It will be interesting to see a mill, I imagine.

Your loving cousin,

Edith

Margaret's cheeks burned with shame, just as they had when she first read the letter. The suggestion Edith had made! And the fact that she would put her standing in the community ahead of any devotion to her cousin, who she claimed was a sister to her. Well, almost a sister. Margaret's instinct
was to crumple the letter and throw it in the fireplace, but as it was July, no fire was burning. Instead she folded the letter carefully and placed it within her writing box, out of sight of the prying eyes of Dixon who would be sure to share its content with Mama. Margaret was glad her mother was not aware the letter had arrived. Hot tears had flowed freely at its first reading.

She had expected so much better of Edith. Yes, the woman was spoiled. She'd never had to overcome the slightest obstacle in her pampered, privileged life, and like a beautiful, rare orchid, she'd never been exposed to anything outside a cultivated, hothouse environment. Therefore she'd never been given the opportunity to experience the greater world. Nor had Edith had much opportunity to grow.

Despite this, Margaret had always suspected there was a goodness of character deep within her cousin. But it seemed she had been mistaken: this letter demonstrated a shallowness that made Fanny Thornton look oceans deep in comparison.

To add insult to injury, Edith hadn't even taken Margaret's suggestion of where to stay in Milton seriously. That had come from John, who knew a bit about these things. Apparently the roads near The Grenoble were being widened: requests to fund such schemes came before the magistrates quarterly. Margaret sighed. Her cousin would probably be late to the wedding.

Well, the bride-to-be told herself, at least the wedding party would now be symmetrical. John did not have a best man to attend him, and now she would stand alone, as well.

A light knock at her door interrupted her musing. The door opened slowly, and Margaret was surprised to see her mother enter.

"Mama! How early you are awake."

"I asked Dixon to wake me. It is not every day that my only daughter is married." The woman came to Margaret and embraced her, and Margaret could not help but notice how much more slight she had become in the months since they had moved to Milton. Maria Hale wrapped her shawl around her tightly, as the room was a bit damp due to the summer rain.

"Shall I ask Dixon to light a fire?"

"That is not necessary. I am sure when I am dressed I will be warm enough. And I will not stay long."

"Sit down, Mama. You will catch a draught." Margaret directed her to a shabby arm chair, pulled the afghan from the bed's foot board and folded it across her mother's lap. "Better?" she asked.

"Will you sit with me, Margaret? There are some things I should like to say to you."

"Mama..." Margaret blushed, but did as she was asked, pulling the small stool that sat by her vanity close to the chair where her mother now sat.

"Mr. Thornton loves you," her mother began tremulously. "And love is truly a wonderful thing. Children come of it, when a man demonstrates his love to his wife in such a way."

"Mama, you have already told me this."

"Yes, but..." Her mother smiled a very small smile and continued. "You see, you may find tonight... That is, the first time you are together..." Maria Hale did not often blush but she did so now. Still, she soldiered on. "Margaret, there may be some pain."
"Pain?" Margaret regarded her mother in astonishment. No one had spoken of this before. Edith had said the opposite in fact, that intimacy between a husband and wife could be quite pleasurable. And John had mentioned nothing of this.

Her mother laid a calming hand on her daughter's. "Only the first time. Although in Mr. Thornton's case... Well..."

"Mama, what about John? I do not understand..." Tension crept into Margaret's body, but it was soon joined by a heady feeling of incredulity mixed with anger, the latter something she had rarely felt towards her mother. "Are you saying that because John is not a London gentleman he will be unkind? Or brutish?"

"No Margaret. Nothing of the sort. Only that you are so fine-boned."

"And he is not. He will crush me?"

Her mother smiled the same half-smile. "Just endure, and you will be fine."

"Endure," Margaret echoed.

"It will get better over time, I promise." Her mother rose from the chair and draped the afghan over the bed's footboard.

"I will ask Dixon to see about your bath. I think the girl Martha has already arrived. It was so good of your Mr. Thornton-John- to send her to us, was it not?"

"Yes, Mama," Margaret said distractedly.

"And give me your gloves, please."

Margaret found the parcel containing the fine kid gloves purchased from Lewis and Farnett.

"Why?" she asked, as he handed it to her mother.

"You will see," her mother said with a smile.

Margaret's worries were forgotten after a quick bath and breakfast in her room, for a visitor arrived. To Margaret's surprise and delight, a rather annoyed Dixon ushered Mary Higgins into Margaret's bedroom. Margaret had never seen the normally slovenly girl in such a state of cleanliness. Her rough grey gown was as clean as possible (which was not, of course, entirely), but more importantly her skin and hair shone, as both had been well-scrubbed.

Margaret hugged the girl to her.

"What a delightful surprise! What brings you here this morning?"

The girl blushed, as was her wont. "I thought y'might help need extra help t'get ready this morning. If there's any kitchen work to do I can help you, as I know y'have much to do today, and two parents lyin' in bed." She waved her hands. "I'm na askin to be paid of course. It's my weddin' gift to you."

"You are so generous, Mary! I do not think I deserve such kindness- I have not even been over to tell you about the wedding."

"When wouldya had th' time?"
"You found out anyway, I gather," Margaret said with a smile.

"Mill's closed today. But the news was goin' 'round Princeton 'fore that."

"Thank you for your offer, Mary. I greatly appreciate it. But John sent over a servant to relieve the burden on Dixon. However, I have a thought," Margaret said. "Usually a bride can count on having her friends nearby as she gets ready. You are my friend, so perhaps you might be willing to play that role."

Mary smiled shyly. "If y'wish."

"And," Margaret said, "We have much time before Dixon comes in to dress my hair. Would you believe the old crow Mrs. Thornton has told me I may no longer wear the clothes I brought to Milton?"

Mary shook her head in disbelief.

Of course, I really should stop calling her that, as she is to be my mother-in-law. But they were new just last year! So," Margaret smiled conspiratorily, as she crossed the room, "what would you like to wear to the wedding?" Margaret opened the drawers of her armoire to remove several skirts and bodices, each folded carefully with tissue paper. "We are much the same size. I am confident any of these would fit you, although I think the blue skirt with white shirtwaist would suit you best. Would you like to try it on?" She held up the indigo fabric against Mary and smiled at the effect.

The girl nodded, at a complete loss for words.

"You will need a petticoats too, as the skirt is rather full. And I have been told I must replace mine."

"This is too much, miss."

"Nonsense. There is supposed to be something borrowed and something blue at a wedding, is there not? And here we have it."

Mary was dressed in short order. Sadly, she did not wear the same size shoes so was not renewed complete, but Margaret was still quite satisfied by the overall effect.

"Now, may I do your hair? Would you like the back braided and then pinned up?"

"Miss, people will think I am puttin' on airs! I canna!"

"A simple twist then?"

Mary nodded, exasperated.

"With one braid wrapped around?" The girl relented, and Margaret got to work, happy to be occupied.

Dixon came in just as she finished, and tut-tutted over Margaret's project, muttering something about the dangers of folk rising above their station.

"It's time to get dressed, Miss Margaret."

"I thought that Mary might assist."

It was difficult for Dixon to look down her pug nose at anyone, but she managed to do so, and with such superciliousness that the girl seemed frozen to the spot. "If you insist," Dixon said finally. "Let
me see your hands," she commanded, and once satisfied that Mary's hands were indeed immaculate, directed her to the corset and its laces.

"Give it here," she said, "Now find the first crinoline. It's in one of those boxes over there."

"No," she said. "The plainest first. "Don't you see that it is the stiffest? It must be, to hold up all the others." Margaret removed her robe and stood before Dixon in chemise, drawers and hose. She held the corset to her as Dixon wrapped it around her and began lacing it, first from top to waist, then bottom to waist, finally tucking the long tails inside the garment itself.

"This is quite lovely," she said as she tugged the front of the garment into place and admired the corded, white on white embroidery that covered the corset with geometric patterns. "Is it trapunto work?"

"Yes, that's what the corseter said."

"It must have cost a pretty penny. Those Thorntons certainly throw their money around."

"Dixon. I will not have you speak in that way. John has been good this family, and to you."

Dixon's tone softened as her face reddened. "He has, Miss. I ask your pardon. I'll need that crinoline now, Mary."

By the third stiff crinoline, Margaret's skirts filled the available floor space of the small room. An Ayrshire-embroidered petticoat, from the workshop of Madame Coleridge topped the more utilitarian garments. Finally Margaret was ready for the skirt, which slipped on easily, and draped smoothly over its foundation. Thankfully, it had no train, as the room could not have contained the additional length. Dixon quickly smoothed the garment into place and helped her change into the bodice.

"Y' look a queen, Miss." Mary gazed at Margaret with admiration.

"You do look lovely, Miss. Now sit, so that I can arrange your hair."

"Mary, will you and Nicholas attend the wedding?" Margaret asked as she took her place at the vanity. "You are very welcome, of course."

Mary blushed and nodded. Margaret checked the mantle clock. "It is nine a.m. now. Perhaps you had better collect him, and make your way there. It is First Presbyterian. Do you know it?"

Mary nodded again and collected bundled her garments together. "Thank y' again, miss. I'll not forget y' kindness."

The hair seemed to take the longest amount of time, although Margaret insisted on no curling tongs. She asked Dixon to rely on braids and the natural curl of her hair instead, and was quite pleased with the outcome. Margaret paused to look at herself before allowing Dixon to place the wreath-like coronet of fragrant orange blossoms on her head. The dress was lovelier than she had imagined, the taffeta more crisp, and almost glowing in the moody light, the off-the-shoulder lace trim even more delicate and elegant than she'd hoped. Dixon pinned the veil in place, and stepped into the hallway for a moment, returning with a medium-sized box.

"This was delivered while you were bathing."

Margaret opened the box, and tears filled her eyes. A yellow bouquet filled the box— in clear defiance of Mrs. Thornton's directive. They were small, perfect China roses. Were they from Helstone? No, their leaves lacked the tell-tale indentations at their margins. And somehow, these blooms seemed
less wild.

There also was a boutonniere for her father and as nosegay for her mother. But most importantly, there was a card from John. The bride-to-be teared up as she read her lover's words.

"My darling Margaret,

I know these are a poor substitute for the roses you love, but I promise you this: I will take you to Helstone and place those blossoms in your hair.

When I kiss you next, you will be my wife. I cannot wait.

Yours always,

John"

Dixon coughed and began to bustle about the room. "It is time for you to be on your way. Your parents are waiting downstairs."

So was Mr. Bell, who exclaimed as Margaret descended the stairs.

"My dear Margaret, you must be careful. I think Aphrodite might strike you down in envy this day."

Margaret shook her head at her God-father's ridiculous words and regarded her father instead. His smile was enchanting, although he seemed struck speechless.

"Papa?" she asked, as she approached him.

"Daughter. I am happy, and yet so grieved." They embraced and Margaret shed tears of joy that she was able to share this day with him. She kissed her mother next.

"You look beautiful, Margaret. Please don't cry. This is a day of joy."

"I am happy, Mama. You and Papa are with me. That is all I could ask."

Dixon gave Mrs. Hale the nosegay, to much exclamation, as her mother was quite convinced the roses were from Helstone, and daughter fussed over father as she fastened his boutonniere.

"Here are your gloves, Margaret," said Mrs. Hale. "Let me help you with them."

"Oh, you have opened the ring finger," said Margaret as she slipped them on, and presented each wrist to her mother to button.

"I saw the idea in Godey's Lady's Book. Do you remember how Edith struggled so to remove her gloves, when it was time to place the ring?"

"Yes, I had to help her," Margaret nodded.

A clatter of wooden wheels drew Mr. Bell to the window, and elicited a laugh from the jovial man. "I should have realized that Thornton would consider every detail."

They stepped outside to find that the rain had stopped, at least for a while, and that two carriages awaited them. Mr. Bell had ordered a clarence, quite large enough to seat four, but the Thorntons an even more spacious britzka.

"I will see you at the church," said Mr. Bell gallantly, as he headed to the clarence. "Or, as these
Thorntons seem to say, the "meeting house." Dixon, you are with me."

"Mrs. Hale and I will ride with you, Mr. Bell," announced Dixon, after conferring with Mrs. Hale. But let us take the britzka. I think Mrs. Hale would like to lie down." Dixon helped her mistress to the larger carriage, which had been set up to allow some of its passengers to semi-recline.

How kind Mama was to give her time with Papa, Margaret thought.

"Shall we, Papa?" she asked. The coachman assisted her father into the coach and she handed him his umbrella. Then Martha held the hem of her skirts as Margaret ascended into the clarence eliciting a laugh from her father, who was soon surrounded by a cloud of ivory white.

"Margaret, perhaps we should have commandeered the britzka ourselves. Your skirts quite fill the space!"

"Yes, Papa, they are quite voluminous." Margaret laughed. She carefully shut the door and used the umbrella to tap on the carriage roof. Soon they were on their way.

"It is hard to believe that you will be John's wife today."

"But I will always be your daughter." Margaret placed her hand on her father's, and noted the faint tremor.

"I was thinking this morning, that I must have married more than seventy couples in my time as Helstone's vicar. Of course, I cannot ascertain this, as the parish keeps the register, but that number seems fair, does it not?"

"Yes, Papa, it does."

Mr Hale smiled sadly as he recited the words from the Book of Common Prayer:

I, Margaret, take thee John to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.

Margaret said the next words of the liturgy in an automatic response. She'd been to so many weddings with her father often as flower girl that she knew every part of the service by heart.

With this ring, I thee wed, with my body, I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I endow. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"Oh, Papa, would it not have been wonderful for you to have married us?"

"But that time is past, Margaret. You know that I could not. And besides, were I not teaching the classics, how would you and John have met?"

Margaret patted her father's hand. "You are right, Papa. It really does not matter who says the words. They will be as beautiful from any man's mouth."

"I would imagine the Presbyterians do things differently. I should have asked Adam to stop by the book sellers to find me a copy of the liturgy." Mr. Hale smiled with the keen interest of an academic. "It will be interesting to see Knox's interpretation of the marriage rite."

"Yes, Papa." Margaret nodded, not knowing who this Knox was or what he had to do with marriage.
"My daughter, there are things I would like to say to you," her father began, removing his glasses to wipe them on his handkerchief.

"Yes, Papa?" Margaret tensed, worried that the conversation might be a reprise of the one shared with her mother.

"You are strong, Margaret. Stronger than Maria and I. I would hope that I have raised you to be a person of integrity and honesty."

"You have Papa. I will always try my best."

"I know. And that is why... You must not... It is easy to erect barriers between yourself and the person you love, to set up go-betweens. You might tell yourself it is to spare your husband's feelings, but truly it is cowardice. Margaret, you must be honest. At all costs. Do you understand me?"

"I think so, Papa."

He clasped her hand. "Good girl. Or should I say, woman."

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Edith awoke to unseemly street noises- the rumbling of carts and the swearing of ditch diggers. She stumbled from bed, and pulled open the drapes to peer into the rainy street below. Regardless of the fact that it was quite early on a Saturday morning, the roadway below was as busier than any London road during the week. One of the lanes was closed off, as they'd noticed last night, when they'd had quite a bit of trouble finding the entrance to the hotel, and soil was piled in muddy mountains to either side of a gaping hole. Despite this, carts piled high with bales of cotton were wending their way along the unevenly paved street, their drivers shouting obscenities- or quite possibly, "good morning"- to each other. Given the thickness of their accents it was hard to ascertain which.

Edith knocked on the door to the room adjoining hers, surprised that Charlotte, her servant had not joined her. But the lady's maid entered the room quickly, if a bit tardily, and joined Edith at the vanity, efficiently removing the papers that covered Edith's hair like white butterflies.

"You would think she had more sense," Edith said aloud. "How could she possibly be happy here?"

"Who, ma'am?" Charlotte asked.

"No one. Have you seen my cold cream?"

"Here it is, ma'am." The servant retrieved a small glass jar from a carpet bag, and placed it alongside a plethora of emollient creams, cosmetics and perfumes on the vanity. She combed out Edith's curls gently while that woman continued musing aloud.

"I cannot see the attraction of this city. This is the best hotel in Milton, yet it is second-rate compared to any hotel in London. And where is breakfast? I had expressly asked for it to be delivered at seven a.m. It's a quarter past, now."

"Shall I inquire, ma'am?"

"Yes, please do that."

The servant left quietly, and after completing her morning ablutions, Edith busied herself with writing out a quick note to Henry. It had been good of him to join her on this trip, given that the Captain was unavailable. In fact, Henry had been eager to make the trip. The poor dear. She
wondered if he was still lovestruck. Perhaps seeing Margaret married off would do him good.

Dear Margaret. What was she thinking?

It was likely that her letter was too harsh, but what a surprise Margaret's had been! To announce a marriage in such a way, with no warning at all. And to such a man! Edith shook her head, and her ringlets bounced around her in merry chaos. But hadn't that always been Margaret's way? She had a will of her own and always had. And once she got an idea in her head, there was no prying it loose. She was easily the most stubborn woman Edith had ever met. And Edith had known a few.

Charlotte returned with a servant carrying breakfast. Edith ate with delicate grace, but was mindful to finish, as she would be eating very little later in the day. Then she despatched Charlotte to deliver the note to Henry. Hopefully he was awake and would see to a carriage. They really should have taken care of that detail the night before, as who knew where exactly this "meeting house" on Cross Street was.

They left for the wedding as soon as Edith was finished dressing, which admittedly took some time. She'd brought three garments along with her, as she wasn't certain just how fancy a Milton wedding might be. Certainly she didn't want to outshine the bride. She settled on a cream and rose gown of silk moire, that always received compliments from the Captain. And Henry's suit, from Henry Poole of the Row, could not have complemented hers more perfectly. Of dove grey, and cut to the latest style, he looked so dashing that she almost wished that he was her husband. Almost.

Thankfully the doorman offered them the use of an umbrella, as they had not thought to bring one with them. It was a horrible day for a wedding: the sky was overcast, the streets puddled, the rain intermittent enough to be an annoyance.

Edith was angered, and rightfully so, when their cab-driver laughed upon hearing their destination. He said something, garrulously, but his accent was so thick that neither she nor Henry could make sense of it. He pointed to a bridge that seemed to be under construction, and then along a canal. Edith looked to Henry for direction and was frustrated when he did not intercede.

Henry did not seem overly concerned that they seemed to be taking the scenic route to the "meeting house." On the contrary, he appeared to be enjoying himself. He opened the carriage window to get a better impression of the sights—and smells- around him, occasionally pointing out some building or another to Edith.

"You are letting in the rain, Henry," Edith warned. Her silk moire would spot.

"Did you know that building holds the largest room in all of the world, even larger than those in any of the royal palaces?" Henry asked, once they'd finally crossed the canal.

"Is that so?" Edith craned her neck to look out the window, but all she saw was a structure that looked much like any other in London, except more sooty. Much more sooty.

"That's the Milton Royal Cotton Exchange," her companion said by way of explanation. "Brokers and merchants trade woven fabrics and yarn there. It's the reason for the great wealth of the city. And a reason for England's continuing wealth. Your brother has suggested we look into investing."

"In cotton?" Edith raised an eyebrow. "But why? Nobody wears cotton."

"You are wrong. Think carefully about all of the clothes you wear."

"Henry! Don't be indecent!"
"You realize I am correct. And in the summer, I have seen you wear muslin gowns."

"Indian muslin."

"Yet English muslin is still finer, I am told. Such as that made by Marlborough Mills."

The carriage stopped suddenly, and the cab driver jumped down from his perch and muttered something unintelligible.

"I think we are here," Henry said with a smile, opening the carriage door.

The driver pointed, and Edith looked up at an imposing, two-story stone building with Doric columns and arched windows. But there was nary a pane of stained glass in sight, nor a steeple, nor anything else that might signal a house of worship.

"But where is the church?"

Henry laughed. "Don't be so judgmental, Edith."

The pair climbed the stairs quickly, as they heard strains of organ music, and entered the meeting house to find a very large nave that was Spartan in its decoration, apart from the bouquets of white roses and green ferns that were placed on the door to every box pew. As Edith and Henry walked down the central aisle, their footsteps echoed off the hard surfaces. Henry opened the door to a pew and they seated themselves on an uncushioned bench that seemed designed for discomfort. Edith looked around her. The place was almost blindingly white, she noted, even in the filtered light of a rainy day. Edith suddenly recalled a detail from one of Margaret's letters. She had written something very odd. In fact, those words had triggered Edith's increasing concern for her. Margaret had said she'd seen hell. And hell was white, snow white. Her cousin had not explained further.

Edith looked for an elaborate altar and found none. Instead she saw that the nave was dominated in front by a mahogany pulpit flanked by two symmetrical, helical staircases. A large palladian window stood behind it, a table at the foot of the stairs. The pulpit, stairs and table were the only unpainted wood in the space and were clearly meant to stand out against the snowstorm of white. A gallery supported by doric columns and lit by arched clerestory windows stood along each long wall: with the additional seating in this area, Edith estimated the room could hold at least five hundred congregants. But at the present time, the nave was almost empty. The right side held about thirty people, mostly portly, middle aged men, along with a tall, severe-looking woman in black, and a blond woman in bright tartan, while the bride's side held only Aunt Maria, her servant, Dixon, and an older grey-haired man. There were also two lower-class people sitting towards the entrance, but they hardly counted as they looked as though they'd walked in off the street to escape the rain. Edith turned in her seat to get a better look at the pair and noticed that the woman blushed and looked away while the man glared back at her. He was clad in fustian, she in a white, lace-trimmed shirtwaist that looked vaguely familiar to Edith, and a bit too elegant for a person of her class.

"You see?" Edith whispered to Henry as she turned back in her seat. "Margaret is friendless here."

"Shh," hushed Henry, as the organ music swelled, and the small congregation turned to the entrance.

A tall, black-clad man stood alone in the doorway. This must be the groom, Edith thought. He walked down the aisle with gravitas, but Edith noticed a light in his eyes. He was a handsome man despite his harsh features and his overly large frame. But he was dressed like an undertaker. Black was completely out of fashion for weddings and had been for some time. A gentleman would be wearing grey, like Henry. She caught a glimpse of a ivory brocade waistcoat and matching cravat as the groom walked past, and that did help to mitigate the dour blackness, but it was clear Margaret
would have her work cut out for her. Edith nearly laughed aloud. As if Margaret cared about such things!

As there was no altar for him to stand before, the table served in stead. Mr. Thornton turned and looked expectantly towards the meeting house entrance. Edith smiled as she noticed his hand creeping more than once towards the pocket holding his watch. To his credit, the hand did not arrive there.

It took a few minutes for the bride to arrive, but all were rewarded with a beautiful sight. While it was true that Margaret's dress was quite plain and did not adhere at all to current fashion, it suited her perfectly. Her skirt belled out, but in appropriate proportion to her height, and the subtle frill of ruffles running up the length of the skirt made her seem a bit taller. The soft ivory of her skin was perfectly complemented by the deeper ivory of the silk taffeta, and the delicate Chantilly lace of her veil was much more in keeping with the subtlety of the gown than the heavy lace that was so much in fashion. Edith found she approved.

The music changed as Margaret began her walk.

"Do you know this composer?" Edith whispered.

"It is Liszt, I believe."

Margaret clutched her father's arm tightly as she walked up the aisle. Mr Hale was beaming, although the man looked so much more frail than he was at her own wedding. Was he unwell? Edith wondered. He stumbled once, and Margaret moved her right arm to encircle him. Yes, Edith realized, Uncle Richard was ill. And this was what Margaret had meant by family circumstances. Edith blanched as she remembered the thinly veiled accusation she'd laid at her cousin's feet.

"Henry," she whispered, "I think she loves him."

"Yes, Edith," her brother-in-law replied just as quietly. "Haven't I been saying so since you showed me the letter?"

Edith looked at him in alarm. "You must say nothing about that."

"Of course I will say nothing. I am an attorney. That is my job."

Edith rummaged in her reticule for her handkerchief and was flummoxed when she realized she'd forgotten it. She gratefully accepted Henry's just in time: Margaret had reached her husband-to-be and her father had lifted her veil to kiss her once and wipe away the tears from her eyes. Then he placed her hand in Mr. Thornton's and rejoined his own wife.

Yes, Margaret was in love. And clearly, so was Mr. Thornton. Even from the fourth-row pew she could see the expression in his eyes, the look she remembered seeing in the Captain's eyes.

"Dearly beloved," began the minister, but Edith did not recognize the liturgy. It was so different from what she'd heard at her own wedding. She did not recall hearing anything about fornication at her own wedding ceremony.

"Does it matter?" asked Henry with some irritation, when she complained in urgent whispers.

"No," she replied, abashed. "I suppose not."

The minister spoke for a while, about man and wife as one flesh and one body, about and man leaving his father and mother to keep company with and love his wife, and about the duty of a wife
to study and please her husband and to honor him in all things that are godly and honest, and to be under his subjection and governance as long as they both live.

"It does not seem quite equal, does it?" Edith pointed out.

Henry poked her.

Finally, the minister addressed Mr. Thornton.

"Forasmuch as no man speaketh against this thing, you, John, shall protest here, before God and his holy congregation, that you have taken, and are now contented to have Margaret, here present, for your lawful wife, promising to keep her, to love and interact her in all things according to the duty of a faithful husband, forsaking all other during her life; and briefly, to live in a holy conversation with her, keeping faith and trust in all points, according as the word of God and his holy Gospel doth command."

John replied, "Even so I take her, before God, and in the presence of this his congregation."

The minister then turned to Margaret.

"You, Margaret, shall protest here, before the face of God, and in the presence of this his congregation, that ye have taken, and are now contented to have John, here present, for your lawful husband, promising to him subjection and obedience, forsaking all other during his life; and finally, to live in an holy conversation with him, keeping faith and truth in all points, as God's word doth prescribe."

Margaret was silent.

Finally, the minister whispered the words she was to say.

"Even so I take him," she repeated, "before God, and in the presence of this, his congregation."

"Where is the ring?" Edith hissed as the minister continued. Even Margaret seemed a bit confused, if her several glances at her now-husband were any indication.

"Why are you asking me?" Henry whispered back in annoyance, his patience finally spent. "Why on Earth would you think I know anything about dissenters' weddings? Perhaps they see rings as a pagan symbol. I am sure you can ask the mill master later. Now please stop talking. We are causing a disturbance." Henry smiled apologetically as several of the portly men on the right side of the church turned around to find the source of the whispers. Edith blushed.

After a psalm and several more prayers, the minister concluded the liturgy, the organist began to play, and Mr. Thornton took the opportunity to spontaneously kiss his bride. It was not the most chaste of kisses, Edith noted, but that was only to be expected, as it was obvious that there was a great deal of passion between the two.

"Am I allowed to talk now?" she asked Henry with a smile, noting his own. He seemed genuinely happy for Margaret, which was a relief.

"Yes, of course," her brother-in-law answered. "If you can keep it to a whisper."

Edith beamed at at the married couple as they walked up the aisle to the strains of a recessional. "I wonder what this music is."

"It is Mendelssohn, I think. The Hartford-Ashes had it at their wedding last year, if I recall correctly."
"Did they?" Edith raised a well-groomed eyebrow in surprise. "I'm rather surprised you attended, Henry. Hmm. I'm not sure I like it."

"I have never thought you an intolerant person, Edith, but now I am not sure."

"Pish-posh, Henry! I am as tolerant as the next person. It is simply difficult to adjust to so many changes in such a short time! It makes one's head spin. I will come to accept this Mr. Thornton." Her expression saddened. "I only hope that Margaret can forgive me."

Chapter End Notes

Author's note: Thank you again to everyone who has been reading and reviewing, and to everyone who gave input about the rating. I appreciate it!

While I was writing this chapter I realized I had a lot to say about the wedding and after, and rather than shortening it, I decided to split it into two parts. Part one is already over 8000 words! I wanted this first part to have an outsider's view, so here is my take on the very shallow Edith, who nonetheless is on the road to redemption by the end of the chapter. Please note that Edith's thoughts are not my own! I actually quite like the classicism of the style of church she disparages and wish that I could see one in person, as I am a big fan of architecture. And I have no grievance against any liturgy. :) I just find it all terribly interesting from a historical standpoint and wanted to share it with you.

I wrote Henry as a little more affable and less sour than he may appear at first glance in the series to balance Edith's intolerance. I am aware this may seem to be a bit of a departure, but as he is a supporting character, I think this is probably okay. As I love to write from John's point of view, it was difficult to leave him out of this chapter, but he will be well represented in the next!

I refer to two liturgies in this chapter: the 1850 Church of England marriage ceremony, which is probably familiar as it is very similar to the form that was used until 1978 (obey was not used in that form); and John Knox's Book of Common Order (1840), which was the book used by early Presbyterianism, and which is very different from what is used in modern Presbyterian marriage ceremonies. It is interesting to see how things have changed. I based the meeting house on several buildings. The Scotch Secession meeting house in Liverpool, which changed to United Presbyterianism in 1847 no longer exists (it was bombed during World War II), but an 1830 engraving shows it had the simple, classical, and very non-traditional exterior I described. I used an 1856 engraving of the interior of the Old Church in New York City, another Presbyterian Meeting house, and photos of preserved meeting houses to describe the interior of John's meeting house, particularly the pulpit and front table.

The music Fanny the music lover chose for the service are both circa 1850. The Franz Liszt piece Henry refers to is Liebenstraum Number 3, which was published in 1850. During the late 1840s, Liszt toured Europe, and women went crazy over him, tearing souvenirs such as his gloves to pieces in their frenzy to obtain them. I doubt he would have made it to Milton, but I think Fanny would have known of his work and would have adored him, regardless. The Mendelssohn piece I refer to-- the one that Edith turns
her nose up at--is meant to be the famous "Wedding March" in C major that is played today as a recessional at almost every wedding. It was first played at a wedding in 1847, but it was not until the marriage of Queen Victoria's daughter in 1858 (after the time frame of this story), that it became a standard part of weddings. So Fanny is an early adopter in this instance. (Wouldn't she be proud of herself?)

Thank you again for reading! I look forward to your comments.
The Ring

Author's note: This chapter contains more frank talk between lovers, and a consummation. I have done my best to keep it rated T. :) Please let me know if you feel otherwise.

Hannah waited impatiently for Fanny to finish pinning favors on the wedding guests who stood, chatting, outside the meeting house in the late morning mist. John and his new wife would be outside in a moment, rice would be thrown, and after some extended conversation with their guests the pair would be off to the mill house in the Thornton's carriage. All should be waiting in anticipation of this moment, but there Fanny was, nattering on with that Watson about something or other, as she pinned a leafy bundle to his shoulder. Her over-ebullient giggling was highly inappropriate for the circumstances, and Hannah wondered just what the rather dull-witted master could have possibly said to elicit such a response from her daughter.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the emergence of the wedding couple. Hannah beamed. Clearly John was happier in this moment than his mother had ever seen him, his arm clasped possessively around his new wife's waist, his eyes sparkling with joy. Margaret looked radiant, as every bride should be, and Hannah had to admit she had been wrong about the gown. Its simplicity suited the girl in a way that a Honiton lace confection would never have been able to. She wore the gown, rather than it wearing her, and Hannah caught a glimpse of the regal bearing she had witnessed on prior occasions. But in this case, the girl's seeming haughtiness did not concern the matriarch: traits that might seem like a liability in an unmarried woman would be seen as assets in a married woman. On balance it would likely do the Thornton name good to have such a queenly woman on their books. And that was even more true, now that the fox-like Mr. Bell had settled a dowry on her.

"Mother," said her son as he approached. He kissed her on the cheek, and she allowed Margaret to do the same.

"Welcome to the family," Hannah murmured to John's new wife.

"I thought you had decided on half-mourning for today?" John asked his mother, noting her choice of clothing for the celebration.

"Oh, I couldn't convince her!" Fanny cried as she bounded up to the group, Watson trailing behind her. "You're not the only stick-in-the-mud, John. You'd think she could wear lavender for just one day. What do you think, sister?"

Margaret thought for a minute before replying, "It fear it is not our place to judge, as we have not yet walked that path. And I must note that you are wearing black, John. How is that different?"

"I believe I may have unwittingly instigated our first quarrel," John said ruefully. "Although my sister may have had something to do with it. Regardless, Margaret is right. I have spoken greatly out of turn, Mother. Please accept my apologies. After all you have done to prepare for this day, it was most unappreciative."
Hannah was nonplussed. While on the one hand she appreciated Margaret's words, her son's easy deference to his wife was unseemly. He should be taking the upper hand right from the start of things. Of course, she thought with a frown, he had seen little of such things in their own household. Such were the hazards of being raised by a strong widow.

Hannah waved her hand dismissively. "The lavender was faded. I had not worn it for so long that I did not realize its poor condition. If I'd more time to prepare I might have obliged you, son."

Fanny whispered something to Watson, which set the pair giggling.

Hannah rolled her eyes and addressed her son. "I know your carriage takes precedence, but I must return to the house to ensure the servants have made all of the preparations. The brougham I ordered is out of sight around the corner. My leaving should not upset the order of things."

"I understand Mother. I am sure we will be here for some time, unless the rains strengthen. Will that help?"

Hannah nodded. "Fifteen minutes should be enough. Fanny, let's be off."

"But Mother, I was hoping to stay a little longer-"

"You'll have no one to escort you back."

Fanny flounced down the steps like a sullen child, her mother following more slowly as she stopped to welcome each guest and remind them of the wedding breakfast.

"Watson is but ten years my junior," Hannah said once the two were seated in the brougham. "Does that not concern you?"

"Should it?" Fanny shrugged as she looked at the window. "I would think you would be happy to get rid of me."

Hannah grasped her daughter's hand. "Fanny, why on Earth would you say such a thing?"

"Because that is what I think, Mother. No. Truly, that is what I know. John has always been your favorite." Fanny shook her head, sending ringlets bouncing. "Do not deny it. I am not a simpleton. And soon your home will be filled with grandchildren. I need to find my own place in the world."

"It is not good to rush into these things."

"Shall I compile a list of Watson's pros and cons to assess his suitability? I think that is what someone like John would do. Besides, he knows."

"Who?"

"John, of course. Watson asked him if he might court me. Apparently John thinks him good enough for me." Fanny turned her head again to peer through the carriage window, sooty Milton's Saturday morning hustle and bustle suddenly of great interest to her.

Hannah's brow creased. "He did not tell me," she said softly.

There was much to do when they arrived back at the mill house. Hannah immediately observed that per her instructions, the front drawing room had been cleared of most of its furniture to allow room for the receiving of the guests by the family. A single, silk-upholstered settee remained in the room, as the invalid Hales could not be expected to stand. And the large, round table that usually dominated
the room had been moved to the side. But Jane had not arranged the presents received that week on
the drawing room table as Hannah had requested. Indeed, the room's table was still covered with the
books that usually sat there. They had been re-arranged precisely, into the spoke-like formation they
always took.

Hannah sighed at the girl's inability to follow the most simple of directions and left the room in
search of the gifts. She found them in her own sitting room. At least the gifts were tagged, she noted.
Hannah rang for Jane and the pair quickly carried them into the drawing room, arranging them so
that the largest gifts were in the center of the table, and so that all tags were clearly on view. The
matriarch noted with some satisfaction the high value of the gifts, even as she recognized the
uselessness of most of them. Yes, a wedding of some substance was the right decision, no matter
what her new daughter-in-law had thought. The appearance of wealth must be maintained for the
business to remain successful. She and her son had learned that lesson early on.

Hannah left the room and hurried to the dining room, where she was pleased to see the table already
laid out for the so-called breakfast. Extra leaves had been added so that the table could accommodate
the twenty two people to be seated, but the room remained more than adequate. In the center of the
table stood a two-tiered cake, reminiscent of the Queen's in decoration, although smaller in size. It
was flanked by two smaller cakes- one for bride, and one for groom. Flower-filled silver epervges
stood to either side of the cakes, and once Hannah ordered the colza chandelier to be lit, the
profusion of crystal goblets and silverware already laid on the table caused the room to sparkle, in
defiance of the gray day.

She'd brought on extra staff for the morning, and two of these girls entered the room now, setting out
the cold viands. She noted each with approval: lobster salad- Hannah had considered whole lobsters,
as she'd recently acquired the silver with which to serve them, but decided the likelihood of injury to
clothing was simply too high—prawns, capon, rack of lamb, mayonnaise of salmon, veal and ham
pie, and boar's head, as well as tongue, well as savory jellies, green salad, a blancmange John
specifically requested, fruits and assorted pastries. That should be enough.

Hannah returned to the front drawing room and sank into the settee, allowing herself a brief's
moment of rest before the onslaught of guests. Her shoulders sagged as she contemplated the vast
amount of effort it had taken to ready for this day in such short order. She would, of course, do
anything for her son, but these past days had been exhausting. This was not only due to the wedding:
John's magistrate's duties had required Hannah to pick up the slack at the mill. This was something
she did without question or complaint, but she'd also needed to be at home as preparations were
being made. It was difficult to be in two places at once, but somehow she'd managed it, scurrying
back and forth across the mill yard like a rodent possessed. Yes, it had been an exhausting fortnight.
And the necessary outcome of all this effort was that she lose her position as mistress of the
household.

But that was as it always was, and as it always would be. Furthermore, it was as it should be.
Hannah Thornton knew she would need to make her peace with it, much as she would need to make
her peace with the fact that the rogue preacher and his wife would soon be her permanent house
guests.

Hannah looked again at the gifts piled up on the table and smiled as she considered the wedding
she'd planned, an event truly befitting a manufacturer of her son's status. Yes, the price she'd paid
was worth it.

They were finally alone, if only for a few minutes. John could not shut the door to the brougham
quickly enough, and within moments his love- his wife!- was in his arms.
"Margaret," he murmured, after anointing her lips with a feathering of kisses. "Mrs. Thornton."

She looked at him with bemusement. "Mrs. John Thornton," she said, finally. "I am glad to be your wife." She laid her head against his chest, and listened to the rapid thudding of his heart. "It hardly seems real."

"I was concerned for you," John said quietly. She pulled away and looked into into his cerulean eyes, her own blue-green ones belatedly echoing his own concern.

"I thought you might be having second thoughts," he elaborated.

"Why would you think that?"

"You forgot the words."

"No," Margaret shook her head. "I simply did not know those words."

John looked at her quizzically for a moment, then understanding illuminated his face. "You must forgive me. I have not attended many weddings, and those I have were at this same meeting house. I did not realize the customs were that different."

"It does not matter, John. We are married. That is what is important. And I had wanted to talk to you ..."

"Oh?"

"About studying your faith. I would like for us to share one."

"I'm not sure it would be fair to ask that of you. Unlike your father, you do not appear to be a dissenter. But this is not something we need to decide today." John smiled as he grasped her hand, then frowned. "Your glove is torn. When did this happen?"

Margaret pulled her hand away and blushed, much to John's confusion. "It does not matter. I rarely have occasion to wear such long gloves, and I am sure it can be mended, anyway. I will just remove them. There is no need for gloves at a breakfast, is there?" She struggled with the several buttons that held the glove closed at the wrist.

"Allow me."

John unfastened five tiny mother-of-pearl buttons, one by one, kissing the small expanse of flesh revealed in each unworking, until finally the glove was loosed above the pulse-point of her wrist. He kissed the exposed skin greedily, eliciting a heady sigh as his reward. His lips then traced the upper boundary of the glove, and as he tugged on each finger, slowly pulling the kidskin garment downward, he allowed his lips to slowly trace the contours of his lover's inner arm. John paused for a moment at the sensitive flesh inside her elbow, when he intuited from her breathless reaction that this was an area that deserved extra elaboration. Margaret's cheeks were flushed by the time his journey to her fingertips was complete.

"If you continue," she said shakily, "I am afraid I will not be presentable at my own wedding breakfast."

John continued.

He would have divested her of her veil as well, for it was in the way- and surely, like the gloves, it had no true function at a wedding breakfast- but the carriage stopped, and their journey was
John's brow lowered in irritation as he considered the hours stretching before them. He would gladly skip the breakfast altogether and dine alone with his wife in the master's chambers. A quick glance at her seemed to indicate she felt much the same way. John laughed. He had never seen her look so much out of her own possession.

"Should we make a run for it?" he asked. The rain had strengthened from a mist to a drizzle.

He alighted, then lifted his wife from the carriage, then carried her in his arms as he ran for the shelter of the portico.

"In the South, are brides carried over the threshold?" John asked teasingly.

"They are, but I do not think your mother would approve," Margaret said laughingly, the color high in her cheeks.

John ignored her warning, and pushed the door open. They were greeted by the sight of the servants-all of them-arrayed on the grand staircase that filled the entrance hall. John's mother shook her head in displeasure while Fanny laughed uproariously.

"Welcome home, Mrs. Thornton," John murmured in Margaret's ear, before allowing her to find her feet below her.

Stokes moved forward to collect John's hat as well as the gloves Margaret had dropped while getting to her feet. With the discretion of a well-trained servant he handed the fine kidskin items to John, as Margaret appeared to be somewhat mortified by the many eyes upon her. John glanced at the gloves again and noted the small tear, and the tiny holes along each edge of what was once a seam. But it wasn't torn at all, he realized. The third finger was merely unstitched. John's brow creased as he belatedly understood the significance. He pocketed the items, as a reminder of a task he must complete before day's end, and turned to his wife.

"I think it would behoove me to listen to you, love," he whispered. "It appears you know my mother better than I." He steered Margaret into the front drawing room and smiled as her eyes widened as she viewed the table laden with gifts.

"This is excessive, John."

"Make sure you do not say so in front of our guests. They will be offended." He walked to the window as he heard hoof beats and the clatter of a large carriage. There was Stokes, standing in the steady rain, umbrella at the ready, waiting for the occupants of the britzka to alight. "Look. Here are your parents."

They were fatigued- there was no question of it- but Richard and Maria Hale seemed filled with joy. Margaret and John led them to the settee and Margaret knelt at her parents' side in a display of filial devotion that made her husband's heart sing. She was everything he had hoped she would be when he first fell in love with her. He could not believe his incredible luck in encountering her.

Guests began to arrive, and the protocol was for each to offer their congratulations to John, and their felicitations to the family. Margaret's happiness in all this appeared to be understood and unacknowledged, the new husband noticed with some disquiet. He pulled her toward him, a little more closely than propriety allowed, and laughed with her as she thanked the guests for their gifts, oohing and aahing over them as appropriate.

The first to arrive were his fellow magistrates, Davis, Kirk, and Carleton, and their wives. John
introduced them, noting that all were in cotton, although each employed in different aspects of the field: Davis was a broker, Kirk, a dye importer and Carleton, an administrator at the exchange. From each came gifts in silver: a toast rack, which would be very useful if the household did not already own one, a cruet set, and a completely superfluous grape dish and shears. John noted the giggle threatening to burst forth from his wife's petaled lips, and squeezed her arm gently in warning.

"That is so very thoughtful," she said instead. "We will think of you every time we cut grapes." Margaret bowed her head in thanks and trembled with unreleased laughter as the line moved forward and the Carletons mingled into the small crowd of well-wishers.

Next came the coterie of mill masters. First was Hamper and his wife. It was clear his better half had selected their present because it was quite presentable: a pair of simple sterling candle holders, meant for the bedroom. The fact that Henderson was married was also apparent in his gift choice, although that woman had gone overboard with her selection, a two-tiered gilded cake stand large enough to outfit a small army. However, it fit what he knew of the woman. The abundance of ribbon on her bonnet seemed to match the level of ornamentation of the gift.

Watson's was next, and Margaret could not help herself. But she did stare at the strange, nautilus-shaped object in silver for some time before asking, "It is certainly beautiful. But what is it?"

"Why it is a spoon-warmer, of course! Have you not seen one before? I have heard it is the latest thing in London. And as I knew our- well, your- household does not have one, I pressed Watson to buy it!"

Mother shot daggers to her daughter from across the room, but they missed their target. The girl babbled on about her superior taste in table settings for quite some time before Margaret was able to get a word in edge wise.

"Of course. A spoon-warmer. That will be very useful in winter. Or whenever there is a requirement for hot spoons." John squeezed his wife's arm once more, and she turned to gaze at him with laughter in her eyes.

The crude Harkness was the penultimate mill-master. His contribution was a crystal salt cellar, of the type usually provided in sets. The skinflint.

And finally came the odious Slickson, although his gift was in no way offensive. It was simply a silver mustard pot, of the type that graced upper class homes all over the country. They both bowed their thanks, and John regretted the impulse immediately, as the lecher took the opportunity to peer down the front of Margaret's gown. John battled a sudden urge to throttle the man.

Margaret's smile stopped him.

"Mr. Bell!"

John steeled himself. He had no doubt Bell would make some mention of his little bachelor's gift, however obliquely.

"It has stopped raining, although my day has already been brightened considerably by your presence, my dear." He offered the necessary greetings to the family and rejoined the couple by the gift table.

Margaret regarded the present tagged as Mr. Bell's. It was a large watercolor hung temporarily on the wall behind the gift able. It showed a scene of beautiful desolation: a Greek temple in ruins on a promontory overlooking a turbulent sea at sunset. In the foreground, two underfed wolves sat among
the stones of a broken frieze, dwarfed by the crumbling gods. "It is beautiful, Mr. Bell. But when did you acquire a Turner?"

"Oh, years ago, on Sounnion. I was there for research, and he was there with Mrs. Booth. Ah. You are wondering why I am passing it on to you. As you are studying the classics, John, I thought it might be appropriate. But," he quirked an eyebrow, "would you say, given your recent tutelage, that you are now more recently interested in the moderns?"

John did not take the bait. "I would say both interest me equally, Adam," he replied evenly.

Margaret picked up on the undercurrent of tension and looked between the two men in confusion. She attempted to de-escalate the situation. "You are much too generous, Mr. Bell."

John laughed sharply. "Did he not tell you, Margaret?"

"Tell me? About what?"

"About the dowry."

"What dowry? Mr. Bell?"

"What's this, Adam?" Mr. Hale rose with difficulty from the settee and approached them.

"Well, yes, I was meaning to mention it to both of you. I had been wanting to do something for my darling god-daughter, and as I figured that as I would be leaving for South America soon, now seemed the most appropriate time."

"South America?" Richard Hale was stricken. "But that is so far away! And why would you leave Oxford?"

"I have been a don for well on five and thirty years. It is time to pass on that mantle to some younger man. And my physician has advised me that the land of my childhood would do my health good. He tapped his foot lightly. It's this gout, you see. The warmth will help, or so I have been told."

"You should have asked," said Mr. Hale with some reprobation.

"Forgive my presumption. Attorneys will press in on a person, as I'm sure you know. They were looking for me to wrap things up. Come, come, this is for the best! Margaret enters into her marriage with property and the union will be stronger for it."

All eyes in the room were on them by this point, and John felt the mortification of both Mr. Hale and his daughter. Thankfully, Mrs. Hale seemed to be oblivious, possibly due to the effects of laudanum.

"What is the endowment?" Margaret asked quietly.

Mr. Bell shrugged. "The mill. Think of it as a wedding gift, if you must."

Margaret bowed her head. "Thank you, Mr. Bell."

Could it get worse? John wondered. Oh, yes, he decided, because next entered Margaret's cousin Edith and her escort Henry. Here was his wife's near sister, who for whatever reason had not stood up as maid of honor. Margaret and he had not had time to discuss the circumstances, but clearly something was amiss. The expression of sadness on Margaret's face as Edith approached attested to this.

"Margaret!" the beauty squealed as she hugged the bride close to her. "You look so beautiful today.
And your wedding was lovely. I cried!"

"Edith, this is my husband, Mr. Thornton. John, this is my cousin Edith. As you know, I spent the larger part of my childhood under Edith's roof. She was always like a sister to me."

"I will be back directly. We must greet your parents." Edith was gone in a blur of pink and cream, while Henry approached the couple, having already made the required felicitations to their parents.

"Henry," said Margaret. "This is my husband, Mr. Thornton. Mr. Lennox is Edith's brother-in-law, and an attorney in London. I have known him for a few years now. What a thoughtful gift this is, Henry."

John nodded. It was an elegant silver wine ewer, in a classical shape, its handle curved upon itself in a sinuous arc. Clearly, the man had taste.

But Lennox actually blushed, and John wondered if the man had once had feelings for his wife. John narrowed his eyes as he assessed the slight attorney.

Edith crinkled her nose in consternation when she returned. "I did not realize there would be a gift table."

"Yes," replied John. "That is how things are done in the North."

Margaret picked up the first of two gifts tagged with Edith's name—a silver vinaigrette- and the blonde protested once again.

"But I would not have- Oh, Margaret! Might I speak with you in private? Please?"

"I think that would be a very good idea," replied Margaret with a sudden look of anger. John did not blame her. "Let me show you the library. I think you will be surprised."

John smiled to himself as he made his excuses to Lennox. The set of faux books did not insult him, no matter Edith's intention. Nor did it surprise him that a high-born London lady would assume a man like himself to be barely literate. But to give Margaret a gift that implied she would be spending her married days in a state of constant fainting was really a bit much. John almost wished he could be in the library with the pair to hear the dressing down this cousin surely deserved. He knew what Margaret was capable of once fired up. And Edith had it coming to her. But John something else to attend to at the moment. He removed the carnelian signet ring from his right ring finger, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and sought out Fanny's new beau.

"Charles?" said John once he found Watson, "Might I have a word in private? I was wondering if you would do me a favor."

The breakfast itself went off without a hitch. There was too much food, in Margaret's opinion, too much wine for the noon hour, and two too many cakes, but those were trifling concerns. And while a London society host might have been perturbed that some of the male guests had no female companions, leaving the table quite uneven, this did not bother Margaret in the least. The mill-masters were a lot like John, she reasoned. They were driven by work, and worse, some had not had the benefit of his early education. It was unlikely Slickson or Harkness would ever find women to stand by their sides. Margaret wondered what Edith thought of them.

At least her cousin was no longer red eyed. Margaret hadn't said a word to her before Edith burst into tears. She'd apologized profusely once within the sanctuary of the library, for the harsh words of her letter, for her presumption and for the gifts. She'd very nearly brought Margaret to tears. It seemed
that Edith had fully realized her own selfishness, and that indeed she was not the Sun, and Margaret a mere planet in her solar system.

"I did not mean to be cruel," she offered. "I just did not understand."  

"I know, cousin. We see the world through different eyes. But do you see now, the man I see?"  

"I see that he loves you. And that you love him. And if you can live in... this place..."  

"This place?"  

"It is much more elegant than I presumed. But-"  

"The problem is that you presume, Edith. Do you not understand?"  

"Margaret..."  

"Trust me, Edith. Trust me as I trusted you when you fell in love with the Captain. Can you not do this for me?"  

Edith nodded then. "Yes. That is exactly what Henry said."  

"Henry?" Margaret's brow lifted. "What did you tell him?"  

Edith stammered. "H-he only saw the gifts. He did not approve. He thought I was being petty. I guess he was right."

"Whose idea was it for Henry to come? Yours or his?"

Edith bit her lip, a mannerism Margaret knew well.

"I see. Did you think I would leave John at the altar?"

"I did not see an altar, Margaret."

"You know what I mean. And again you are being petty. Yes, he is different from you."

"And from you- from the life you grew up with."

"He is not different from the way I am now. I have chosen to be his wife. That will not be undone."

Margaret's recollections were interrupted by the touch of her husband's hand on her own. She looked up at him to find him gazing at her with unadulterated adoration.

"You were far away. What were you thinking?"

"About the long, happy life we will live together."

"Yes. If only this breakfast would end."

She rubbed his hand with her own. "How are Mama and Papa doing?"

John looked to his left. "Fatigued," he whispered. "They are only just holding up."

She patted his hand. "I will ask your mother if we might cut the cake. I believe that is your duty, although I am not sure given that there are three. She turned to her mother-in-law but stopped herself, turning back to her husband instead.
"Where is your ring? The signet. Have you lost it? I am sure I saw it on your finger earlier."

John smiled. "I took it off not long ago. It is not lost." He turned to his mother-in-law. "Mrs. Hale, may I offer you some refreshment?"

Finally the cake was cut, and the guests dispersed, leaving only the family that had been joined on that day.

"Mother," said Fanny, "I would like to borrow Jane for a while, as Watson has asked me to go out walking with him, now that the weather has improved."

Hannah nodded. "That will be fine, Fanny, as long as you are back within an hour or two."

"Would you excuse us?" John said to the room in general. "There is something I need to discuss with my wife in private. We'll be back momentarily."

"This is mysterious, John," Margaret said, as they climbed the stairs. "Why are we going upstairs? Surely we are not retiring yet?"

John smiled wickedly. "If so, we would not be returning momentarily." He paused at the top of the staircase. "I know that this day was not as you might have wished."

"John, that is not so. I am with you, and that is all that matters."

"No. A wedding day is a day to make memories. It is day of intention, filled with planning. It should have been as you desired. But there was a reason for this." He paused. "Would you close your eyes for a moment?" She complied. "Now give me your hand." He led her down the hall, opened the first door on the right and led her inside. "Open your eyes."

"Oh, John."

Margaret looked around the room. It smelled of sawdust, fresh plaster and wallpaper paste. And at present, it was only partially furnished, as it was waiting for key pieces from Crampton. However, the wallpaper was identical to her mother's room. And as she stepped through to the adjoining room she saw that it had the paper of the downstairs sitting room- that which her mother had described as somewhat similar to that of the vicarage in Helstone. There was still another room adjoining, this one reserved for her father.

"Mother and I struck a bargain," John said by way of explanation. "She thought a lavish wedding was imperative. I thought it would do you good to have your parents here with you."

Margaret could not contain her tears.

"Did I do wrong?" he asked with concern, folding her into his arms.

"I would have married at the registrar's office. As long as it is you, John, the details are irrelevant. This is- Why are you so good to me?" She sobbed against him.

He kissed the tears from her face and led her to the bed, sitting beside her on the striped mattress. But this was no time to take advantage of her heightened emotions, tempting though it was. John waited patiently for his wife to calm herself.

"Shall we ask your parents?"

Margaret nodded and they made their way downstairs.
"Mama, Papa, we have something we would like to ask you," Margaret began.

Her parents could not have been happier.

The Hales returned to their Crampton home for the afternoon. The removing would take place on Monday once the hands returned to work. That allowed a day and half's honeymoon, of sorts, for Margaret and John, as Hannah and Fanny were removing themselves to a hotel for the remainder of the weekend. Likewise, the servants would have the afternoon and evening off. His mother had already given each a small gift in honor of the special day, and the staff were well-pleased at the opportunity for some time to themselves.

The new couple sat in the library as they awaited the return of Fanny and Watson. The sooner she returned, the sooner their time alone would begin. John regarded his new wife, and noticed how she twisted her engagement ring nervously.

"Would you like to take a walk?"

"In my wedding finery? Through puddles?" Margaret laughed. "Well, I would actually. I will go up and dress. I will just need help locating my trunk." She stood to ring for a servant.

John's brow furrowed. "No, don't." He had fantasized for too long about this day and about divesting every item comprising her wedding ensemble himself "I am sure Fanny will be along shortly." The eager husband picked up the latest copy of The Economist and tried to read an article on amendments to the patent laws, but was utterly unsuccessful. He wanted to take his wife to his bed— their bed- poste haste.

Finally Watson arrived, and it was all he could do not to rip the man's head off. He left the room with the man who seemed to be shaping up into his future brother in law, but returned in less than five minutes. Then he checked his pocket watch no less than five times as he waited for his sister to gather her belongings and quit the place along with his mother.

"Shall we?" John asked, when he and Margaret were finally alone.

His bride nodded nervously, but did not falter when he offered her his hand. He lifted her into his arms and smiled.

"My darling, as carrying you over the threshold was so summarily thwarted, might I carry you upstairs?"

Margaret giggled, and lost a kidskin shoe somewhere along the way.

The feel of her arms around her neck reminded him of that day, the day that had set all of this in motion, and suddenly John was glad of the riot and of the brutish workmen that could not control their own savage natures.

She was light as a feather, just as she'd been that day, although a bit more unwieldy in the layers of crinoline that puffed out about her, cloudlike. John lifted her across a second threshold, this to the master chamber and set her down gently.

"What do you think?" he asked.

She smiled. "It's beautiful." She walked directly to the window and caressed the yellow damask draperies that had hung there for only the past two days. "Are these Spitalfields?"
John laughed. "Have you ever been? To Spitalfields, I mean, during your time in London."

Margaret shook her head.

"We might visit when we're next in London."

"Do you make the journey often?"

It was John's turn to shake his head. "I thought you might fancy a visit to the Crystal Palace. I do owe you a honeymoon, after all."

"Really?" Her excitement was palpable.

"But they're not silk. The drapery, that is. They were made just across the way. You've never been to the jacquard shed. We've not that many looms, but what we produce is of high quality."

Margaret shook her head as she inspected the fabric closely. "Exceptional quality. These are beautiful. And the color is lovely against the grey walls."

John beamed. He had hoped she'd be pleased. The yellow was the same shade as the pic-nic blanket. He'd had the idea of changing the bed clothes and draperies from their masculine maroon to this more Margaret-like yellow as soon as he'd proposed. The grey silk moire fabric on the walls was the same as it ever was, but the yellow made the room much less oppressive than it had formerly been. And that was risible, because he hadn't seen it as oppressive until he'd changed it.

John moved across the room to open an adjoining door. "This is my dressing room. Its twin is across the way. He pointed to the door set in the opposite wall. The rooms were only twins in layout. John's was rather severe in coloration as he had not bothered to change it, while Margaret's was papered in a sunny yellow and grey scrolling strapwork design he hoped would please her.

He followed Margaret inside her dressing room and did his best to view things through her eyes as she took in the room. She moved first to the narrow divan covered in grey silk, then to the mahogany clothing press, and washstand and wooden commode beside it, and finally to the vanity. Atop its low surface sat a coromandel box not dissimilar to the one still sitting on the gifts table in the front drawing room below.

"That is from Mother and Fanny," he said as she lifted the lid, to display a velvet-lined case fitted with crystal containers, each covered with engraved silver lids. A tray of mother-of-pearl-handled tools useful for dressing sat in the center of the case, and within the lid was a mirror. A drawer was set into the bottom of the case. Margaret pulled it out slowly, to find a golden bracelet set with carnelians.

"That is from me," said John softly. "Would you wear it?"

She obliged, and John stood mesmerized as the bracelet immediately slipped down the length of her taper arm.

"But I have no gift for you," Margaret said, abashed.

"On the contrary," John replied. "You have given me everything."

She looked around the room. "It seemed you already had everything."

"No," he reached for her hand, but she slipped away, her interest seemingly diverted. She inspected the clothing press, and seemed surprised to find her garments already neatly folded inside of it.
"Margaret-"

"There is no bed," she said, as she turned to face him.

"No," John agreed. In the North, husbands and wives-" She surprised him then, by moving closer to him, and lifting her arms to encircle his neck. She kissed him softly.

"It is no matter. I want to share your bed. Husband."

What had he done to deserve this bliss?

He offered her his hand and led her into the bed chamber.

"Are you not afraid?" he asked.

She nodded. "This morning, Mama said something that surprised me." Margaret's eyes moved to the lower right as she remembered the conversation. "She said I must 'endure.'" Margaret turned away from him. "Why did you not tell me that there would be pain?"

He pulled her to the bed and sat her on his lap.

"Margaret. Look at me." Gently, he lifted her chin so that he could peer into her lovely blue-green eyes. Somehow, you think I am a man of some experience. You greatly misjudge me. I have not had the time to chase after women. And I would never-" He paused as he struggled to phrase the next words delicately. He started, and stopped, several times. Finally, in frustration he asked, "Do you really think me the type of man who would stoop that low?"

"I have been told that men and women inhabit different spheres, and that what is right for a woman is in no way appropriate for a man, and vice versa. While I would greatly hope that you were not such a man, I would therefore never expect it. For it would seem I have no right to do so."

John sighed. "You should expect it. I am not such a man."

Margaret again twisted the ring on her finger, reminding him of the task he'd set Watson on that day. "I am glad of it," she said quietly.

"I cannot promise you there will not be pain, my love, but I do promise you that I will never intentionally hurt you. Do you understand?" He kissed her gently. "We will learn together."

He surprised her next, by pulling out the glove he'd held in his pocket the day long.

"It took me a while to figure this out," he said, as he ran his fingertip over the open seam. "I noticed the questioning look you gave me in the meeting house, but I did not understand. Finally it dawned on me." John rose from his seat on the mattress' edge and retrieved a book from the bedside table. "Do you recognize this?"

Margaret nodded after examining the paging briefly through the small volume. "It's the Book of Common Prayer."

"Turn to the page I bookmarked." He returned to her side and watched her face as she paged through the book.

She smiled in recognition almost immediately. "There's really no need. I have the Form of Solemnization of Marriage memorized. I attended many services with my father, you see. I was often flower girl. Papa said the flowers were a remnant of our pagan past and a result of the Church's
"Syncretism." She nodded. "I suppose that's why there were no rings at today's service- they must also have a pagan history and dissenters have made an effort to strip away such irrelevant things, have they not?"

"It is clear I married a scholar's daughter," John said dryly. "But Margaret, truly it did not occur to me that the words we said this morning might be so different."

Margaret laughed softly. "The vow I took does not require me to love you."

"Does it not? I'd not noticed that."

"Only to obey. It was a bit of a surprise."

"Will you say the words again? These words? I'll begin." The new husband read from the volume: *I John, take thee Margaret to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth.*

Margaret started to cry, but she said the words from memory:

*I, Margaret, take thee John to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth.*

John reached in his waistcoat pocket and pulled out a simple platinum ring. He placed it on Margaret's finger as he said the next words of the form: *With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

She kissed the ring, then gazed at her husband through tear-stained lashes.

John opened her hand, and placed a second, larger ring in her palm.

Her brows lifted in confusion. "But this is not part of the form. A man would not-.

John smiled. "The ring signifies a binding, does it not? If you are bound to me, I would be equally bound to you."

A single tear fell as Margaret whispered the words. *"With this Ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."* She placed the ring on his finger, then pressed his hand to her lips, kissing the symbol of their union.

John looked at her with reverence, with longing, with passion.

"May I?" he asked in a low rumble that was almost a whisper.

Margaret nodded, and she trembled as his lips pressed against hers. She sighed as his caresses moved to the ivory flesh of her shoulders and to the smooth decolletage exposed by the cut of her gown. And he was surprised to find her fingers as eager as his own.

She stood, and unloosed his cravat easily, and pressed her own lips to the triangle of flesh revealed by the opening of his shirt. He thought he might burst. He moved her hands to his frock coat in a silent plea to disrobe him. She obliged, partially, removing the offending garment.
He turned his attention to the troublesome plethora of closures running down her spine. But instead of ripping Margaret's dress apart as some small bestial part of himself urged, he taunted himself, unworking each silk-covered button slowly, and inhaling her fragrance as he found himself one layer closer to her true anatomy.

"Where does it begin?" he asked, once he encountered the mystery of her corset lacings.

"They are tucked away, at the waist. You will need to slip your fingers inside." Margaret blushed furiously at the double entendre. John noted how the color crept not just to her face, but to her neck, and even down her back. He was enchanted.

He did as she requested, feeling for the first time the sensation of forbidden flesh against his own. He unlaced the garment slowly, deliberately teasing himself. She was the most beautiful gift, a present enveloped in layer upon layer of snowy white tissue paper and cotton wool. He kissed every new delight as it was revealed to him, and innocently, she began to reciprocate.

Eventually, she was fully revealed to him, and he to her.

Slowly, carefully, John removed the combs and pins from Margaret's hair, and watched enraptured, as wave after chestnut wave tumbled around her.

She stood before him finally, his Eve. His glorious wife.

John was thankful then, to Mr. Bell, and for the embarrassment of riches the man had bestowed upon him just two days prior. Because of that man's rather indecent tutelage, John was able to make Margaret his own. He was able to delight her in both spirit and flesh in ways he'd not before imagined, in ways that eased their eventual joining, so that when they did become one flesh it was not as painful as it might have been. For there was also pleasure. Not just for him, of course- could there be any question of that? But for her, as well. He'd heard it in her voice, in the way she'd cried his name.

"We are one now," he murmured now as he pulled her possessively against himself.

"We are one, John," she agreed.

Author's notes:

Thank you again to everyone who continues to stick with this story and to everyone who is kind enough to fave, follow, or best yet, leave a review. You make me want to keep writing these very long chapters, so thank you! Sorry for posting this later than usual tonight- real life got in the way.

I hope the love scene was not too much! I'd love to hear your comments.

You may have noticed that I like to do research. :) For this chapter I looked at all of the etiquette guides I could find that were written during the Victorian era. I was not terribly successful in my quest, however. I also referenced an article from the British Library by Kathryn Hughes entitled "The middle classes: etiquette and upward mobility." Hughes details how rigid the social hierarchy was in the Victorian era and the steps the newly emerging middle class—and wealthy industrialists- had to take to make sure they were able to fit into society. Many books were written sharing in excruciating detail exactly how to behave in every social setting. Sadly, despite all of this detail, the etiquette guides written before or during the 1850s are very vague about wedding receptions and those that I did find with details were written well after the time period of this book. Some early guides suggest that gifts are not to be mentioned publicly, as they are a rather private thing. Others suggest that gifts should match the station in life of the recipient. However, this small amount of information is not a
lot to go on. Therefore, I had to do some extrapolating. *The Habits of Good Society*, published in 1859, and *The Housewife’s Treasury*, published by Mrs. Beeton in 1865 came closest in time frame to this story. I relied on both for the menu and on Beeton for the description of the gift table (with unwrapped gifts), and for the types of gifts that would be appropriate: the former book does not mention these. Note however, that the latter book was most definitely targeted toward the values of the burgeoning middle class and *nouveau riche*, and not the established upper class. The upper classes saw the new, wealthy industrial class as gauche, and would therefore have seen their conspicuous consumption as equally gauche. I am guessing, therefore, that the ideas presented in a book for the middle class might seem outmoded or in poor taste to someone from the highest level of society.

By the 1870s etiquette guides for the middle class suggest that a gift table filled with tagged gifts is an unacceptable breach of civility, so certainly the usage of such tables changed over time. Even in today's electronic age, where information is transmitted extremely quickly we see that different parts of society embrace change at different rates, and do not necessarily communicate with each other. So how long would it have taken for the trends embraced by the upper echelons of society to filter down to the middle classes in the 1850s, when society was much more stratified and communication much more slow? And did the wealthy use gift tables circa 1850? I have a feeling they did not, that they would have felt the practice was unseemly. But this was not possible to ascertain from the materials available to me. Therefore, if anyone has information to share I would welcome it. My assumption was that Hannah Thornton, who was not "to the manner born" would rely stringently on an etiquette manual in planning the wedding breakfast as she would want to get every last detail right, while someone like Edith would be very much in tune with the latest London fashions concerning such celebrations. Hence Edith’s consternation in seeing her rather insulting gifts displayed, with tags, for all to see.

About the gifts: I visited a number of online antique stores to find circa 1850 gifts that would be ostentatious enough to be given by mill-masters concerned about their standing in society. If you are interested, you can find many of these items on the antique shop aggregator firstdibs dot com (I have no affiliation, just a drooling interest.) Coromandel wood is a beautiful tiger-striped wood that was often used in the mid-Victorian era on furniture and as a veneer on boxes. A decanter box was a velvet-lined box that typically held four cut crystal decanters plus matching stemware. It may have also had a drawer for cigars. And it locked, to keep the alcohol away from the servants. A spirit kettle is simply a sterling silver kettle that had an alcohol burner below it, so that it could be used at the dining table. Although the spoon warmer Fanny has Watson give might seem frivolous to our modern sensibilities (and to Margaret!), it was actually a useful item in a cold Victorian home: filled with boiling water, it would keep serving spoons warm until they were needed. The grape plate and grape shears, on the other hand are excessive, but they illustrate the Victorian penchant for a tool for every purpose. The shears are for cutting the grapes from the stem, because apparently that could not be done by hand. It is not clear to me why a special plate would be needed to hold the grapes: it looks like any other silver plate.

The "books" and vinaigrette Edith gives to the couple can also be found on the website I mention. The set of faux books was intended to fill the bookshelves of people more interested in the having an impressive looking library, rather than going to the trouble of actually reading books. (You can still buy modern versions of these faux books today, believe it or not. But why?) The vinaigrette was a locket-sized silver object that opened to show an interior pierced through with holes. It was to be filled with smelling salts. Fanny might have appreciated having one.

Note that *The Economist*, the magazine John is reading was first published in 1843. It was very much in favor of industrialization and against the Corn Laws, protectionist acts which were generally opposed by manufacturers. I can therefore see John taking this magazine.
The watercolor painting Mr. Bell gives the couple is by J. M. W. Turner, one of the masters of English landscape painting, but a controversial artist in his time. He died in December 1851, during the time frame of this story. The painting I reference is entitled *The Temple of Poseidon at Sunium (Cape Colonna)* and was painted in 1834. It can be viewed at the Tate, in London.

From Queen Elizabeth's reign on, Spitalfields, London was a center of silk-production in England, after French protestants were driven from that country and brought their weaving skills to England. Spitalfields soon became renowned for its high quality of silk goods. However, unlike the cotton industry in Milton (Manchester) the looms used for weaving in Spitalfields were not centralized in a single location, even after the simple looms began to be replaced by complex jacquard looms that required less skilled laborers. Rather, these looms were spread out among individual cottages. In 1860, a decade after the time period of this story, a free trade treaty with France resulted in the rapid decline of Spitalfields, as it was impossible to Londoners to compete. During the time of this story, the Spitalfields industry has been through many ups and downs and its laborers are living in great poverty, as detailed by Dickens.

If you'd like to see the wallpaper I chose for Margaret's dressing room, go to Adelphi paper hangings dot com (again, no affiliation on my part), a maker of reproduction wall papers. Click on catalog, and then 1830-1860, and then "Renaissance Strapwork" I chose colorway C. It is Greek Revival, which fits with John's interest in the classics, I think.

The type of dressing case Mrs. Thornton and Fanny gave to Margaret began to be produced starting in the 1850s and were typically made of Coromandel wood. Quite a few of them still exist, but they must have been expensive in their time, as they were made of the finest materials.

Please note that chapters for the following two weeks will be posted on Monday or Tuesday, rather than Sunday evening, due to the Christmas and New Year's holidays. :) Thanks for understanding.
It was five a.m., a good hour before sunrise, but a glow already permeated the bedroom. John lay in bed, unwilling to start his day. Margaret lay fast asleep, encircled by his right arm, her hair in a chaotic corona around her. John's arm, too, was fast asleep, fully numbed by her weight. He did not mind, although he knew extracting said arm would be rather problematic. He tried, and she stirred, slightly, her eyes fluttering slightly against the incoming light before she turned her head to burrow against him. He gave up the fight for a few minutes, and settled against her, luxuriating in her presence. Her breasts, clothed in the thinnest white nainsook, pressed familiarly against the skin of his chest. The windows had not been opened wide enough overnight to take advantage of the cooler night air, and as a result her garment clung to her quite appealingly. A fleeting image chalked itself on the tablet of his mind, one of her in the bathtub, clad in a similar garment. The difference was, she was his now, to gaze at as long as he desired. There was no felt square to wipe away the reality of her presence.

Even asleep she raised his ardor, as she did every morning. But this day, John restrained himself. He could tell his wife was tired. He observed the slightest shadows under Margaret's eyes, shadows that should have resolved themselves after a full night's rest. After six weeks together she was still pushing herself far too hard. John was not sure how Margaret filled the long hours he spent at the mill, but taking care of her parents was work enough, and he was fairly certain her day was not limited to that. Slowly she had been taking over the mantle of running the household, and knowing Margaret, she was probably finding ways to improve upon that formidable and time-consuming job. She had friends to visit with, too: the remaining Higgins girl, and possibly Higgins himself. John frowned. He'd be happier if she were free of that latter association, but it was not something he would ask of her. She was her own person, wife or not.

John had heard that a honeymoon should last six weeks. But these last weeks had included no visit to the Lake District, London or Paris, or anywhere outside of the environs of Milton. And he had been forced to work late almost every day each week save Sundays. Doing so was necessary to get the mill back on its feet, even with the generous gift from Mr. Bell. But Margaret had not complained. No, he'd found her waiting for him, every evening. She held dinner for him, choosing to eat as late as he did, well after the rest of the family. Then they'd retire to the library together, where he would spend another hour, or maybe half, balancing the books or writing letters, until her nearness became too much to bear.

And every night, she gave herself to him with abandon, in a way which surpassed his wildest imaginings. He had thought once that he did not want to possess her, but he found that he did. And he did, and again and again. Just as she possessed him.

So while these weeks could certainly not be called a honeymoon, John was certain that he and Margaret would think back on them as halcyon days.

John carefully extracted his deadened arm, and crept from the bed and the room. Although she might be annoyed to find he'd breakfasted without her, he decided he'd bear her ire. She done enough for him the past six weeks. She deserved a rest, even if she did not realize it. And he deserved a good breakfast, as he was absolutely ravenous.
He was half done with his kippers, when Margaret hurried into the breakfast room.

"Why did you not wake me?" his wife was groggy and petulant, as she so often was in the morning. Clearly she'd hurried downstairs. Her hair was arranged plainly, as though she'd done it herself, and instead of skirt and shirtwaist she wore a simple wrapper. She stared at him indignantly as she waited for a response. He finished his mouthful, chewing thoroughly, and was about to reply when she grimaced and then fled from the room.

"Margaret?" he called after her. She did not reply, and John decided she was indeed angry that he'd let her sleep in. He decided he'd deal with it later that day, after she'd had a chance to cool off. Her temper was much like his own, he'd come to realize over their short time together: time apart allowed reason to take control of passion and made it much more likely that unkind words would remain unsaid.

John attacked his breakfast with gusto instead. It would be many hours until the noonday meal and it was important to fuel up, after all.

His mother rose from her chair at the other end of the table and picked up the remains of John's breakfast. One full fish was left.

"I was not finished, Mother," he said with some annoyance. Kippers were easily his favorite part of the morning meal.

The elder Thornton chuckled. "Yes, you are. And for some time." The widow rang for the footman, and busied herself with tidying the table and replacing the lid to the offending serving dish until the man arrived. "Tell cook no kippers for at least the next month."

John lifted a brow, utterly confused.

"Are they off? They smelled perfectly fine to me."

His mother did not answer, and the footman took his plate over his objections. John crossed the room to the buffet and picked up another plate, to which he added scrambled eggs and link sausage, protein sources far inferior to smoked herring.

"Mother, will you tell me, please, what is going on?"

"Stop thinking about your stomach and go to her, John. Silly boy."

He did as he was told. Margaret was in the library, her head half out the window, sucking in long gulps of warm, moist August morning air. John laid a cautious hand on her back and rubbed faint circles. "Are you well, darling?" he asked.

She nodded, but did not move from her place for some minutes. Finally, she turned to him. Her face was ashen.

"Darling, sit." John helped lower her to the settee that sat just below the tall windows. He sat beside her and held her hand, rubbing it between his own. He should have asked his mother to call Dr. Donaldson. Clearly Margaret was gravely ill. How selfish he had been not to notice.

"Do you need to lie down?" he asked solicitously. "I will help you back upstairs."

She shook her head. "No, John. I am well, really." She turned toward the window, and her deep, gulping breath served only to accentuate the lie.
John's concern grew exponentially. What was she not telling him?

"I had wanted this to be a surprise," she said, finally. "For tonight. But as it is already your birthday, I guess I can tell you now. John, I think I am with child."

John's eyes widened with surprise. "With child? Are you certain?"

Margaret shook her head. "No." She laughed. "I have never been so before. But I do have the symptoms. I have been very tired. The nausea is new. Since last week."

John's face fell, and he noticed that Margaret's immediate attempt to mitigate his feelings of guilt.

"It has not been so bad. Not like this morning."

"Those are your only symptoms?"

His wife blushed.

No. There are others. I am sore in... places. But the most important one is that twice I have missed my... my..." she blushed again, even more profusely.

"Your monthly courses?"

Margaret nodded, although she looked away in embarrassment. "You know of such things?"

John rolled his eyes, although his wife did not see. "I have a sister who is not the most discreet."

"I think I am perhaps six weeks along..."

A grin spread across John's face at this proof of his virility. "Our wedding night, then?" He kissed his wife again and again.

"You are pleased?" she asked, a small smile curving her petaled lips.

"More than pleased." John crushed his wife against him and murmured into her ear. "Absolutely delighted. I will be a father, and you will be my child's mother. I cannot imagine a better birthday gift."

For some people the term "morning sickness" was a misnomer, Margaret learned from Dr. Donaldson. Apparently, she was one of these people. There was nothing wrong with her, in fact she was perfectly healthy, and if she was lucky the nausea, which was lasting all morning, all afternoon and well into the evening, would be gone in the next month. Of course, Dr. Donaldson had added, in a minority of cases "morning" sickness lasted the entire course of a pregnancy.

"Oh, joy," Margaret had murmured aloud. Should she wager on the possibility of that coming to pass? Fortunately, Dr. Donaldson's physical examination was quick. Even more luckily, Mrs. Thornton was there in the room with her. John's mother was turning out to be quite the advocate. While Margaret might have preferred to have her own mother at her side, today was not a good day for Mrs. Hale. She was in more pain than usual and had not gotten out of bed until noon. Worse, after seeing the doctor herself Mrs. Hale's spirits had ebbed. And truth be told (although Margaret hated to admit this) the raven was much more likely to stand up to the doctor should he begin to behave condescendingly, as he had in the past.

Margaret stripped down to chemise, corset and drawers, as instructed, in the privacy of Mrs. Thornton's sitting room, just as she'd done some weeks earlier while recovering from her head injury.
But for this examination the doctor knelt beside her, pressing against her still-flat abdomen with one hand while invading her most intimate anatomy with the other. Margaret had blushed furiously, but Mrs. Thornton had nodded her approval. There was nothing untoward here. "Yes, I'd say you are two months pregnant," Dr. Donald said with some authority, his hands lingering on her inner thighs. Regardless of the propriety of this inspection, it made her quite uncomfortable. She stepped backwards in an effort to be rid of him. She was unsuccessful.

Finally the man moved away from her. Margaret stood ramrod straight and lifted her chin into a familiar, haughty pose. She asked, "How can I be two months pregnant when I have only been married six weeks?" How dare he even suggest such a thing of her!

Mrs. Thornton patted her on the arm. "Do not take offense. Doctors do not count the days of pregnancy from actual date of conception, but from the first day of your menses. They are a bit backwards in that regard."

"So I was two weeks pregnant before we ever-" Margaret began to giggle.

"Yes," Mrs. Thornton almost smiled. "So was I, and every other mother."

It was Dr. Donaldson's turn to color. He wiped his hands on a monogrammed handkerchief that he then folded carefully away inside his waistcoat pocket. Then he packed his bag quickly, exiting after giving the young wife only the tersest of advice regarding diet and exercise.

"Why was he in such a hurry?" Margaret asked after he left.

Mrs. Thornton's lips narrowed into a tight line. "I don't like that man," she nearly growled. "I'll have cook make you some captain's biscuits. You'll find they help with the nausea. They did me when I was carrying John.

The biscuits did help, and Margaret carried a small cloth-bound parcel of them with her when she stopped by Mary Higgins's house early that afternoon, stopping now and again along her journey to sample its contents. She was overjoyed to see her friend, as was Mary to hear her news. It had been too long since their last visit, and Margaret was surprised to learn that since then Higgins had taken in the Boucher children. That meant Mary now had her hands full with their care and feeding. She certainly needed any help Margaret could spare. Within moments of her arrival, Margaret had a toddler on her hip and an grousing infant in her arms. She was in her element.

But Margaret was back at the mill house in plenty of time to make sure that the preparations were well underway for John's birthday dinner. She hoped he would be pleased. She already knew he was fond of beef, and the dessert she'd described to Cook should also be a success.

A nap was in well in order, she decided. That and the tenth visit of the day to the commode. She chewed yet another biscuit before heading upstairs.

"Watson is here, Mother. I didn't think you'd mind one more for dinner." Fanny steered her beau into the front drawing room and propelled him to a silk-upholstered settee. The master sat with the lack of grace one might expect from a man of his bulk, and the elegant wood frame protested.

Mrs. Thornton sought confirmation from Margaret: this was her dinner, after all. The young wife nodded, pleased that she’d had to foresight to ask Cook to order an extra steak from the butcher, just in case. She rang for Stokes and informed him of the change, then walked with the butler towards the dining room, pausing only briefly in the pantry as he unlocked the plate, and removed another place setting of silverware. She smiled as she surveyed the dining room. She had not yet learned John's
favorite flower, so a single vase of yellow roses sat in the center of the table, and after conferring with her mother-in-law about the choices available to her in the well-stocked linen closet, she had decided to use a damask tablecloth and napkins that had been woven in the mill. They were not the most luxurious to be found in that closet, but surely they were the most significant. Margaret refolded a napkin carefully, positioning it just so within the center of the plate. John noticed the smallest things, she'd observed in their short time together. She wanted every detail to be perfect for him.

Although it was Saturday, John was late. But Margaret had expected this, and had purposefully set the dinner hour for seven instead of the usual six. Mama would not be joining them due to the unusually bad day she’d had. But Papa was already in the drawing room, enjoying a glass of claret. His daughter joined him, thrilled to see him looking so robust. Her father smiled broadly when John walked through the door. Due to John's late hours, father- and son-in-law had not spent much time together over the past six weeks. But hopefully that would be changing soon. John had said things were running much more smoothly at the mill and he would soon be able to reduce the time spent there to a less grueling schedule.

But John's attention was immediately diverted. He was surprised to see Watson sitting side by side with Fanny in the settee closest to the windows.

"And to what do we owe this pleasure?" he asked in the coolest of voices. Fanny nudged herself away from Watson, suddenly aware that she was sitting just a bit too close to the man.

Watson smiled, his nose already reddened by his intake of wine. "Fanny and I were walking out this afternoon, and as it was getting late, she suggested I dine here."

John nodded. "You are welcome, of course. And exactly how many department stores did you visit?"

The older man laughed heartily, while Fanny gave her brother an acidulous glare. "Oh, you know your sister well! Three, the number is three. And my pocketbook did feel the pinch!"

"Margaret." John's attention was finally on his wife, but this was interrupted by Stokes's quiet announcement of dinner. And of course the pair were separated at the table, he at its head, she at the foot.

But he seemed to like the meal.

"Is this your doing, Margaret?" John asked, after he tasted the consomme of fowl with quenelles.

Margaret nodded. She was glad it pleased him, as she found it much too salty. And far too fowl-ish.

"It's very good," Papa said. "Is it something you had on Harley Street?"

Again Margaret nodded. "I thought that John might like it," she explained, "as I always have."

"It's just chicken soup with odd-shaped dumplings, isn't it?" Watson asked, and Fanny rolled her eyes at his boorishness, then patted him on his hand. John looked at the pair in irritation.

Margaret nearly laughed aloud as she wondered what the couple would be like five years hence. Then she imagined the same for herself and John. Of course there was a child five years in their future, one a year or so from starting school. And a son, she was sure of it. She'd already chosen his name. She was sure John would agree-

A rather strong smell brought her back to reality. The fish course, char à la parisienne was being
"Mother, did you mention my fondness for this dish?" John asked. The elder raven shook her head. "Did you have a hard time finding it?" he asked Margaret. "I've not had this fish in years."

"You would have to ask Cook," Margaret smiled. She wanted her crackers. The fish smelled much too oily.

"It tastes a lot like trout, I'd say," pronounced Watson. "What say you, Fanny?"

"I hate fish." Fanny seemed to be goading her brother. "Slimy, slithery things."

"But an excellent source of protein, by all accounts," Mr. Hale added helpfully.

"Yes," John agreed with a frown. "Like kippers. Are you fond of them? Unfortunately, they've been embargoed in this household." He glared pointedly at his mother, while Mr. Hale regarded him quizzically. Margaret's stomach turned.

Finally it was time for the main entree, and once again, John was pleased. "Steak and potatoes. Lovely."

"To be more precise, steak de boeuf avec pommes frites," Margaret said in perfect French.

"Some might say it's a bit pretentious to pronounce everything in a foreign language," Fanny sniffed.

"Fanny!" her mother chided.

Fanny was in fine form tonight. Something must be bothering her, Margaret realized. She chose to ignore the insult. "Yours is medium rare, as you like it," she pointed out to John. She did not mention that its redness—something she normally would find appetizing—presently made her stomach flip. She also realized she had no idea how she would get through another month of strong smells and gut-wrenching flavors.

"This is perfect." John smiled as he helped himself to the side dish of creamed spinach. "You seemed to have read my mind, Margaret, down to the smallest details. I could not have asked for a more perfect dinner."

Margaret beamed. Despite her nausea, despite the tiredness, pleasing John felt so right, so wifely. It was really quite silly how happy it made her to make him happy.

"Do you speak French?" Watson asked. "Or do you just read menus? That was quite lovely, just now."

"I studied while I lived with my cousin. She went to Paris with my aunt every winter, while I went back to Helstone to be with my mother and father." She patted her father on the arm as she spoke. "I cannot say that I could hold a conversation, because I have not had much practice, but I can read tolerably well."

"Margaret is too modest," her father pointed out. "She reads quite well."

"Do you speak French, Fanny?" Watson asked.

"No," Fanny replied as twin spots of color appeared on her cheeks. "But of course, I play piano. I am quite accomplished. You shall be my audience after dinner."

"Do you speak any other?" Watson asked.
"Me?" Margaret asked, not noticing the icy blue glare that focused itself on her partner in conversation. "Well, yes, I also read German. And for much the same reason. My Aunt Shaw is very concerned about her health and travels to Baden-Baden in the Black Forest every summer to take the waters. My cousin always traveled with her so there was a need for her to learn the language. And as I was Edith's companion, I learned it too. I've never been to any of these places, of course. I've never left England."

Dessert arrived, and Margaret smiled broadly as she explained its significance. "It's a gâteau Saint-Honore. The last time Edith was in Paris, she stopped by the Chiboust bakery where it was invented, and she showed the cook at Harley Street how to make it. John, would you like to cut it?"

John had just finished speaking to Stokes, however, who was now in the process of uncorking the bottle of champagne that had stood at the ready in an ice bucket on the buffet. Glasses were quickly poured, and John moved to stand behind Margaret, resting one hand possessively on her shoulder.

"I would like to make an announcement," he began, in his warm, authoritative voice, holding his champagne coupe aloft.

Fanny interrupted, her voice a trumpet to his baritone. "There's something I have to say first. I've been holding it in all day. Watson and I- We're engaged! We're getting married in three weeks!"

Champagne splashed as John angrily set his glass back on the table.

"Congratulations, Fanny," he said. "I hope you won't mind if I leave you to your dessert. I have a mountain of work awaiting me." He turned abruptly and left the room, before Margaret could even call his name.

She looked from Fanny, to Watson, to Papa, to Mrs. Thornton. Papa looked as though he wanted to sink through the floor, while Mrs. Thornton looked as though she might flay Fanny alive. Watson seemed confused, and Fanny seemed... pleased.

"That was for his birthday," Margaret said vexedly as she pointed to the elegant composition of profiteroles, caramel and cream. "He didn't even cut it." She stood, and sliced off a large portion of the dessert, and placed it on a dessert plate. "You must excuse me." She hurriedly left the room.

"His birthday?" Margaret heard as she was leaving. "Fanny, why didn't you say something? We might have bought a gift."

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A light tap on the library door interrupted John's study of the accounts receivable ledger. "Come," he said with some annoyance.

His wife entered, dessert plate in one hand, fork in the other. The crossed the room and deposited the articles in front of him, and without warning climbed into his lap. "You left so suddenly, John."

He did his best to remove the scowl from his face. He was not successful. "Fanny has a knack of bringing out the worst in me."

"I think she feels left out."

John was not ready to hear his wife come to his sister's defense. "What would you know?" he asked churlishly. "You do not have a sibling. You don't know how these things work."

"I-" Margaret began, then stopped abruptly.
"Three weeks until she weds," John said morosely. "She is probably with child. There will be talk."

Margaret looked him squarely in the eyes. "We waited only two. And I am with child. What will the gossips say about us?"

He was abashed, but she continued. "It is wrong for you to doubt your sister's virtue, John. Before we married Fanny told me how eager she was to leave this house. She feels... bereft. I do not think you understand what is like for her."

"For her? I have given her everything. I scrimped and saved and did without so that she might not suffer the indignities of poverty."

Margaret placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "But perhaps this is the problem. You did so much for her that she does not know whether to view you as brother or father. As a result she resents you. And she acts out as a child would. Please forgive her, John. Our secret will keep a little longer."

John sighed. Margaret was right. He was angry that Fanny had stolen the limelight from him, and interrupted his day, and his announcement.

"Besides" Margaret added as she cut into a profiterole and lifted a morsel to his lips, "this evening, right now, is not about Fanny." She wiped chiboust cream from above his lip with a taper finger and offered it to him. He licked it eagerly, then regarded the dessert.

"You won't join me?"

"I cannot. I do not think it would sit well at the moment."

"I am sorry, Margaret. I have given no thought to your indisposition."

His wife smiled ruefully as she offered him another forkful of dessert. "It will pass. Or so Dr. Donaldson says. In a majority of cases, anyway."

"What do you think of him, Margaret?" John gauged her response carefully.

"Oh, he is a strange man. So learned, but, really he is quite odd."

"Well, sometimes the two go hand in hand."

"Yes..." Margaret's brow knit. "He left so quickly today. I mentioned it to your mother."

"Mother was there?" John felt unacknowledged tension suddenly abate.

"Yes, of course. She said she doesn't like him. He must rub her the wrong way."

To John's dismay, she rose from her comfortable perch. "Will you be working for long? If so, I will fetch a book, so that I can keep you company."

She was gone for longer than he expected, returning with not only the book, but with a small parcel, which she deposited on his desk.

"Many happy returns of the day," she said with a shy smile. "You may open that once you have completed your work. She installed herself at the writing desk recently added to the room, and began to peruse a tattered volume. John gave it no mind, as the bookcase in the Hale's upstairs sitting room was filled with such examples. He went back to the tedium of checking figures, pulling the Argand lamp closer to him and loosening his cravat against the oppressive evening heat."
In the distance he heard the plunking of the piano and a caterwauling that could only be his sister's *quite accomplished* talent. He smiled at his own inability to let the matter drop. Yes, he was still irked.

"John," his wife's sweet voice was far more pleasant to the ear, he noted, "would it be possible for me to purchase a dictionary?"

"We have one here." He pointed to the foot thick volume that sat on its own stand in the corner.

"I mean one for translation. For this book."

"That's not your father's?"

Margaret looked up from her reading. "Nicholas gave it to me."

"Did he?" John closed his ledger, interest fully captured. "I did not realize he was a man of letters."

"He is an intelligent man, but the book is not his. It belonged to Boucher. His wife has passed away and Nicholas has taken in their eight children."

"Eight?" John lifted an eyebrow in astonishment.

"Yes. I am not certain how he is able to put enough food on the table. He has been doing manual labor, and Mary says the work is not steady."

"When did you visit Higgins?"

"This afternoon. Mary was quite overwhelmed. The baby has colic-"

"You are with child, Margaret. I will not have you exposing yourself to disease-"

"But colic is not-"

"Princeton is a cesspool. It is filled with disease. It is a wonder it has not succumbed to cholera."

"But, John, Mary needs my help and the children are well."

"I won't stand for it." John breathed heavily as he tried to control his burgeoning temper. He lowered his voice. "What is this book?"

"*Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England,*" Margaret replied.

John glowered as he crossed the room to collect the volume. The scruffy volume was printed in a heavy and indecipherable German font. "What does it mean?" he asked.

"On the conditions of the working class in England," translated Margaret quietly. "I have not read much yet, as I am not as good a reader as Papa might have you believe, but it appears to be a book about poverty in Manchester."

John noted the cover was water-stained. The title page- he could read the date, at least- said 1845, so the book was fairly recent. He wondered why the volume was so well worn. Surely that rabble-rouser Boucher had not been an intellectual.

"Are you sure this was Boucher's?"

"Higgins said he lived in Manchester for a while and that he boasted that the author gave it to him."
They drank at the same inn, he said." She rose and perused the section of the library where he shelved non-fiction books that had nothing to do with manufacturing. Finally she found the volume she sought. "I believe the book is not so dissimilar from the book de Tocqueville wrote about America." She began to climb the ladder to retrieve the volume, but he jumped up to stop her.

This was almost as bad as Edith giving him the set of faux books. Did Margaret really think he filled his library with books he hadn't read? "You mean Democracy in America? Yes, I'm familiar with it, Margaret," he said with as much patience as he could muster. "But that book is not an indictment of an industry. Somehow I am certain this book is." John returned to his desk, picked up the tattered volume and let it fall back to the desk with a satisfying thunk. Of my industry, he did not add.

She perched on the edge of his desk, inadvertently pushing her gift off the polished surface. It fell soundlessly to the carpeted floor. "What I mean is that they are both an outsider's view. De Tocqueville is a Frenchman. He sees the world through a particular prism. Likewise, Engels is German."

"Engels? Of Manchester?" John opened the book again and looked at the cramped, angular text of the title page more closely. He found the author line. It read "Friedrich Engels." John paged backwards until he found the frontispiece. Due to water damage it was stuck to a fly leaf. He carefully prised the two apart and examined the illustration he uncovered.

"I know this man." The visage was unmistakeable.

"Do you?" Margaret looked at him in surprise.

"He is the head of Victoria Mills. He is a dilettante and degenerate. The rumors have been circulating about him for years. How he has installed two spinners, and sisters at that, as his mistresses. And with this" John pointed to the book as his eyes narrowed, "I now know him to be a hypocrite. He attacks the very hand that feeds him."

John opened a desk drawer and swept the book into it. His next words were harsh, and loud.

"I won't have you polluting your mind with this trash. Find something else to read." He waved his hand around the well-furnished room. "There is plenty here to choose from."

"I only want to find out what he has to say."

John said nothing. He opened his ledger instead, and dipped quill in ink.

"Surely there is no harm in broadening one's mind."

"I will not have you turned against me."

"You do not trust me." It was not a question, but rather a statement of wounded astonishment.

He looked up and saw tears in her eyes, but she was gone before he could do anything about it. She rushed out of the room with quick words about needing to see to her parents.

He was alone again.

John held his head in his hands. This is not how he had wanted his day to be. It seemed that everything he had done today had been in error. But all had been done with good intentions.

He listened to the day's conversations in his head, searching for the flaw in each. He therefore did not hear his mother enter the room.
"You know better than to argue, John, especially when we have company. Although it his bad enough in front of the servants."

"I have a temper, Mother. It is oppressively hot today, and I am human. And frankly, Fanny drives me crazy." He did not raise his head to look at her.

"Is that what this is about?" his mother asked, as she lay a weathered hand on his back.

"Yes, of course."

"I know you, son. And I do not think this is the case."

John looked up abruptly. "Enlighten me," he said with some sarcasm. He regretted his words immediately, although they seemed to roll off the older woman.

His mother shrugged. "That is not my place. But let me ask you this, what did you argue about with Margaret?"

"She wants to read books that paint this industry- my industry- in a most unappealing light."

The elder Thornton crowed. "And how is this any different from the Miss Hale we already know, the girl who would urge you to reason with a mob of slavering rioters?"

John considered her words. His mother was right. Margaret's behavior was no different than normal. So why had he become so angry?

"It's not just that. Today she went to Princeton and exposed herself to colic, Mother. She is with child!"

"You had it yourself and drove me to distraction with it." Hannah shook her head as a crooked smile lit her features. "Silly boy. Colic is not infectious. It's just gas, and hour upon hour of wailing."

John glowered at his mother's mockery.

"That's twice you've called me a boy today, Mother. And twice you've called me silly. Today I am two and thirty yet you persist in treating me like a child."

His mother did her best to straighten her smile. "Yet twice today you've acted foolishly, John. You are sadly mistaken if you think I will leave off telling you the truth just because you have grown a year older. Today your wife exhausted herself to make the evening special for you. Yet your repaid her by shouting at her. Apart from the message you sent the servants, what message did you send to the mother of your child?"

John held his head in his hands again. "I do not know, Mother. I do not know what I am thinking."

"You knew who Margaret was when you married her. She is a free-spirited, troublesome girl. You will not rein her in. And I did not think you wanted to."

"No. I did not. But now..."

His mother lifted her eyebrows.

"Now I will be a father."

The elder Thornton smiled. Finally her son had gotten to the crux of it. She rose, then bowed to retrieve a small package lying next to the desk.
"You dropped this," she said before exiting the room.

John turned the package over in his hands slowly before opening it. Margaret had used a scrap of wallpaper from the Hales' upstairs sitting room to wrap the package. He found the gesture oddly comforting, as it put him in mind of the homely Crampton quarters where he had fallen in love with Margaret.

How many hours had she spent working on these? John wondered, as he slid a pair of petit-point embroidered braces out of the parcel. There were thousands of stitches here, all perfectly even, each expressing her love for him. And the braces themselves were quite beautiful, their blue paisley motifs well-balanced and pleasing to the eye.

He needed to apologize. He gathered the braces and lit a candle, and made his way upstairs.

She was asleep, of course. He should not have assumed otherwise.

It was almost a new moon, leaving the room quite dark at this late hour, but with the candle's light John saw Margaret's hair was tied back into a single plait, as protection against the sweltering heat. And she'd pulled the bed's single sheet clear to her chin. Perhaps that was to protect against him.

John sighed. He did not blame her after the way he'd treated her tonight. He undressed quietly, and in deference to her obvious wishes, left his own shirt and drawers on. She probably had wished for her own bed tonight. Although he could not oblige, he would make sure she understood he had no desire to molest her.

He climbed into bed, blew out the candle and left a decent margin of space, but still he felt her even breathing. Then his wife sighed heavily and rolled onto her side, half flinging herself across him.

She was so warm against him, her breasts so soft. He gingerly attempted to move her away, peeling back her arm. He felt something slide down her lithe arm, and recognized it as the bangle bracelet he'd given her as wedding gift. How strange that she should wear it to bed. His brow wrinkled. He felt certain she had not been wearing at dinner: he would have noticed its faint glimmer in the candlelight. When it came to Margaret, he could not help but notice such details.

His hand slid up her arm, and to her back. He startled in surprise, then continued running his hand down her back.

She was naked.

John kissed his wife chastely on the forehead and attempted to rearrange her on her own pillows. He would not impose.

"John." Her voice was a sigh. "I missed you this morning."

"Did you?" He nuzzled against her neck. "I am sorry."

"You don't need to be afraid, John."

Afraid? How did she know?

"It's my job to protect you, Margaret," he said huskily. "To protect my family."

"We will not come to harm. You will never lose us."

"Promise me."
"I already have."

He kissed her again, not so chastely this time, and relished the salty flavor of her skin. He cherished her, loving her with the abandon she offered to him daily. He anointed every part of her, eliciting sighs, then moans, then full-throated cries of pleasure that exhorted him to abandon his mission of pleasing only her this evening. But he would not be dissuaded.

Finally, as she lay panting in his arms, he directed her again.

"Promise me."

"I promise. You will never lose us."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for reading, and for sticking with this story. :)

You may notice no one says "Happy Birthday" to John. "Many happy returns of the day," was used instead on special occasions to convey a hope that the day's happiness would repeat over and over throughout the years. You'll also notice there is no birthday cake at the dinner. Birthday celebrations with cakes and candles were occasionally done in Germany in the 19th century but did not become a big thing in England until the 20th century. So no cake for John. :(  

During Margaret's obstetric exam Mrs. Thornton refers obliquely to Naegele's Rule, which is still used by many obstetricians to calculate the estimated due date for a pregnancy. It was devised by German obstetrician Franz Karl Naegele in 1812, and it is based on the date of woman's last menstrual period, which means that a woman is considered two weeks pregnant on the day she conceives. As Mrs. Thornton's father was a physician, she would have been familiar with this method of calculation.

The captain's biscuits are from Eliza Acton's Modern Cookery In All Its Branches: reduced to a system of easy practice for the use of private families (1846). The dinner menu is from The Modern Cook: Recipes by Queen Victoria's Chef (1846) by Charles Francatelli. Note that although this may seem like a fancy menu for us, this is a pretty plain family dinner for an upper middle class household. The gâteau Saint-Honore was invented in 1847 at the Chiboust Bakery in the 1st arrondissement of Paris, France, near the Louvre and Tuileries Gardens. It is likely Edith would have visited during her many winter visits to the city.

Colic is periods of three or more hours of crying in babies that are usually under three months of age, and the cause is still unknown- there are several possible contenders- lactose intolerance or other allergies, or possibly an immature digestive system. Victorians like Mrs. Thornton thought gas was the cause of colic, and a giant burp, the relief. Modern medicine has ruled out gas as a cause. Victorians treated colic starting in 1851 with something called "gripe water," which was a mixture of dill oil, baking soda (to produce a burp) and alcohol. The alcohol probably made it pretty effective at calming the baby (but harmful, obviously!). You can still buy gripe water today for
Friedrich Engels was Karl Marx’s lesser known compatriot, and everything I've written here about him is accurate. He was the son of a wealthy Prussian industrialist. His father set up Victoria Mills, a thread spinning concern, in Salford, a borough of Manchester, and installed his son as the head of it, as he was concerned about his son's revolutionary leanings. Unbeknownst to his father, Engels led a double life. He took up with a woman named Mary Burns, who most likely was a mill worker. (He lived with Mary (and her sister!) for many years, but only married the sister on her deathbed, years later.) Between 1842 and 1844 at night, in disguise, Mary showed him the underside of Manchester. Engels compiled his findings into a book that exposed the poverty that went hand-in-hand with industrialization. This book was published in German in 1845, but an English translation was not published in London until 1891. Therefore seeing this book and Engels’s picture as its frontispiece would be a shock to John. Although Engels disagreed with industrialization, he was willing to use his earnings from the mill, to support the work of his friend, Karl Marx. (It was these earnings that allowed Marx to write the Communist Manifesto, for instance, in 1848.) Although John would be unaware of these details, given this new information John certainly would have picked up on the hypocrisy of the man living a double life, as there are many stories of Engels spending time in working class bars in the Salford area, and talk of his affair with Mary Burns.

Wrapping paper was not sold commercially until 1917 (by two brothers who formed that company that became Hallmark), but Victorians sometimes wrapped gifts in wallpaper, assuming they has scraps lying around. It was not the best choice for wrapping gifts, as the paper was quite heavy, but it was certainly prettier than plain paper.
"You see, John, Plato is suggesting that individuals cannot truly be self-sufficient, and that for this reason, cities inexorably developed." Richard Hale looked up from Book II of *The Republic* and waited for his student's thoughts to coalesce. John did not disappoint.

"I disagree with his thesis. I believe quite strongly that each man—each *true* man- must be self-sufficient."

"But you live in a city, do you not? And your business depends on commerce with other entities."

"Perhaps I am conflating self-sufficiency with independence."

"Is there a difference?"

"I think so. Dependence has a negative connotation in my mind. I think of a babe who has not yet learned to walk, who clings to chairs and tables. He must let go and stand alone or he will never be able to run."

"Certainly that child eventually will become independent in the physical realm, but in other areas he will remain dependent. He will need his mother and father for many years to come. For food, and for shelter. And of course, for love. And as he grows older he will depend on teachers and friends, and finally, a wife."

John tapped his chin with his forefinger. "I agree that there is a measure of interaction there. But once a man has reached adulthood, friends are not strictly necessary. A person can survive without them. And the same can be said of a wife."

"But to survive is not the same as to thrive, John. We are talking about a healthy man, about a *vital* city, not one that is simply subsisting. And I would argue further that a man who was completely alone would not survive long at all."

"I suppose we must agree to disagree, then."

"Perhaps. Although I must say, it is interesting. You are a successful manufacturer and magistrate, and certainly both of these depend on a web of connections- an interrelatedness that would have been inconceivable in Plato's time."

"I have always valued my independence," said John, not willing to concede the point.

"There are degrees of independence. The world is not painted in black and white. There are infinite shades of grey."

The starkly clad mill-master set his mouth in a tight line. "I know this."

"We see this web of connections within the city, as well. We— all of us- interact with farmers, and colliers, and mill-masters. Perhaps not always in the first degree, but certainly through intermediaries. And we pay taxes to keep the roads paved and to dig wells. Unless a man is living on an island
alone, I do not think he can be said to be truly self-sufficient. According to Socrates, justice, therefore, should be seated not in the individual man but within the city itself."

"But what is Socrates' definition of justice?" John asked. "We have only heard Adeimantus' defense of injustice, and Glaucon's idea that justice is only practiced out of fear of punishment."

"Ah, yes. We will get to that shortly. Was Margaret planning to join us this evening?"

John frowned. "Perhaps she is with Mrs. Hale. I will look for her." He excused himself as the older man stretched in his chair.

Richard Hale certainly had missed meeting with John. In the first six weeks after he and Maria settled into their new quarters, the former vicar had felt oddly unsettled. This was not for want of keeping busy. Margaret spent a good portion of each day with both him and Maria, and he filled the rest of his day with a study of the dissenters' bibles Mr. Bell had kindly purchased for him. But despite this, he felt the need for intellectual engagement that could only come from discussion with a peer. And now that Mr. Bell had left for South America there was no one for him to talk with. With Richard's illness it had been decided that he should retire from tutoring, so he did not even have the opportunity for discourse with his younger students. And he could hardly imagine broaching the possibility of tutoring once more. He did not think Hannah Thornton would appreciate the tread of student footsteps upon her oriental-carpeted staircase.

But in this past month, he and John had been meeting regularly. And John's return to study was a great blessing. Richard smiled at the understatement. It was John's entry into the Hales' life that had been the greatest blessing. Richard looked around the sitting room, noting the great pains the man had gone to make Maria and himself comfortable- the same duck-egg blue wallpaper that Maria had chosen for Crampton, the furnishings carted over by his own men, the tortoise stove added to make it that much easier to maintain a degree of self-sufficiency once cooler weather arrived. John truly was a considerate man. How fortunate it was that Margaret's feelings for him had changed! Richard still could not pinpoint when this might have taken place. One day she seemed to hate the man, and the next she'd called him John. But women were strange creatures. Maria certainly was, and always had been so.

Maria. It was easy to pretend she was not slipping away from him, and even easier to allow Margaret to act as a buffer between them. He knew that he should be the one spending the hours each day by Maria's side, not Dixon or Margaret. But knowing and doing were two very different things.

Richard sighed. This was not the first time he'd pushed Margaret into a role that was not hers to fill. But she'd handled it with aplomb. Of course, she handled everything with aplomb. His daughter demonstrated a resiliency and strength he'd seen in few others in all of his years as a pastor. And although it could not be said that the end result of his decision to quit Helstone and its vicarage was one hundred percent successful, at least Margaret had ended up better off.

But what of Maria? Surely her illness was not due solely to Milton. It must have been festering all along, biding its time within the sunny environs of Helstone. Milton might have expedited its course, but it could not be the cause. Richard could not allow himself to believe the latter, because such a thing simply could not be true. That truth would not fit with the facts of his dissension. In his heart he knew it was right to leave the Church, just as it was right to relocate his family two hundred twenty miles away. And if he had to, Richard knew he would do it again. And if those decisions were right, surely Maria's illness-

"Papa? You look deep in thought." Margaret returned on the arm of her husband, embroidery hoop in her free hand.
"How is your mother tonight?"

"Asleep, finally. It has been a rough evening. We tried lowering her dosage today, as she has not really seemed to be with us, but it was a mistake, Papa." Margaret hung her head.

"I think she would want you to try. I know she would like to talk to you about the fact that she will be a grandmother in a few short months."

Margaret looked up, and Richard noted the light in his daughter's eyes. Her smile perfectly matched his son-in-law's expression. The former vicar smiled in return as he contemplated whom his grandchild would favor. But regardless of eye- or hair color, there was no doubt the child would have a passionate temperament.

"Have you had tea?" She glanced at the corner stove. "It's much too hot to light a fire in here today. I'll go downstairs to heat the kettle."

"No," interrupted John. "You've been too much on your feet today. Please sit, darling. I'll take care of it." He left the room, rather than ringing for a servant.

Richard noted how readily Margaret ignored her husband's request. Instead, she busied herself with removing cups and teapot from a breakfront that formerly stood in the Hale family dining room, and pulled a covered dish of lemon cakes from its lower cabinet.

His daughter and son-in-law were going to considerable effort to make these rooms as much like the Crampton home as possible. And they were succeeding. It was almost as though they were playing house, reducing the cold, grand mill house to a scale that was warm and approachable. The former vicar felt welcome here, and comfortable. And above all, quite happy.

"Margaret?" he asked.

His daughter turned to him, a small smile playing across her lips. "Hmm?"

"Are you happy?"

"Papa! Do you have to ask?" She crossed the room and knelt by his side. "I could not be happier. Sometimes I feel as though I am in a dream."

"Why is that, daughter?"

"Because John- and this place- are so different from what I first imagined. I don't feel that I deserve such good fortune."

Richard chuckled. "It is not luck, Margaret."

Her blue-green eyes captured his grey ones. "No? Then how do you explain it?"

"You are both good people. You deserve each other. And you complement each other."

"Thank you, Papa." She attempted to change the subject. "The weather should be fine tomorrow, and John is taking a half-day from work. We are going to visit the ruins of St. Catherine's Abbey. We've been there once before and it was quite lovely. I thought that with your interest in ecclesiastical architecture you might be interested in joining us. You have been cooped up here for weeks."

Richard looked at her in puzzlement. "I have not heard of this place. My students never brought it up
in my Sunday lectures. How old is it?"

"I am not certain. I think John said the original structure was Norman, but I am not sure if that portion is still standing." She smiled. "I guess you will have to see for yourself. You will join us, then?"

"Certainly. Although I assume it is out of the question for Maria to do so."

"Mama is not well enough to travel."

Richard sighed. It did not seem fair to enjoy himself while his wife lay ill in the next room. He should be performing penance instead.

"Margaret, I hope that you will remember what I said. About honesty."

"Yes, Papa."

Richard thought of his own propensity to place his daughter between himself and his wife. "You must not let anyone come between you. Nor place anyone between you. Not even your child."

"Of course not."

"It seems simple, Margaret. But the reality-"

"What is simple?" John asked as he entered the room, steaming kettle in one hand, milk pitcher in the other.

Richard smiled at this paragon of domesticity. "Honesty," he replied. "I was telling my daughter how important it is to speak plainly in a marriage."

John raised an eyebrow. "I would have to agree with that."

"And that I regret having placed her in the uncomfortable position of acting as intermediary."

"Papa! Please don't say such things." Margaret looked at her father searchingly, as a blush crept across her face.

"It is true, Margaret."

"Please. Have some lemon cakes." His daughter stood and offered the laden plate to her father and then to John, then busied herself with the kettle and teapot.

Richard looked on wistfully as Margaret used not her fingers but a pair of silver tongs to add sugar cubes to his tea. Thankfully, John still took his tea with milk only. Nonetheless, it was hard to miss the loving glance that passed between the couple as cup and saucer passed hands. It had been a very long time indeed since he and Maria had exchanged such looks.

He did not begrudge them their happiness, however. Far from it. Margaret's happiness was his own, and Richard could imagine no better mate for her than John. He was relieved to know that she was not only provided for, but loved, and in such a way that few women were. John clearly saw her as his equal. In raising Margaret to be outspoken, to be a lover of justice and of what was right, Richard had not reckoned on the fact that this might make her less marriageable. He had not considered that spinsterhood was her likely lot, nor had he given much thought to the fact that as a spinster, she would not be well-provided for. He shuddered to think what her life might have been if she had not met John.
But then he smiled. The Margaret he knew would have borne such adversity, and ended up a better person for it.

"Margaret," John spoke, between sips of tea, "we have just finished discussing Book II of *The Republic*. I assume you are familiar with it?"

His wife nodded, and Richard laughed inwardly. Margaret was more than familiar. She could probably teach Plato's Republic, as she'd heard him expound on it numerous times as a child.

But she demurred. "I would much rather hear you and Papa discuss it." She sat back in a wing chair and pulled a lamp closer to her, so that she could focus on her embroidery. A small, content smile played across her lips as she listened to the men.

"Well, then. Justice," Richard began. "If we skip to Book IV, we can find Socrates' definition. Justice is when each member of the city does his job, and does not meddle in the work of others."

"How, then, does that apply to the soul?" John asked.

The pair talked for hours.

Margaret woke just before sunrise. It was early enough that John was not yet awake, and she luxuriated in his warmth. She curled up beside him, pressing herself against his broad back.

He murmured her name in his sleep and she wondered what he might be dreaming about, then wondered if it might be possible to make his reality exceed his dreams.

She rained soft kisses along his neck and collarbone, and allowed her hands to stray where they might until he stirred with a low groan.

"Will you wake me up like this every morning, Mrs. Thornton?" John's voice was heavy with sleep, yet seductive.

"Would you like that?" Margaret's hands continued their journey until they elicited a moan of pleasure.

He rolled onto his back, and in one swift movement captured her so that she lay atop him. "You know that I would."

"Then I think the answer is yes. So long as you do not keep me up too late at night."

"This, my love, I cannot promise." He claimed her lips with his own, then sat up, to make it that much easier to remove her nightgown. She obliged, lifting her arms above her head, but smiled at him mockingly.

"Clearly we are at an impasse." She rose from the bed, eliciting a frown from her mate, at her willingness to leave his side.

He leaned on one elbow as he gazed at her naked form, taking in the subtle changes that had occurred over the ten weeks they had been together. "You look less tired," he said, finally.

"I am. The morning sickness has abated." She stood beside the bed, a goddess unrobed. He marveled at the voluptuous swelling of her breasts, and the subtle veining produced by her condition.

"I am glad of it," he murmured.
"John," Margaret grasped his hand and laid his palm flat against her abdomen, "feel here."

He complied, gently rubbing her belly. He lifted a brow. "What should I notice?"

"You do not feel it?" Margaret asked.

He shook his head. "You seem much the same. Perhaps a bit firmer, but I am not certain. What should I feel?"

"Him."

"Him? Our child?"

Margaret nodded, and John smiled.

"How do you know our child is a him?"

"I simply do."

"And what does he feel like?" her husband asked in wonder as he caressed her flesh with tender strokes.

"Well... it is hard to describe. I almost do not feel it. It is as though a butterfly is inside me and I feel his wings beating against me. It's that delicate."

John kissed her, then, on her still-flat abdomen, his lips almost as light as the wings she described. "Do you think our son can feel that?"

"I do not know. But surely he knows that he is loved."

"Yes, Margaret. He is that. As you are." He pulled her back into bed and showed her her.

It was some time later, although still early when Margaret made her way down the hall to her parents' rooms. Her mother was stirring, and Dixon was with her, as usual. A good report was forthcoming. Mrs. Hale had experienced a better night than expected. Margaret kissed her mother and noted she seemed quite alert.

"Margaret," Maria Hale asked querulously, "I hear you have some good news for me?"

"Yes, Mama," Margaret said with a smile. "I will tell you over breakfast."

Her father, she found, was already awake, and in the sitting room.

"Papa," she asked, "will you be taking breakfast with Mama today?"

"Ah, Margaret," her father said as he looked up from a cloth-bound book. "I have been looking for information about this St. Catherine's Abbey." He pointed to a stack of several books Margaret recognized as belonging to his architecture collection. "So far I have been unsuccessful, but the hunt continues! Would you mind terribly if I had breakfast in here this morning? I'd so like to be prepared for our visit this afternoon."

"Of course, Papa. Just ring for a servant. They will bring you whatever you need."

Margaret left silently and returned to her mother's room, her brow furrowed.
She found that breakfast had already been served. Maria Hale sat propped in bed as Dixon fed her thin gruel as one might feed a child. Her mother was not even responsible for wiping her own face, it seemed.

"Perhaps I should return after you have finished," Margaret began.

Dixon sniffed. "Yes. I'd think that would be best. You'll only be in the way. This room is quite small, as you can see." In truth the room was a good deal larger than Mama's room in Crampton, but convincing Dixon of that would not be worth the lost breath.

Margaret quit the room and went downstairs. Surprisingly, she found both Mrs. Thornton and Fanny at the breakfast room table.

"You haven't forgotten that my final fitting is today, have you?" Fanny cried, as Margaret sat down. "Madame Coleridge will be here at half ten, and as my maid of honor it is important that you are here to give your opinion."

"I have not forgotten. But John and I will be leaving at noon, so I hope you will be finished by then."

"I should think not! We have a list of things to accomplish in the coming week, as you well know. I hardly know how you and Mother were able to pull off your own wedding in such a short time. Of course, your wedding was quite small, so that would have made things easier. But I am glad Charles and I decided to wait a bit longer. There is just so much to do!"

Mrs. Thornton harrumphed. "Fanny, there is no need for Margaret to tag along this afternoon. You and I are fully capable of visiting Lewis and Farnett ourselves.

Fanny pouted.

"And we both know you will ignore any sensible advice you are given and choose the most expensive items presented to you, at any rate," Mrs. Thornton added just loudly enough for Margaret to hear. Her daughter in law stifled a throaty laugh.

"Is my gown ready for its final fitting, as well?" asked Margaret, once she composed herself. She hoped not. In fact, she hoped some precipitous calamity had befallen the garment. It was easily the most hideous assemblage of high-priced textiles she had ever laid eyes upon.

Fanny fairly danced around the room in excitement. "Yes, yes! Madame C. sent a message that both are ready. I am sure we will both look stunning!"

Stunning was definitely the appropriate word, Margaret realized when Madame Coleridge arrived, and removed the two gowns from the chest her assistants carried into the house.

Margaret had no doubt that Fanny's gown would graze both rows of pews as she moved down the center aisle. And although her own gown would not (that would hardly be fitting for a bridesmaid), it made up for this with its five abundant tiers of ruffled Brussels lace, comprising at least fifty yards of goods.

Like the Queen's, Fanny's gown was made of precious Honiton-covered silk. Clearly no price was too high, as far as Fanny was concerned, especially when the payer of said price was her brother. But as there was only time in a girl's life when she might fulfill the dream of becoming a walking snowball for a day, Margaret kept her peace.

Besides, Fanny was happy. No, the girl was overjoyed. And it wasn't simply the trappings of the upcoming wedding that were making Margaret's sister-in-law smile. She truly seemed to like and
respect Charles Watson. The pair would get on together.

A knock on Mrs. Thornton's sitting room door interrupted the fitting. After checking that all concerned were decent, Margaret slid back the pocket door to find her husband eyeing her costume as he attempted to control a laugh.

"I see our haute couturier has laid her grubby mitts on you," he whispered, before bestowing a quick kiss on Margaret's cheek. "You should see the fashion plates she drew as a child. Well, to be fair, some of them were better than this."

"Take that back!" Margaret hissed. "I have to wear this next week!"

John entered the room and nodded to Mrs. Coleridge, who smiled brightly at him.

"John! It has been so long since we've seen you at the draper's. You never stop by."

"I apologize, Mrs. Coleridge. The mill keeps me busy."

"Well, with Mr. Coleridge gone these years, I suppose there is less call for you to visit."

"But it has always been a pleasure to talk with you, even in the absence of your husband." John glanced at Margaret. "As my wife has not yet had time to order her trousseau, perhaps I might accompany her one day, and spend some time in both your company."

The elderly woman blushed. "I'd like that, John. You are a very lucky young lady, Mrs. Thornton."

"Is your father ready?" John asked, as he turned to his wife.

"He is very excited, to be sure," Margaret replied. "I have not seen him so engaged in weeks. I think this outing will do him good."

"I will collect him, if you will check with Cook about the hamper."

The pair excused themselves and their group was soon on its way.

Although they did not have the luxury of Watson's Gorman for this trip, the brougham sufficed and it did not take long to reach the ruin. It was just as Margaret remembered, apart from the flowers. As it was late September, the meadow was mostly bloomed out, and the grass was no longer bright green but faded to warm shades of yellow. Still, the scene was lovely, and the day unseasonably warm for early autumn, quite warm enough for a pic-nic.

John and the driver alighted from the brougham, and Richard prepared to do so, as well, but Margaret urged him to stay.

"Papa," she asked, "would you ride to the crest of the hill with me? John insists I not walk, and I would rather not ride alone. But it is not fair to the horses to carry all three of us up such a steep incline."

"Certainly, Margaret." Mr. Hale patted his daughter on the knee, and looked out the window at the view of Milton that presented itself as the carriage slowly ascended the rise. Then, as Margaret had, he caught his breath as the abbey presented itself to him.

"Ah, this is not quite as Parker described it. I was expecting the cloister to be standing, but I believe what we are seeing here is the nave." The trio walked inside the large space bounded on two sides by thirty-foot walls. Mr. Hale rushed to one wall, nearly tripping on a tussock of moss in his haste.
He smiled in recognition as he ran his hands over the elaborate geometric tracery of the lowest arcade of blind arches. "Here are trefoil arches, and above them are the plain-pointed arches Bloxam described," he called out with some enthusiasm.

Margaret laughed as she walked toward her father, arm in arm with John.

"With the roof missing, it is as though the arches are pointing to heaven, would you not agree?" The former vicar looked upward into a sky unsullied by clouds.

The trio wandered the site for a while, until Mr. Hale had his fill of the limestone structure. Then John suggested they journey father down the meadow to the stream he and Margaret had visited once before. After a quick, whispered conversation with his wife, it was decided that all would take the brougham to the site.

But Richard Hale would not comply. He wanted to enjoy the hay meadow, he said, and would not take no for an answer, so the trio walked the distance instead, and the brougham met them at the stream.

Margaret hoped the bee orchids she'd seen months earlier would still be in bloom. She thought her father might recognize them from their former home. But only their rosetted leaves were still visible- the flowers had long gone to seed. But the site did not disappoint, although it was Mr. Hale who cried out in surprise at the site of a Helstone resident.

"This is devil's bit scabious!" he exclaimed.

He picked a stem of the pin-cushion-like flower and offered it to his daughter. She examined the blue-purple flower and a memory of a butterfly-filled, boggy field presented itself to her.

"Were these by Heron Pond?" she asked her father.

"Yes," he nodded. "Not so far from the cottages that were about to be torn down."

Margaret laughed. "Papa, do you remember the crowns we-I- used to make as a child?" She smiled at her father, then at John. "I will make one for each of you." She ran off to collect the raw materials, as her husband gazed after her.

"I forget how young she is," she heard John say just before she was out of earshot. "She's left me to do the women's work, I see. Will you help me with the blanket?"

Margaret returned with an armful of blue flowers, but set them aside to serve her companions a filling luncheon of steak and kidney pie (her father's favorite), Suffolk salad, windsor beans, pickled peaches and walnuts, queen cakes, and a gooseberry fool, with claret and ginger beer as potables.

She did not forget the coachman, of course, who was happy to finish off the leftovers. She returned to the blanket to find her husband and father stretched out and dozing in the warm afternoon sun. She sat beside them quietly, and fashioned a crown for each. Carefully, she propped them across the forehead of each man, and sat back, wishing she had a sketch pad to capture the image.

Margaret contemplated the two most important men in her life. They each had brought her immeasurable happiness, although in different ways. Mama had once said that daughters married men like their fathers. But Papa was nothing like John. They were as different as day and night. Perhaps it could be said that both were thinkers, but surely that was the only thing they had in common. Papa was gentle- almost feminine- while John was rough. And while it could not be said that her husband was brutish, or coarse, as once she had feared, for Margaret John very much remained the holotype for man. He defined the word "masculine."
Margaret glanced at the two men lying sleeping in the sun, and suppressed a giggle as she noticed a fluttering of wings about them. The fragrant wreath each wore had attracted a good number of marsh fritillaries, and the orange-brown butterflies flitted back and forth between the two men as if the yellow blanket were a tiny meadow of its own. John awoke with a start when one kissed him on the lips. He sat up and looked at the wreath questioningly as it slid into his lap, then placed the blue and green annulus on Margaret's head. She smiled as a portion of the fritillaries flew immediately in her direction. Despite John's movement, Papa continued to sleep, much to Margaret's relief. Her father seemed so peaceful with his coronet of flowers, not so far different from the laurel-wreathed heroes of his beloved classical era.

The clear sky had changed to a cloudy one by the time the former vicar awakened, and the warmth of the day had dissipated by the time the blanket was folded and the hamper packed up. The sky was spitting by the time they reached the crest of the hill, and a steady rain greeted them when they entered the mill courtyard.

Regardless, the day had been a success.

"There is an hour until dinner," Margaret pointed out, after checking the time on John's pocket watch. "Papa, will you be joining us at the table tonight?"

"Yes, I think so. I will need to check with Maria, of course." Father kissed daughter before ascending the wide staircase.

"Margaret?" John asked. "Will you join me in the library?" He beckoned for her to follow him, the smallest of smiles upon his face.

A paper-wrapped bundle sat on her writing table, and Margaret gazed at her husband quizzically.

"Open it," he said. "It will make sense to you, once you do."

She removed paper and string and found three books: a German-English dictionary, a French-English dictionary, and a thin volume entitled, "Mémoire sur le paupérisme." She did not understand until John placed the tattered copy of Boucher's book beside the volumes.

"I should not have taken this away from you," John said apologetically. "And surely I should have returned it to you long before now." He ran his hands through his hair in a gesture of frustration Margaret recognized. "It's just that I wanted you to have both sides of the story. A long time ago, back when I was working for Mr. Coleridge, I had aspirations."

Margaret laughed. "Surely you did not lose them!"

"No," John smiled. "I did not. I mean to say I was as driven then as I am now. I read the Guardian and any other paper available to me, because I wanted to continue my education as best I could, even though a formal opportunity had been taken from me."

Margaret nodded.

"A book came out during that time, and for some reason, when we argued last month and you mentioned de Tocqueville, I remembered it. It took me some time to track it down. I had to find the title first, and that took a bit of digging. But the Exchange has a good library with back issues—"

"You looked through years of newspapers for me?"

"Of course. And then the book had to be special ordered, as most Milton book sellers do not stock books in French."
"A Memoir on Pauperism?" Margaret translated the title.

"I think you will find it a balanced viewpoint to that of Mr. Engels," John said with a frown. "I was hoping you might write out your thoughts of each, so that we could discuss them."

"I would be happy to. Are you thinking of a translation?"

"No, not anything as detailed as that. Simply a synopsis and your thoughts. Enough information so that I am on an equal footing when we ultimately argue about this." Her husband smiled ruefully.

Margaret rested her hand against her husband's chest and smiled placatingly. "I do not want to argue."

"Nor do I. But I realize we will not always agree, and furthermore that I cannot forbid you to read things that might cause you to arrive at a different point of view. You are your own person, Margaret. Much as I might want us to agree, I know that I cannot force it."

"Thank you, John." She rested her head against his chest. He kissed her crown and then released her.

"You should check on your father. Mother will want a firm number for dinner."

Margaret nodded and left the room. She looked in on Mama first. She hadn't dressed, although at some point during the day Dixon had styled her hair. The two were dozing now, Mama propped up against several pillows, Dixon slumped in a wing chair. Margaret crept away silently.

Next she looked in on Papa.

He was sleeping, too, although he hadn't undressed. The day must have tired him, Margaret realized: he'd lain down atop the counterpane without even removing his shoes. She approached her father and whispered his name softly.

"Papa?"

Perhaps she should just let him sleep. Cook could certainly send up a cold plate later, or a special meal, just as she would do for Mama. Margaret collected an afghan from the foot board of the bed, and unfolded it as she moved closer to her father. He looked so peaceful as he slept, just as he had this afternoon at the pic-nic.

She laid the blanket across his supine figure, and leaned over him to tuck the blanket against him. He was so still, almost statue-like.

"Papa?" she asked again.

He was too still.

"Papa!"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again to everyone who continues to read this story, and especially to those of
you who take the time to leave reviews. They keep me going. This week was particularly difficult for me. My work had a bit of a crisis to deal with, and I ended up doing unpaid overtime over the holiday weekend, which of course, delayed my finishing this chapter. Ugh. I'm tired.

Now for the historical notes: The tortoise stove was a small cylindrical stove that was invented in 1830 by Charles Portway and used throughout the Victorian era. It was lined in ceramic, and burned anthracite coal slowly and efficiently, like a tortoise. The Portway company still makes highly efficient stoves.

When they visit the abbey ruin, Richard Hale refers to two authors. John Henry Parker wrote numerous books on ecclesiastical architecture during the Victorian period. An Introduction to the Study of Gothic Architecture (1849) might have been in Hale's collection. Likewise, Matthew Bloxam was author of Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture (1844).

The pic-nic dishes mentioned are from Eliza Acton's Modern Cookery In All Its Branches(1846), as mentioned in previous chapters.

The butterfly mentioned, the marsh fritillary, is a threatened species in the United Kingdom today, but it is still found in the New Forest and (rarely) in the Manchester area. However in the Victoria era it was abundant all over. Its host plant is devil's bit scabious a blue-flowered plant which is in the honeysuckle family. It is food source for both marsh fritillary butterflies and caterpillars. These plants are rare nowadays, which is why the butterfly is also rare.

In the previous chapter Margaret mentioned Alexis de Tocqueville, who had visited the US and written the seminal work Democracy in America. This book’s point of view would fit with John's worldview. De Tocqueville also published a lesser-known work in 1835, Memoir on Pauperism: Does Public Charity Produce an Idle And Dependent Class of Society?, which looked at the causes of the high rate of pauperism in industrialized nations, using England as a model. It is a contrast to Engel's point of view. However, this book was not translated into English until 1968, so it would have been necessary for Margaret to read the original in French.
Warning: The events of the last chapter exacerbate. If you are processing any pregnancy-related grief, you may want to skip this chapter.

John had never before heard the sound of keening, but both his body and mind responded to it instinctively. His journey up the stairs to ready for dinner altered immediately from a leisurely climb to a fevered scramble, and his heart pounded as his mind readily formed the worst possible conclusions.

Margaret's voice was loud enough for him to locate her without any trouble. She was crumpled by the side of Mr. Hale's bed, half kneeling, her skirts in a puddle around her. Her torso was draped over her father's body, her hand intertwined in his, her face buried against the man's unbreathing chest.

"Margaret?" John whispered as he approached her slowly.

She did not hear. She continued her half-sobbing, half-moaning sounds and John was struck by their primal nature.

John knelt beside her and lay his hand on her back, rubbing slow, wide circles in an attempt to soothe her. He felt the staccato of her spasmed breaths as her grief flowed forth unabated.

"Margaret?" he asked again. "Margaret!"

She was quite alone, he realized, insensible of her surroundings.

Gently, he pulled her from her embrace, and into his own arms.

"What's all this noise?"

The dragon appeared at the door, and John steeled himself for an eruption of fire and brimstone at the man's impertinence at dying before his wife. But to her credit Dixon kept her peace. And like the good servant she was, deep down inside, she teared up at the loss of her master. But she ruined it. It
really was too much to expect she could be on good behavior for more than the time needed to string three or four thoughts together.

"Poor Miss Margaret," she murmured as she began to enter the room.

"I trust you will inform Mrs. Hale," John responded somewhat irritably, his tone effectively stopping her cold. "Please leave us. As you can see, Mrs. Thornton is not herself."

He returned his attentions to his wife. He crooned her name gently, and used his handkerchief to wipe the wetness from her face. She still was not there, however. And the tears continued to flow.

He picked her up, and prepared to carry her down the hall to the master bedroom. It made no sense for Margaret to remain in this room, with the body. Mr. Hale. John allowed himself the briefest moment of anguish, then fastened the shutters against the storm.

"Margaret," he said gently, once they entered their room, in a voice as quiet and gentle as one would use with a fevered child, "I am going to get you ready for bed. Do you understand?"

His wife did not respond, and when John set her down she simply stood where she was placed with a vacant expression that reminded him of the German doll he had bought Fanny many years before.

How old was his sister then? Nine or ten? Fan had seen the doll in the window of the elegant Lewis and Farnett, a store they did not have the means to patronize at the time. But that was his sister's favorite place to window shop and she had been adamant that she needed that doll. She did not get it for her birthday, and was quite disappointed, but by foregoing his mid-day meal for the next six months John was able to buy it for his sister for Christmas. The doll was of wax over papier-mâché, with perfect, tiny teeth, a blond mohair wig in ringlets, and had remarkable paperweight eyes that possessed the trick of being able to follow you across the room. But despite these lifelike eyes, the doll wore an uncanny expression, the same one Margaret wore now. It was an expression that made him look again and again, in an effort to pinpoint exactly what was off.

His wife had stopped weeping, but really, this current state of vacancy did not seem an improvement. John gazed at her with concern, then carefully began unbuttoning her gown. She did not seem aware of what he was doing. She stared unblinkingly at the room's damasked curtains, her reddened eyes wider than they normally appeared. She seemed astonished, and locked into a singular moment of remembrance.

"Can you lift your arm?" John asked. She did not comply, but doll-like, did not fight him when he lifted it for her. He removed her bodice and unfastened her skirt, guiding it to her ankles. Her lace-trimmed petticoat followed the skirt, and then the first of her crinolines. His brow creased as he noticed a shilling-sized spot marring the perfect whiteness of the stiffened fabric. He pulled the garment down and cried out in confusion. Here was another spot, but larger, much larger than the first. It was wet, and crimson, and its iron scent was unmistakable. He pulled the garment away and found her chemise completely soaked through with blood.

John ran for the door and roared his mother's name.

Immediately he heard the scrape of chair against wood floor, followed by the clatter of heels.

His mother joined them, breathless, her face pale with worry. "What has happened, John?" But he had no time to answer as Mrs. Thornton immediately took in the scene and then took charge of the situation. "Oh, Margaret. You poor dear. John, don't just stand there. Go to the dressing room and find some towels. Not the best ones, if you can help it. And tell Fanny I need her cloths, as I'll never find Margaret's in time. She'll understand. And then have Stokes fetch the doctor. Margaret,
Margaret, can you hear me? John, what is wrong with her?"

John did not hear this last question as he had already left, but he returned immediately to deliver a stack of fine white towels to his waiting mother. Then he left to send Stokes on his way. He found Fanny sitting in the dining room alone, working on dinner.

"What is all the hubbub?" she asked, her mouth half filled with roast capon. "It's quite vulgar to be yelling like that in front of the servants, you know. Such things won't happen in my home, you can be sure of that."

John sighed. "Mr. Hale has passed."

"And that requires you yelling, John? I should have thought it was obvious that the man had not long to live." She bit into a forkful of scalloped potatoes and chewed daintily.

"Must you be so- so-"

"So, what, John? So observant?"

"So cold." He turned away.

"When is the funeral, then? Will it conflict with my wedding?"

"I have no idea, Fanny. I've not thought that far ahead. I have other things on my mind."

"She's ruined it!" His sister stood up suddenly. "My wedding! Margaret won't be able to wear her gown now. In fact, she won't be able to be matron of honor at all if she's in mourning! I will have no one to attend me!"

"Is that all you can think of? Margaret's father is dead, and your thoughts are on that lace monstrosity? And yourself? I'm sure you have plenty of other friends who would be happy to be maid of honor at Milton's wedding of the year."

"Of course you take her side, John. At least she had a father all these years. But you wouldn't even think of that, would you?"

John rubbed the crease between his eyebrows in a futile effort to ward off the headache that had blossomed there like a poisonous flower.

"I take her side because she is my wife" he spat. "Just as Watson will take your side. You will be marrying him- that has not changed despite Mr. Hale's passing."

"No." Fanny pursed her lips, annoyed at the lack of a rejoinder.

John took a deep breath and attempted to calm himself. "Mother said I should ask you for something."

"Oh? And what's that?"

"Your cloths."

"My what?" Fanny's skin turned a vivid shade of cerise, and John wondered exactly what he'd asked for.

He shrugged his shoulders."She said you would understand," he added helpfully.
"You think you're funny, John, don't you?" Fanny's blush did not subside and she crossed her arms across her chest as though she were being called upon to defend her virtue.

Comprehension dawned on him belatedly. This was some woman's product he'd asked for, and his sister was eager to continue the pretense that such things did not exist. For heaven forbid that a man, or a brother be aware of the realities of female physiology.

He'd had enough of Fanny's simpering, of her selfishness, of her ridiculousness.

"If you don't believe me, go up and ask Mother yourself. Or don't. I'm sure my wife and I can make do without you." He turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.

His sister ran after him, stopping him at the bottom of the wide staircase.

"What happened? What is wrong, John? Please tell me."

His voice cracked. "Margaret has had a miscarriage."

"A miscarriage?" Fanny's eyes widened in disbelief. "But why did nobody tell me she was with child?"

"We tried," John spat. "At my birthday dinner. You would not listen."

"Oh, John. I am so sorry." She reached out to console him, but he moved past her.

"Yes. So am I." He continued up the stairs.

John's mother tried to shoo him away when he returned to his bedroom. Margaret was installed in the bed, and thankfully she was sleeping. And like the doctor's daughter she was, his mother had the situation well in hand. Margaret was in chemise only, and that hiked up around her hips. His mother pulled up a sheet to cover her but not before John saw that blood had oozed onto the towel below Margaret's pelvis. More blood.

"I gave her some laudanum as she was beginning to cramp. You shouldn't be here, John. I don't think Margaret would want you-"

"She is my wife. We have no secrets."

His mother barked a laugh.

"She needs, me mother. Her father is dead."

Mrs. Thornton looked at her son is astonishment. "That is why..." she said.

John nodded. "She is lost."

The elder raven smoothed Margaret's hair. "Did Fanny give you the cloths?"

John glowered. "She did not believe that you had asked for them and picked a fight. I would assume Margaret has some?"

His mother sighed at her daughter's truculence. "Yes, you might rummage through her bureau. If not, I will make do."

John did as his mother asked, and eventually found the stack of white squares of fabric that seemed to be such a secret among the women of the household. They were at the very bottom of the bottom-
most drawer, in the very back, under garments he'd never once seen Margaret wear.

His mother accepted the covert cloths, and set them on the bed, then turned to her son with compassion in her eyes. But when she spoke, her voice was firm.

"Now go downstairs and wait for the doctor. I will not allow you to be in the room for his examination, John. It is likely to cause her great discomfort."

"Then I must be here."

"No. I will not allow it, John."

"Mother, I am head of this household."

She did not reply, but her expression, one he had never seen before, was one that brooked no further objection. John had always known his mother was a woman of iron will. But this was something more. She was adamantine.

John sat in the library, an open ledger book before him, red-dipped quill in hand. He had made no progress in the review of the household accounts, however, as his knowledge of basic arithmetic had seemingly vanished. The figures did distract him for a time, however, as the amounts that had been spent on Fanny's wedding were absolutely mind-boggling. He might have been able to buy a partnership at the draper's for all that had been spent there. Twenty-five yards of Honiton lace, the most expensive lace made in England? Clearly Fanny thought he was made of money. Either that or she intended to bankrupt him.

But even Fanny's antics could serve as distraction for only so long. Again and again, John found himself looking up at the ceiling and listening carefully for any sounds that might give him a clue as to what was transpiring in the room above him. In the past hour, he had heard several moans that made him clench his fists in apprehension, but now it was quiet upstairs. Hopefully, that was a good sign.

Finally, he heard a tread on the stairs that could only be the doctor's. John met him at the library doorway and did not stand on the formalities of offering him a drink, or even a seat.

"How is she?" he demanded.

"She will live." Dr. Donaldson slid past him, and sank into the settee that stood below the windows. He sighed, while John's eyes widened as he belatedly registered the man's words.

"I-I did not know there was a question of that."

"There is sometimes a risk of hemorrhage, yes." The doctor removed a handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his forehead wearily. "However, everything is under control. Your mother was a help in this. I was quite surprised by her skills." The doctor frowned. "You must understand that the child could not be saved. So early on, this is rarely a possibility."

That did not matter, although John would never say this aloud. He mourned his child: of that there was no question. But although he knew if was terribly selfish to even think it, to John, Margaret's life outweighed all others.

"I understand," the manufacturer said instead, his face a well-schooled mask.

"She will need to stay in bed the week, of course. This is not much different from a confinement
following labor and delivery, you see. The demand on the body is similar."

"But her father's funeral is likely to be midweek."

"That is out of the question." The doctor quirked an eyebrow. "And surely it is no place for such a lady."

"She will want to attend," John mused aloud, and was irritated to see the look on the doctor's face, which communicated clearly that it was his job as husband to control his wife.

John changed the subject. "What caused the miscarriage?" he asked.

The doctor frowned. "It is not completely understood what makes a womb irritable. Did your wife suffer an injury in the past day?"

John's forehead wrinkled as he shook his head.

"Has she been particularly active?"

"No more so than usual. My wife has always enjoyed walking, and surely her body is well-adjusted to it."

"Yes. I've seen her out and about on occasion." The doctor gave him another judgmental stare, one that said proper wives did not gallivant through the streets of Milton, particularly not through the poorer streets. "Was it she who found Mr. Hale, per chance?"

John nodded. "She was fully overcome."

"Well, that may well be the cause. Such a shock to the system could be devastating." The physician nodded. "Yes, that is my opinion. You should not be overly concerned, however. Mrs. Thornton is fine specimen of a woman and will bounce back from this. You will have a family, soon enough."

John felt the bile rising in his throat. His wife's pain had just been breezily dismissed by the healer sitting not six feet away from him. And this man had just referred to his wife as an object.

"I am sure my wife mourns the loss of this family, Dr. Donaldson."

"Yes, women are sentimental creatures. Give it two weeks before initiating any congress, my good man."

And now this doctor suggested in one breath his wife was a beast, and in the next described a schedule for intimate relations.

John's fingernails incised crescent-moon-shaped cuts on his palms. He rose and crossed the room to inspect a volume- any volume- on cotton manufacturing. It was a moment before he was calm enough to speak.

"How did Mr. Hale die?"

"His heart was irreparably damaged by the first attack. It was simply his time," the doctor replied, and John nearly laughed aloud. Fanny had made much the same certification only a few hours prior. Perhaps she should go into medicine.

The doctor opened his leather satchel and rummaged in it, producing two flyers. He crossed the room and proffered the documents to the once-and-future father.
"Wilson Brothers are closest to you, but both of these are reputable undertakers."

John examined the topmost document. It was a price list. He wondered idly if these tradesman gave the doctor a small slice of the profits for sending business their way. That would be good business sense, but it also would be ethically corrupt. A surreptitious glance at the doctor told John all he needed to know about the doctor's standards. The man's satisfied half-grin suggested he would readily accept such inducements.

John leaned against the bookcase as he examined the flyer further. "You'll understand if I don't see you out," he said brusquely to the physician. "I have a lot to take care of in the next few days."

It was midnight when Hannah found her son sitting in a room that was completely dark, save the small pool of light emitted by the shaded lamp on his desk.

"I am sorry, John," mother said to son, as she embraced him.

"I never imagined such a thing happening."

Hannah said nothing. She knew her words would have no power to heal, and would likely only get in the way. Her son continued after a time, and the desolation she saw in his eyes was like a stab in her own heart.

"I so wanted to be a father."

Hannah knelt by him and took his hand in her own. She rubbed it between her own, as she did when he was young. Perhaps it brought him some small consolation.

"She was devastated. And mother, she did not know me."

Hannah had to speak. She knew something of what Margaret was going through, after all. "Son, she was in shock. She had just lost her father. And then her body betrayed her."

"I know." John nodded. "Her loss is immense." He sighed. "We need to plan the funeral. The doctor left some information. Would you be willing to look through it now? I know it's late."

Hannah readily agreed. It was clear her son would not be retiring for some time. And if he was to have a sleepless night, she would gladly give up her own.

"It's been some time since I've visited an undertaker," she said as she perused the first flyer. "These prices are excessive. Surely a rank III funeral would be below us. But a rank II funeral is £90."

John sighed. "That is a good amount of money. And after Fanny's wedding..."

"Yet that is the level that is to be expected. When Harkness's mother passed last year, her procession had twenty paid attendants. I counted."

"My father requires no attendants."

Hannah and her son looked up to see Margaret standing in the doorway like a specter in the glow of a low-burning candle. Hannah could forgive her the fact that her hair was down, as all of the house's mirrors were covered, but the girl was dressed only in her thin cotton nightdress, with no robe or slippers. She gave no thought to propriety.

"Why are you out of bed?" Hannah regretted her tone of voice immediately. Clearly Margaret must be confused. A draught of laudanum would do that to anyone, although by now its effects might
have worn off, at least partially.

"I am not tired. And I am not feeling so horrible. I wanted something to read." Margaret entered the room, and Hannah noticed how the girl's small hand crept across her belly. She was lying about her condition- Hannah could see the pain in her daughter-in-law's face.

"Margaret," she said more softly, "These are Dr. Donaldson's orders. It is not good for you to be up and about. You may-" she glanced at John before continuing, "disturb things. Please. Let me take you back up to bed."

The stubborn girl shook her head. "No. You were talking about Papa's funeral. Certainly my opinion counts in this matter."

"It does, my love." The intensity of the look between son and wife was almost embarrassing. "Mother, surely Margaret can lie down on the settee? She is right, she should be a part of this conversation."

Hannah's headstrong son did not wait for a reply. He settled his wife on the small couch with tender movements, and knelt beside her as he began to speak to her about the funeral plans. His wife, full of opinions as usual, spoke up right away.

"As I said, I do not see the purpose of paid attendants. You are talking about those men who stand silent, are you not? Those mutes? I will admit I know little of funerals, as Bessy's was my first. In Helstone, there was no undertaker and funerals were a simple affair. Of course I had seen processions in London, but I did not realize the participants were paid. Why would one want strangers at such a private occasion, let alone pay them?"

"Because that is how it is done," both mother and son said simultaneously.

"Show me the paper you are looking at," Margaret said somewhat imperiously, and in her condition, Hannah did not feel she could refuse. She obliged, bringing candle, as well.

"The scarves the mutes wear cost a pound each?" her daughter-in-law noted as he examined the flyer. "That is a week's wages for a spinner. And the scarves are just for hire, are they not? Surely they do not cost more than one pound each for the fabric, do they? And here it is the same for the feathers and velvets worn by the horses." Margaret looked up the prices. "Three pounds, three shillings to outfit just the horses for the hearse. What a fortune these undertakers are making, hiring out the very same items over and again. But why does the horse even need to wear feathers? Why do the carriages need to be draped in velvet? Why must a man we have never met before carry a plume of feathers? And why an oaken coffin lined in lead, when an elm one will do just as well?" Margaret shook her head. "No, I do not think Papa would want such a production made of his burial. I cannot allow this." Her eyes ran down the page to glance at the total, and she paled as she took in the figure. She tried to sit up, but John persuaded her otherwise. Still, she made her thoughts known. The girl always did. But now her aspect was increasingly anxious, her voice almost shrill. "£90? Mama and I cannot afford such a funeral, anyway. Even with Mama's annuity we do not have the income. That is an obscene amount of money to spend on something so immaterial."

"Margaret," John said gently, "you are part of this family now, as are your mother and father. We have been over this. We will take on the cost as a family."

Tears welled in the girl's eyes, and Hannah grew alarmed. It was not good for her to be feeling such strong emotions at such a time.

"John, please take her upstairs. It is imperative that Margaret return to bed. We will resolve this at
John gathered his wife into his arms. "Can you take the candlestick?" he asked his mother. She claimed two.

His mother accompanied them upstairs, stopping just outside the green room. "I had Jane make up the room for you, son. Margaret will be more comfortable on her own," she said, handing him one of the two candles before continuing down the hall.

John ignored her suggestion.

He pushed open the door to the master bedroom with his foot and carefully settled Margaret in the bed. Clearly she had been lying about being tired, as she fell asleep almost instantly.

John surveyed the room by the light of the single candle as he considered his mother's words. It didn't matter to him that the bed was stripped to remove the elegant damask furnishings, or that a stack of clean towels stood at the ready on the bedside table. He would rather be in a sick room with Margaret than in the most elegant room without her. And he refused to believe she would not want him by her side.

He dressed for bed, and settled in next to his wife, draping his arm across her possessively. She sighed as he nestled against her, taking his hand in her own and kissing it, then tucking it against her breast.

"Margaret?" he asked. There was no reply. She was still asleep.

He allowed himself a small liberty, then, one he'd foregone the entire evening.

He thought of the man his father was, of the father Mr. Hale had been to him, and of the father he had hoped to become.

And, silently, he allowed himself to cry.

Author's notes: This is chapter is about an uncomfortable real-life topic, and is probably depressing as a result, so I will point out that this story is meant to reflect the reality of life, not fantasy. (If you've read this far, you've probably already realized this, though... I am trying to write John and Margaret as real people with real joys and concerns.) I do promise a happy-at-the-end-of-the-story for our dear couple, but be warned that in getting there they will encounter some additional bumps in the road. Things will get better for them, however, and hopefully they will both grow as a result of their struggles. Thank you for sticking with it!

Note that Margaret's point of view is not represented in this chapter. That will be upcoming, as she recovers.

Thank you to everyone who continues to read and review. I appreciate your support! This story is a bit of a safety valve for me- the time I spend on research and writing helps me to cope with a very stressful real-life job. So the fact that people are enjoying what I write makes me very, very happy, indeed. I really appreciate your kind words. It balances out the nonsense I am currently dealing with.

And now for the historical notes, which keep getting longer and longer (I apologize...) Please skip if you are squeamish.

About Margaret's miscarriage: About ten to twenty percent of known pregnancies miscarry. That is a
very large number. And if you are among those of us who have experienced one, you probably already know that eighty percent occur within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. Given the timing of this story, Margaret is right on the borderline: one week more and she might have been safe. Frustratingly, modern medicine still does not know the source of most miscarriages. (Dr. Donaldson’s explanation is the Victorian one, and is based on what is written in the book, Obstetrics: The Science and the Art, by Charles D. Meigs, 1852. It is not at all scientific, and rather mother-blaming.) We do know today that a subset are caused by chromosomal and developmental defects in the fetus. For a very long time, maternal stress was dismissed as a cause of miscarriage. The thing that is funny about part of Dr. Donaldson's explanation is that recent studies have shown that extreme stress is indeed a possible cause for some early miscarriages. This is not low-level stress, but catastrophic levels of stress that cause the body to release two chemicals. One tags the fetus as foreign (similar to the way the body tags an allergen as foreign, which the body will then attack) and the other, the same chemical produced during labor, begins the process of contracting the uterus, as in labor. Scientists hypothesize that the body is deciding it can't support the pregnancy under such stressful conditions. Could Margaret’s body have been going into this shock-like process over her father's death on top of the stress of dealing with her mother's illness? Maybe. An explanation is always more comforting than uncertainty.

Victorian treatment for a miscarriage was typically to let it take its course, which would take variable amounts of time and would involve variable amount of cramping and bleeding. Doctors would often use home made tampons to staunch blood flow, but the key directive given patients was to lie flat to avoid hemorrhage. Margaret is ignoring the doctor's instructions, which is why Hannah begins to become alarmed.

About the cloths: I spend way too much time wondering about weird details from the past- the small things that we take for granted today, like bathrooms, dental hygiene, and yes, menstruation. Because information about the latter was typically not written down by women (out of shame) there currently is a lot of misinformation floating around out there about this topic. One big misconception is that women simply bled into their clothing. But this would be not only unhygienic, it would be a nightmare to deal with come wash day. (One form of bleach powder had been invented by 1851, but was not commonly in use at this time. Lye soap would have been used instead, which is highly damaging to clothes. I can't imagine Margaret or any other woman taking lye soap and a scrub brush to an expensive petticoat when she could be washing a scrap of fabric instead.)

Despite the misinformation, there is information out there about what women did use during their "courses." The device used was called a perineal cravat, and information about it can be found in medical books of the era (such as Obstetrics: The Science and the Art, as described above.) Note that the author of this book even mentions that he has been told by his patients that unless a woman's "catamenial occasion" was unusually light, she would definitely not be bleeding into her petticoat. Rather, she would be using 12 to 20 "guard-napkins" each month. To make the device, she would tie a ribbon or strip of cloth around her waist like a belt. An absorbent cloth, which became the guard-napkin, was folded lengthwise, like a cravat, and went between the legs, and was pinned on each end to the belt. In that regard the device was like the belts used by women from the 1900s through the mid-1970s, except that those contraptions used disposable pads (which were still called "napkins," back then, at least in the U.S.). At any rate, these guard-napkins cannot have been very comfortable, but they certainly would have beat staining ones lovely white petticoats and drawers.

About the funeral preparations: I relied on a document from the 1840s, and two books: The Victorian Celebration of Death, by James S. Curl, and Death in the Victorian Family by Patricia Jalland. I found that upper middle-class funerals had similarities but also key differences from the impoverished/working-class funeral I described earlier. For instance, the hoods worn by lower class people did not appear to be worn by middle and upper class people as they are only listed in undertakers' bills for the lowest level funerals. However, for all levels of society funerals grew in
ostentation starting in the mid- to late 1700s, and by the early 1800s, it was imperative to outlay ridiculous amounts of money on the funerals of family members.

In 1843, Edwin Chadwick was asked by Parliament to research funeral practices as there was a concern about both the health issues caused by burial in church yards and the exorbitant cost of funerals. As part of his study Chadwick detailed the amounts spent on funerals by different classes of society. Although it was done eight years before the time of this story, I found his study was nonetheless helpful in getting an idea of what would be purchased and how much would be spent on a funeral that someone like Hannah might be planning.

Chadwick's report states that the cost of the very cheapest funeral for a working-class family, like the Higgenses, would be about £8. This would include use of hoods and gloves for the female family members, 4 crape bands for the male family members, an elm coffin, use of a pall to cover the coffin, and a gin allowance for the men digging the grave. According to John Benson's The Working Class in Britain 1850-1939, in 1850, spinners, the best paid cotton mill workers, made 23 shillings a week, or about 60 pounds per year. Therefore, a funeral would have eaten up about a seventh of the Higgenses' yearly budget.

For the middle and upper classes, funeral costs were much more substantial, as the frills were greater, and the number of men, horses and carriages included in the procession many more. For a curate (assistant pastor), the average cost of a funeral was £60 and necessitated the hiring of 14 men. For a well-to-do tradesman like John, the average funeral cost would be £70 to £100, whereas for a gentleman the normal range was £200 to £1000. And if a person had a title, the cost was in the range of £500 to £1500.

To put all of this in perspective, note that Hales were paying £30 a year in rent for their four bedroom Crampton house. The inexpensive curate's funeral cost twice that. For fun (assuming you are like me, ha-ha!), you might want to consider how much is paid in rent per year in your area for a four bedroom, middle-class house and compare that to the average cost of a funeral nowadays. In the UK, average funeral cost is currently £4,100. In the US, $7,000 to $10,000.

In 1852, a year after this story takes place, the Duke of Wellington died. Although he was not royalty, he was a hero, and he had a state funeral that cost an amazing £11,000. It was an incredibly ostentatious affair. (If you are interested in seeing a book containing a 66-foot-long panoramic drawing of his procession, Google "Wellington's Funeral, A Damned Serious Business." It is over the top.) An estimated £80,000 was spent on seats for the event, and additionally there was a huge business selling souvenirs (who knew he had so much hair?). As a result of these excesses, a backlash began to build among the higher levels of society. From the mid-1850s on, the upper classes began to scale back on funerals, but in contrast, the lower and middle classes actually increased their spending. Curl's book shows a photo of a funeral in an impoverished section of London in 1895 and it is a truly impressive sight, replete with wand-bearing mutes, horses with ostrich plumes, and a hearse with a lid of ostrich feathers. It is hard to imagine how the poor were able to afford such displays.

In 1851, Margaret would have been a bit ahead of the curve in demanding a small funeral for her father. However, after the 1843 study I mentioned earlier, there were already a number of voices crying out for reform, and several well-known figures had already made sure they were buried in less than excessive style. As Margaret was reform-minded and very concerned about the useless spending of money when so many were going hungry I think this is an issue she would have cared about. Additionally, I think a former parson such as Richard would not have wanted such a display. He would have been uncomfortable with the nouveau-richness of it all, particularly when there were so many in Milton who were hungry and out of work.
This chapter is partially from Margaret's point of view, so it has her thoughts regarding the sad events of the previous chapter. Additionally this chapter deals obliquely with sexuality. Although NO sex actually takes place, but there is innuendo and the author notes contain a frank discussion of Victorian sexuality. Please let me know any concerns.

The flooding, as Dr. Donaldson so poetically described it, had abated. It was Thursday, and Margaret was feeling much better, physically, than earlier in the week. She was not lying down, however, despite the doctor's explicit instructions that she lie flat and keep herself unoccupied. She'd tried, valiantly, for several days. But each day had stretched ahead of her like yawning chasm. And John's kisses and caresses before leaving for work were not enough to preemptively mitigate the effects of hours of loneliness and contemplation.

The doctor had said that she mustn't burden herself with heavy thoughts. But what light thoughts could she think at a time like this? Should she be thinking of redecorating the house, perhaps? Or of the trousseau she still had not purchased? How could that be possible, when there were was one cold body and another, so tiny, to push all other thoughts aside?

She could not lie flat in bed. Rather, Margaret made her way downstairs in search of the mourning stationery she was sure John had procured from the undertaker. There was little chance of getting caught out: John, his mother and Fanny were at the funeral, and would not be home for some time, and the servants were likely below stairs.

Nonetheless, Margaret listened carefully before proceeding down the hallway to the library. Although she was technically mistress of the house, she had no illusions about who was really in charge. The servants, who loved their tittle-tattle, would tattle with alacrity should they find her out of bed. Margaret hurried into the library and shut the double doors quietly behind her, then scanned John's well-organized desk top for the black-edged papers and envelopes she required. She found a stack of each right away, but quickly realized that the flooding of another kind was nowhere close to ending.

It was funny that she might touch her face and find it completely wet with tears. How could she be so completely unaware that she was weeping? Certainly something so symbolic of death as a black-rimmed envelope might trigger tears, but clearly these had been falling long before that.

John was right. She was in no condition to attend a funeral.

Of course, that morning she had insisted she attend. She felt well enough. And surely her father should have one of his own kin there to pay her respects! But there had been no question of Margaret attending. This was her period of confinement, her mother-in-law had told her in no uncertain terms. There was no shame in mourning her father privately. John had said almost the very same words, hours earlier, although in much gentler tones.

She had broken down in sobs that devolved after a time into jagged breaths and half-hicups. John held her and soothed her, just as he had at all hours since then. He didn't admonish her or chide her. Perhaps he felt such a display was to be expected. Perhaps it was normal for someone who was grieving. Nonetheless, it was humiliating. She did her best to pull herself together.

Wife chose not to fight husband on the issue of the funeral. Even through her tears Margaret could see how care-worn John looked. And although he'd been a steady comfort to her in the terrible blur of days since her father's passing and her subsequent miscarriage, once the first veil of anguish had
lifted from her eyes, Margaret had seen how affected John was by the two events. He did his best not to show his grief in her presence but she caught glimpses, all the same. In moments when he thought she was not looking he dropped his guard and pain filled his eyes, a clear signal that the tears she felt in the fabric of her soul were matched by equal splits in his own.

He wanted her to stay home, so she did. She might have fainted, anyway. The thought of her father's casket being lowered into the ground was enough to make her lightheaded. Now Margaret sank into the desk chair and did her best to put the thought out of her mind.

How could he be gone? It was unfathomable- she loved him too much for that. He should be by her side forever, as should every person who was loved so dearly. And Mama- was she even aware that Papa had passed? Dixon had tried, but the telling had been unsuccessful. Perhaps Mama's dosage was too much, for it had seemed her mother was teetering on the edge of oblivion. If she'd heard Dixon's words she did not acknowledge. And as Margaret was confined, she had been unable to talk to her mother herself.

Well, she would remedy that now. Margaret opened the library's double doors carefully, and once she was sure that no servants were about, crept quickly from the room and headed back upstairs. She found her mother asleep. Dixon sat in a chair next to the bed, her chin to her chest, lightly snoring.

"Mama?" she asked quietly.

But it was Dixon who awoke, with an abrupt and loud snort.

"Why are you out of bed? Is something wrong, Miss Margaret?"

"No, Dixon." Margaret gave her best impression of a smile. "I just wanted to check on Mama. Did you tell her?"

Dixon shook her head. "I tried, again. Honest, I did. This morning. But she needs so much of the laudanum. And once she takes it, she is not aware. It is almost as though she is in a dream. But at noon today, I gave her less." She looked at Margaret with large, bovine eyes. "I am afraid she will wake up in pain."

Margaret patted the faithful servant's hand. "You did not do wrong- she needs to know. And I will tell her. And I have decided that I will write to Frederick, too, to tell him of Papa's passing. I think he would want to know."

"Frederick?" Her mother's eyes opened at her son's name, and she stared at her daughter in confusion. "Is Frederick here? You have brought my beloved son to see me?"

"Mama, it is just Margaret."

Mrs. Hale's face fell.

"But you said you had a surprise for me. Yesterday, at breakfast. Dixon shooed you away." The invalid looked chidingly at her steadfast companion.

Margaret gazed at her mother, first in bewilderment, then distress. She bit back the tears that threatened. She would not tell her, she decided.

"You are confused, Mama," Margaret replied in a voice that was artificially light. "There was no surprise. Do you know where you are?"

Mrs. Hale looked at the blue-green wall paper and brass bedstead and smiled uncertainly. "In
"No, Mama. You are here with me and my husband, John Thornton. Do you remember?"

"Mr. Thornton? The cotton tradesman?" Maria Hale's brow wrinkled. "This is not Crampton? But it looks the same."

"We are at the mill, Mama. In the mill house."

"Yes." The invalid closed her eyes and sighed. "I hear the clanking in my dreams. It is so noisy." A tear slid slowly down translucent skin. "Why did he bring us to this infernal place?"

"Mama, John is-"

"It is my fault. I pushed him. I was too ambitious. A country vicarage was not enough for me. I wanted my husband to be a bishop, and for his living to be a cathedral. I thought that would only be fitting for a Beresford. As though I were better than everyone in Helstone. I am so ashamed of myself. I was so unhappy in Helstone, but what I would give to be there now."

"I am glad that you are here with me, Mama." Margaret caressed her mother's face.

In response, Mrs. Hale struggled to sit up in bed. "Where is he? Dixon, please fetch Mr. Hale. I need to speak with him."

"Mama, Papa-" Margaret's voice broke.

Maria regarded her daughter as though seeing her for the first time.

"Why are you crying? What has happened? Margaret, why are you not dressed?"

"He is gone."

"Richard?"

Margaret nodded.

Maria fell back against the cushions and her brow creased in confusion. "But I saw him... yesterday."

"No, Mama."

"Oh." Recognition dawned on the older woman's face, and it crumpled.

"Oh!" she moaned.

Margaret glanced at Dixon, who stood silent, for once, twisting her apron.

"I am alone." Maria Hale's voice was a child's, plaintive and small.

"No, Mama. You have me, and John, and Dixon. We will take care of you."

"You are married. You know what it is to have a husband. I have lost that. I have no one, now." She started to sob. "I did not say goodbye to him. I did not apologize to him." Her sobs escalated in intensity and pitch. "And worse... worse is that I will not say goodbye to my- to my firstborn."

"There, there," interceded Dixon, pushing Margaret aside in her hurry to get to her charge. "It's not so bad." She poured a tumbler of water and picked up a small blue dropper vial from the bedside
table. "I'm sure you are thirsty. Drink this. That's a good girl. Drink it all down."

Margaret stood by idly, unneeded. She left the room silently, and paused outside the door.

One thing was clear to her: her mother desperately wanted to see Frederick, and would likely request that her daughter ask him to come back to England.

Her father's words of just days before came back to Margaret. "I hope that you will remember what I said. About honesty," he had said. And then Papa had reminded her never to let anyone come between herself and John, and to always speak plainly.

Clearly, it was time to tell John about Fred, and to get his advice. Margaret walked slowly down the hall as she considered the best way to tell him.

The young wife was surprised to find John waiting for her when she entered the bedroom. He looked even more melancholy than he had that morning, and had not yet removed his funeral clothes.

"Why are you out of bed?" he asked in a voice that was tinged with concern.

"I am well, John. I needed to tell Mama-"

"How is she?" John folded his wife into his arms and stroked her hair.

"She is confused. She did not know what day it was. I did not tell her about..." Margaret broke away from her husband and moved toward the bed.

"...our child," her husband finished for her. He noticed the black-banded papers in his wife's hand and his brow darkened. "You have been up and about. More than visiting your mother." He breathed a heavy sigh of frustration. "Margaret, you must get well. This is against doctor's orders."

"I have some friends abroad that you did not write to. I thought I might-"

"No, Margaret. Dr. Donaldson explicitly said that you are to be resting at this time. Through Sunday at the minimum."

"It is impossible. I can't stop thinking about Papa, and...the baby." her eyes filled with tears.

"I will write to your friends, just as I wrote to your family in London and your family's friends in Helstone. This is no burden, Margaret. Please allow me to do this for you."

"You don't understand. I need a diversion."

Please." Margaret's voice rose and she began to tremble. She could not bear another day of abject boredom, filled with endless hours of thoughts of death and desolation. It could not be healthy, not when she could be occupying herself. It wasn't that she wanted to pretend it hadn't happened. Those feeling were with her all the time. She simply did not want to drown in them.

He pulled her close again. "Hush," he said soothingly. "I promise Margaret, things will get better. We must trust the doctor."

"I do not trust him. I do not like him."

"You do not have to like him."

"I think that I must like- or at least respect- a person to trust him."
John chuckled. "Trust me, then."

Margaret slumped against her husband. "I will."

John led his wife back to the bed and solicitously tucked her in. "If it is hard to lie still, could you not sleep, instead?" John brushed a stray hair aside before kissing her forehead.

"No," Margaret replied quietly. But ever tenacious, she was not quite done pleading. "I am finished sleeping. Could I at least do needlework, or sit downstairs with your mother or Fanny?"

John sighed.

"You are right, darling. They should be here with you. Fanny and Mother have been too busy with the wedding preparations. I will ask one of them to sit with you." He moved across the room to enter his dressing room. "I'm sorry, but I must get back to the mill. Quarter sessions are next week. And with everything that has been going on this week, I have much to do if I am to be gone from the mill next week."

"I understand, John."

Margaret sank into the pillows and admitted defeat.

But she was mistaken, as an ally arrived in the most unlikely form.

An hour later, Fanny bounded into the room, with a large wooden box in one hand and a book in the other.

"John said you needed company," she began, as she pulled a chair close to the bed. She bit her lip in a show of humility that was quite uncharacteristic. "To be honest, Margaret, I didn't think either of you wanted my company. I said some hateful things to John a few days ago."

Margaret reached out a hand to clasp her sister-in-laws fluttering one.

"Sisters and brothers often say things they don't mean. It can be hard to get along." She craned her neck to inspect the small crate Fanny had set on the floor. "What is in the box?"

"John said you were bored. Well, of course you are! I thought you might help me make favors for the wedding. I do wish you were coming. You will be missed, Margaret."

"What will you do with the dress?" Margaret asked tentatively. She was not sure if this was still a sore subject for the flighty blond.

"Well, it turns out Watson has a second cousin who is about your size. Madame Coleridge let the dress out for her. It will do. Although I will say it would have looked much better on you." Fanny reached into the box and scattered silken leaves onto the bed. "We simply need to make bundles of the leaves and wrap them with this wire. It shouldn't take long. Of course," and with this Fanny gave a wink, "we can take as long as you like."

Margaret thought she had never been happier to be in the presence of the girl. She was happier still when her sister-in-law placed a red-bound volume on the bedside table.

"Oh, and here is a book for you," Fanny said with a conspiratorial grin. "John said you are not to be reading, but I think that is nonsense. I know you are not so familiar with Poe, but I am certain you will find this book diverting. I found myself lost in it for many hours."
Margaret picked up the volume. Stamped in gold on spine were the words, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. "What is it about?" she asked.

"Read for yourself." Fanny pointed to the title page and Margaret read, "Comprising the details of a mutiny and atrocious butchery on board the American brig *Grampus*..."

Margaret smiled a real smile for the first time in days. Fanny had unwittingly answered Margaret's question of how to broach the question of Frederick to her husband.

"Thank you, Fanny," she said, as she picked up the first of many silken leaves. "I think today you are my savior."

Quarter sessions were over early on Friday, as a result of the loss of the lead magistrate, Kirk. John left the courthouse with a purpose to his stride and a speed aided by the cold late September rain that misted now, but threatened worse.

Despite some very good news earlier in the day John was worried, but he had always found that a brisk walk helped to clear the mind. Currently far too much was weighing on him. Margaret, of course, was foremost in these concerns.

Thankfully the mill had turned a corner in recent weeks. Demand was up for cotton fabric, and as a result, income exceeded expenses by a wide margin. All of the hands, whether knobsticks or locals were fully trained and producing cloth that met the exacting standards of Marlborough Mills. Business was doing so well, in fact, that he was almost at the point of considering expanding. John had therefore felt confident leaving the mill's operations in the hands of his mother this week, as he sat in quarter sessions.

John tallied the costs and benefits of being a magistrate as he walked away from the courthouse and toward the commercial district. He relished the work, but if he were honest with himself, he relished even more the standing it Milton society it brought with it. He had no qualms in admitting this. It was important to him not only to succeed, but that others knew he was a success. And that he'd done all of it under his own steam.

But with Mr. Hale's death, and Margaret's illness, there had been too much on his plate. And Margaret must come first. She would always come first. With the funeral preparations and Fanny's wedding preparations in addition to his daily work at the mill, he simply had not spent enough time with his wife over the last week.

And what he had seen troubled him.

He had returned home quite late on the day of the funeral, and after a quick supper had headed to bed, with a sheaf of papers under his arm. The work had to be done- there was no getting around it. But at the very least, he could do the work in Margaret's company, and watch over her as she slept.

But she wasn't asleep, despite the late hour. A candle burned, and a book was in her hands.

He'd been angered, and rightly so. And "Fanny gave it to me," was as poor an excuse as the one Eve had used millennia before.

"You said you would rest."

"I could not sleep, John. I told you. Should I lie awake and cry?" Tears began to flow as she spoke, and John immediately regretted his words. He pulled back the bed clothes, and joined her, fully clothed, in the bed.
"How was your day?" Margaret asked.

"Long. Tiring. The mill is doing well." He smiled crookedly, and was rewarded with a small, but perfect kiss.

"I am glad of it. I am not surprised. You work so hard. And your workers follow, of course."

"There may be opportunity to expand. I had heard a rumor, but I will find out more next week at the Quarter Sessions."

"Why there? Was a law broken?"

"Quite a large one. Do you remember Kirk, from the wedding?"

Margaret shook her head. John was not surprised- the man was quite forgettable.

"He is Milton's lead magistrate. Or quite possibly was. His brother has been accused of embezzlement. If it is true, the brother stands to be prosecuted. The business will likely fold, as well, as I believe the brother is a full partner."

"And what is this business?"

"It is a group of several dyeing concerns. After cloth comes from the mills it typically goes to one of Kirk's shops or to one of his competitors for dyeing or printing. Kirk's concern is special in that it not only does the dyeing but also the importing of the dye-stuffs. I am certain their profit margin is much greater than that of their nearest competitor. Which makes the news of his brother's embezzling all the more surprising. This must be a very greedy man."

"What will happen to Kirk?"

"He may stay on as partner, as he appears to have done no wrong, but it is likely that the business will fail as merchants and suppliers will be unwilling to associate with the name. It has been tarnished. And it is also likely he will need to step down as magistrate. There will be a cloud of corruption hanging over him."

Margaret was silent for quite a long time. So long, in fact, that John wondered if she slept, as her eyes were closed. Finally, she spoke.

"And you hope to buy this business?"

"Possibly, or perhaps a portion of it. It would depend on what state it is in. And I would need financing." John sighed. "But the truth is, this may not be the best time for it."

"It sounds like the perfect time for it. There was such a note of excitement in your voice when you spoke just now. And you said the mill is doing better financially."

"Yes, we are close to paying off the investments I made on the new looms."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"I have been neglecting you."

"I am well, John. I just need to be allowed out of this bed. You will see."

John gave up, and changed the subject. "What have you been reading?"
"It is a recommendation from Fanny. Edgar Allen Poe."

John rolled his eyes. "I should have guessed. Is it good?"

"It's a bit bloody."

John quirked an eyebrow. "It's not too much, is it?"

Margaret shook her head. "It's nothing I cannot handle. It's about two boys who stow away. They witness a mutiny. That's the bloody part. Although I should say, I think the author is taking a great deal of artistic license. A mutiny would not necessarily be bloody and violent, would it?"

"Every one I have heard of has been. It rather defines the term."

"It is an act of violence against authority, made worse by the fact that there is no legal structure set up to allow the airing of grievances." John paused for a moment, as Margaret digested his words. For a moment she seemed about to reply, but she said nothing. He continued. "Consider the differences between law on the high seas and law in a city. In my mill, I have a certain level of authority. If a worker should choose to disagree with me, I have certain rights that allow me to punish him."

Margaret nodded, although her brow lowered slightly. John regretted his words. Doubtless she was thinking back to the very first time they'd met.

"But if he disagrees with my punishment, he has recourse. At the very least, he can quit and find work elsewhere. On the high seas this is not true. The law of the captain must therefore be absolute and infractions must be dealt with severely."

"I see." But it was clear she did not see, because Margaret quickly grew perturbed. "Therefore the captain's word is law."

"It must be."

"No matter what?" She looked at him wide-eyed, almost disbelieving.

John shrugged.

"And what if he were beating his crew? What then?"

"Margaret, must we bring it back to that day?" John did his best to keep the tension from his voice.

"What day?"

"You know which day I am speaking of, darling."

"This is not about you, John. I am speaking purely hypothetically." Margaret's face reddened and she lifted her chin in that haughty way of hers. Clearly he'd caught her in a lie, but she continued. "What if the mutiny was just?"

"Margaret, there is no such thing as a just mutiny. By definition, there cannot be."

"I disagree." Her color rose further, and her breathing quickened. John saw tears in her eyes, and wondered why exactly this discussion was causing such discontent.

He kept his voice as low and soothing as he was able. "Not only can it not happen, it has not
happened, Margaret."

"How would you know?"

"I have followed shipping for years as my business is dependent on imported cotton. I take the *Nautical Magazine*. Mutinies are described there."

"All of them?" Tears streamed down his wife's face and John had no idea why.

"I have the issues for the past fifteen years. I have not read the details of every mutiny, but I have read through many. And yes, the details are very much the same. Margaret, what is wrong?"

"But you could be wrong?"

"I do not see how."

Margaret took a deep, jagged breath and sighed. She rubbed the tears from her eyes and John saw her jaw set into a dogged expression he knew quite well.

"I am tired," she said then. "You are right. I need to sleep. Good night, John."

The next day was worse, although John had not thought it possible.

John returned home, again, late, as the needs of the mill were pressing. This time he found his wife in bed, as the doctor ordered. But stacked on and around the bed were thirty bound volumes of the magazine he had mentioned in passing the night before.

Something was clearly wrong. Why would she be focusing so intently on an event that happened in a second-rate novel?

This must be some way to push aside the pain she was feeling, a way to focus on something other than the loss of her father and child.

His poor, darling Margaret.

Should he suffer her delusion?

He decided to. It was doing her no harm.

"You did not go down to the library, did you?" John asked gently, as he moved aside a small stack to make room on the bed.

"Stokes brought them for me. I'm sorry. I lost track of time. I should have asked him to return them before you arrived."

"And what did you find?"

This was the wrong question to ask, he realized, as her eyes filled with tears.

"You were right," she said, and turned away. She sobbed herself to sleep and refused to be comforted.

On his way home from the courthouse, John stopped at the florist and found its owner was only too happy to supply him with some more of the yellow roses that had so delighted Margaret months before. He was even happier to learn that John wanted roses delivered weekly henceforth, only a
mere two dozen, but even that was enough to make sure bread stayed on his family's table.

Rain was falling steadily by the time John cut through the cemetery. He took the less-used path the led past his own family's plot, and was not surprised to find his wife there. Somehow, he'd guessed she would be.

She sat on the small bench just below the evergreen magnolia, clad fully in black, a veil covering her bonnet. She did not look up when he approached.

"Margaret?" John sat down beside her and took her leather-clad hand. She did not reply.

He lifted the veil and saw eyes rimmed in red, a face shiny with tears.

She was not wearing a cloak, he noticed. He took off his own frock coat and draped it across her shoulders.

"You are getting soaked, darling. You will become ill."

"There is no stone." She looked across the space to the exposed soil of the grave, now muddy and flowing with small rivulets.

"Not yet, darling. I am having one cut."

"Oh. Thank you. You have done so much, John." She stared again at the overturned earth and silence fell between them again.

"It was a good funeral? I did not ask. Aunt Shaw did not come, did she? Did Edith?"

"No," John replied. "But Henry Lennox did." He suddenly felt a great deal more respect for the man. "And you might be surprised to learn that some of your father's friends from Helstone came, as well."

Margaret turned to him then, her eyebrows raised in surprise. "From Helstone? Yes, you said you had written. That was good of you. Father would have been so pleased to be remembered in such a way. His parishioners meant so much to him." She turned away and was silent again.

"Margaret?" John's shirtsleeves were now soaked through with rain. "We should go."

"I will stay. It is not yet dark."

"You know I cannot allow that."

Tears flowed again and John felt utterly powerless. The only thing he could do was hold her, he realized, so he did that. Presently, she spoke again.

"Did I tell you that I named him?"

"Who?" John said, but then he realized.

"I named him after Papa, as soon as I knew I was with child. I'm sorry. I should have asked. But now it is like he never existed. There was nothing to bury. Or nothing that Dr. Donaldson showed me."

"We will not forget him, Margaret. Our Richard." John pulled his wife close and felt her shivering. "I must insist. We are leaving." She did not object.
When they returned home, he installed Margaret in front of the bedroom fire and had Stokes send for the doctor.

"What is wrong with her?" John asked as he ushered the doctor into his library after the examination. This time he did offer the man a drink. The rain had strengthened and anyone out on such a night deserved the warmth of a glass of brandy.

"Hysteria," was the reply. "Its quite common in women and to be expected in these situations. "The proximal cause is that your wife has suffered two tremendous losses in close succession. Her body is reacting to the shock, particularly to the miscarriage. Her body wanted a child and is in rebellion. That is not the ultimate cause, however. The deaths were merely the agent that precipitated the current crisis."

The doctor stood near the roaring fire as he launched into a monologue. "You must remember that men and women are quite different. A woman's body, and her psyche are dominated by her generative organs. As we do not have this organ it is difficult for us men to understand, but all of a woman's anatomy is intimately tied to this organ. If it is in distress, her entire person will be in distress. Of course, it is not this way for men. It is therefore unfortunate that our society insists on treating women as though they are equivalent, or as though they women have a capacity they have been shown empirically to lack."

John raised an eyebrow but let the man continue.

"My study of hysteria has impressed on me several conclusions. The way in which women are raised by their parents greatly influences whether or not they will develop hysteria as an adult. If a mother, or more likely a father, allows his daughter to think that she is in some way the intellectual or spiritual equal of men she is likely to develop a gross derangement of her generative organs. The reason for this is that her purpose is to bear children, and going against this purpose can only have negative consequences. These may manifest in a variety of ways. She may be unsuitably intellectual, she may be passionate, she may be argumentative. But I am sure you will agree that none of these are feminine characteristics."

The doctor stopped to finish his drink, then held it out for John to refill. His host complied.

"You are saying it is a waste of time to educate women, then."

"Yes, beyond the basics of needlework and music. It will only bring them misery. When she marries, she will be unhappy, and unable to dutifully take up the role allotted to her. Worse, she will be unable to be pleased by her husband."

"I see." Except he didn't. Pleased by her husband? What was the doctor talking about?

"What's more, a woman's husband has a great influence on the development of this disease, as well. If he allows his wife to live in indolence, or gives her too much free rein, she is also likely to develop the disorder. I am not a man to pass judgment-"

John coughed.

"-but when she was Miss Hale I saw your wife, unchaperoned in the streets of Princeton. While I realize this was her father's fault, not your own-"

"You would defile her father's memory a mere week after his funeral?" John rose from his chair, fists clenched. The man actually cowered.

"Do not misunderstand. It is society's fault, not Mr. Hale's. But once one has been advised of the
errors of ones ways, surely it is incumbent upon a person to make the changes needed to avoid falling into error again."

"And you are going to advise me, I presume." John's jaw clenched.

"You must tighten the leash."

"She is not a dog!"

"Nor is she your equal. It is obvious that your Mrs. Thornton is a woman who is governed by her passions. These passions will be the end of her. Hysteria is not a disease to take lightly. Have you ever witnessed a hysterical paroxysm?"

John shook his head. "I have heard of it, but no, I have never seen one."

"They can be life threatening, and can leave a patient mentally deficient. Surely you would not want this to happen to your wife."

John's eyes flashed. "Of course not!"

"Yet this is the path she has been set on."

"By my actions, and those of her father."

The doctor said nothing, and John struggled to keep his temper.

"There are treatments," the Dr. Donaldson said after some time.

"Yes?"

"In Austria, Vincenz Preissnitz has developed hydriatic therapy which has been said to be highly effective against hysteria."

"Water therapy? As at Bath?"

"No, not exactly. This involves a high-pressure stream of water directed at the abdominal area. This pressure against the womb has a salutary effect. Of course, it requires travel abroad."

"I'm sure that wouldn't be possible right now."

"There are in-office treatments that could be tried, instead. These are done in the presence of an attendant, such as pelvic shampoo."

"Shampoo? I am not familiar with this word."

"Shampoo is a word that comes from the Turkish baths. It means to knead the flesh with ones hands."

"So this is a kneading of the abdomen, similar to the water therapy?"

The doctor smiled uneasily. "Ah, well, not exactly. But as I said, it is done in the presence of a female attendant. Everything is done with the utmost attention to propriety."

John’s pale blue eyes locked on the doctor. "Tell me, exactly what flesh is being kneaded with your hands?"
"Er, a bit lower than the abdomen, I'd say."

John was on him immediately, and the doctor's head made a semi-circular impression in the lath-and-plaster coating of the walls before the man had time to realize what was going on.

"You will elaborate." John held the doctor by the lapels of his frock coat, and the doctor's face was close enough that John could smell the remains of the cigar the man had smoked earlier that evening.

The man stammered out a response. "In h-hysteria, the womb is congested. If this congestion is not cleared in some way, the hysterical p-paroxysm I mentioned will result. Release is required."

"Release." John allowed the word to hang in the air for a moment, as he considered Margaret's words to him earlier that week. She told him, hadn't she? She didn't like the man. She didn't trust the man. And he, her husband, had simply ignored her and assumed she was being over-emotional.

John was livid.

"And how does a womb become congested in the first place?" It seemed his fists were itching to make contact with the doctor's smug mouth. But that mouth stayed shut.

"You will answer me."

"Inadequate sexual congress," was the doctor's reply.

John's fist flew and time slowed down. There was a satisfying crack as the doctor's nose moved out of joint, and John's eyes were able to trace the arc of crimson blood that traveled in the wake of his fist.

He regretted nothing. John moved away from the doctor and opened the room's double doors.

"You will leave here, and not return."

The doctor pulled a handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and held it to his nose.

"This is unacceptable," Dr. Donaldson muttered in a clotted voice as John forcibly escorted him to the door. "I will complain to the authorities."

"Do that," John said. "By all means. Go straight to the magistrates. Of course they will want to get all the details of your pelvic shampoos. While you're at it, go straight to the top. See what the lead magistrate thinks." John laughed. To think he'd considered quitting earlier today.

John slammed the front door after his family's former doctor, and dashed upstairs to see his wife. He had two pieces of very good news to share with her. And one apology, as well.

Author notes:

I want to apologize for not posting last week. I had mentioned in the previous week's notes that work has been a bit crazy lately. It still is! This time of year is exceptionally busy at my work. I was supposed to have a four-day weekend this past weekend to make up for having to work New Year's weekend, but due to being short-staffed I ended up having to work all four days. And as I am on salary, I got to work for free. (What a great job!) That meant no time for writing, unfortunately. And I would much, much rather be spending my time doing this. :)

In the comments someone asked me how I find all the background material I am using. I do a lot of research for my day job, so I am pretty adept at using search engines. Even so, it takes me about ten
hours each week to do the research for a chapter. I do not mind this at all. In fact, I find it a relaxing way to de-stress after work. I am having a lot of fun going down the rabbit hole of Victorian England. I spread the research out over the course of the week- two hours each week night on research, and then I do an all-nighter Saturday night to actually write the chapter and do some more research, and edit Sunday afternoon.

There is a good chance I will have to work either next weekend or the weekend after (or both!), but after that the schedule should go back to normal. I apologize in advance if you do not see a new chapter next week. I will do my best to make it happen, however.

Thank you again to everyone who takes the time to review. It makes me really, really happy to hear what people think of my writing, and it makes we want to continue, especially when real life is so stressful. I cannot begin to explain how difficult work has been for the past couple of months and how much the reviews here have cheered me up through this time. :)

This chapter is a bit of a homage to one of my favorite short stories, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, written in 1892. In it, a woman suffering from postpartum depression (described at that time as "temporary nervous depression - a slight hysterical tendency") is given the standard treatment of the time by her physician husband. The treatment is for her to be completely unoccupied. It slowly, inexorably drives her mad. In this chapter the outcome is different, thankfully (and thanks to John).

Now, for the historical notes.

The more I learn about Victorian England the more surprised I become. Some of what I learned this week floored me. It makes me wonder what people will think of our society 175 years from now.

The *Nautical Magazine* was exactly what it sounds like, a British magazine published during this era that had notices on ship movements, staff promotions, demotions, mutinies, and numerous other bits of information of interest to people in trade.

The *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is Edgar Allen Poe's only completed novel. It was written in 1838. It debuted to mixed reviews, but today it is considered one of the most influential English novels ever written. It hugely influenced Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and author Jules Verne actually published a (fan fiction!) sequel to it in 1897.

About the word shampoo: The word "massage," was not used until the 1870s. In the 1850s, the word "shampoo" had the same meaning. Shampoo was originally an Anglo-Indian word from the Hindi "champo", meaning "to press or knead the muscles." Shampoo did not get the meaning of "to wash the hair" until 1860.

Next, a quick primer on hysteria. Today, the word *hysterical* has two meanings- when we say a joke is hysterical, we mean it is ridiculously funny. And if we say a person is hysterical, we mean they are emotionally overwrought. We've lost sight of the root of the word. The word hysteria comes from the Greek word *hystera*, for uterus. In the Victorian era, hysteria was a medical diagnosis, and one that was almost exclusively given to women. It was a wide-ranging diagnosis, one that had an amazingly broad spectrum of symptoms. According to the book *The Diseases of Woman: their causes and cure familiarly explained, with practical hints for their preservation, and for the preservation of female health*, by Frederick Hollick (1849), hysteria was a uterine disease, where the "symptoms comprise... those of nearly every other disease under the sun." In other words, it was a catch-all diagnosis, and one with which approximately 25% of women were diagnosed. It could have symptoms that were similar to epilepsy (where a woman might have a seizure), nymphomania (where a woman might be sexually promiscuous), or more vague feelings such as being too melancholy. One of the things that might occur during hysteria was a hysterical paroxysm. According to this medical text and others,
this was a fit, in which the woman might begin by laughing, but soon would feel as though there was some round object moving up through her left side and into her chest and throat until she felt as though she were going to suffocate. In severe cases, a woman having a hysterical paroxysm might faint, or she might go on to have other fits that resembled epilepsy. Once the fit was over, she would have a great deal of gas, and vomiting, and might spend a great deal of time sighing, crying or laughing again. Note that all, some, or none of the array of symptoms described above might be observed, yet doctors would still diagnose women as hysterical.

The causes of hysteria were many. Weak constitution, laziness, city life, poor morals, poor temperament, poor diet, poor habits, over-excitement, constipation, reading romance novels, listening to emotional music, too much education, anger; disagreeable, painful, or sorrowful sights; too many religious feelings, first period, ovulation, sterility, menopause, "deranged" menstruation, inflammation of the womb, miscarriage, widowhood, late marriage, early marriage, too much sex, not enough sex, etc. Just about everything and anything under the sun, in other words. Also, it was communicable- a woman who was around another hysterical woman could easily be infected.

Hysteria was undoubtedly caused by the uterus because, as stated in this medical text and others, "The Uterus, it must be remembered, is the most controlling organ in the female body, being the most excitable of all..." The text goes on to say that the uterus is connected by nerves to all other organs of the body (kind of like the brain!) and that therefore it is not surprising that there are so many different symptoms that can be attributed to hysteria. Rather sloppy thinking, in my opinion... And if hysteria is based in the uterus, how do men become hysterical? (Guess.)

More cutting-edge research, such as that seen in the medical journal the London Lancet(1849), places the cause of hysteria as an inflammation of the ovaries, not the uterus. But the causes of this inflammation of the ovaries were the same as those listed above.

Treatment for hysteria is where things begin to get really, really interesting. The first-line treatment was to deal with any acute fit a woman might be having. In this case, the patient was made as comfortable as possible, as one might expect, although a variety of novel treatments might be tried instead, like cold water enemas, leeches, opium poppy heads in various orifices, etc.

But prevention was another issue. Because the uterus was involved, it was very clear to Victorian doctors that something sexual was amiss. However, because moral women were generally not seen as creatures capable of sexual pleasure, there was a bit of a disconnect here. There was a recognition that there was some kind of congestion of the uterus happening, but doctors did not recognize (or were unwilling to verbalize) that sexual release was the antidote, nor did they openly state that quite possibly their patients were sexually frustrated. The first line treatment was more sexual intercourse with the husband, regardless of whether or not these relations were satisfactory to the wife. However, if the patient was not married, intercourse was not possible (and solitary pursuits were forbidden!), so in that case horseback riding, or spending large amount of time in a rocking chair, swing, or hammock were prescribed. There was a recognition that stimulation of a very particular kind was needed, but no admission that said stimulation would be pleasurable to a woman. Additionally, doctors felt that in treating a hysteria it was critical to make sure that the mind was not taxed, either by reading romantic books or listening to music that might lead to excitement, or by simply exercising the mind too much.

Importantly, Hollick and other authors of the time allude to "other practices" that are "resorted to, the character of which betrays a curious opinion as to the nature of the disease!" Hollick continues, "I would, however, caution those who recommend them as to the probable moral consequences afterward, and I assure them that it is seldom or never the case the same good cannot be effected by less objectionable means."

So what were these "other practices" that a doctor might resort to? What Hollick is talking about is
most likely pelvic massage, which had been done since antiquity as a treatment for hysteria. In the past, this task had been done by midwives, but during the Victorian era, this task (like childbirth) was sometimes taken over by physicians. There is a question about how often doctors took over this task. For his part, Hollick seems to be suggesting that directly stimulating the pelvic region is just too shameful to contemplate, as it would lead to the inevitable conclusion that women are sexual (and therefore immoral) creatures.

Other doctors rationalized the practice by saying that the purpose of a pelvic shampoo would be to bring on a hysterical paroxysm of the uterus under controlled conditions so that a full-scale hysterical paroxysm (as described above) would be prevented, completely ignoring the huge differences in these two types of "paroxysms."

Apparently it took the average physician over an hour to achieve a hysterical paroxysm in a patient using his hand alone. This probably was due to a profound ignorance of female anatomy. It was not until 1856 that a French doctor, P. Briquet, in his book, *Traité Clinique et Thérapeutique de L'Hystérie* recommended focusing these massages on one particular area of the female anatomy, with much better success. Despite this helpful redirect, Victorian doctors began to look for technologies that might help speed the process along. (Perhaps they couldn't read French?) In the 1830s, Austrian entrepreneur Vicenz Priessnitz invented a gravity-fed device that directed a steady blast of water at any willing woman's pelvis. A new craze began over the 1830s and 1840s, as women from Britain and across Europe flocked to Austria to take the waters. In the 1860s, the city of Bath installed similar hydrotherapy devices. Then, in 1869, the first steam-driven vibrating device, "The Manipulator" was created to treat pelvic disorders. However, its creator warned that women should be supervised to prevent "overindulgence." Apparently, it was very effective at treating hysteria. And the first battery-operated device was created in 1882. Doctors at the time raved that it cut down the time needed to bring on a hysterical paroxysm from one hour to five or ten minutes. Progress! Profits!

In additional to the texts mentioned above, for the research for this chapter I relied on *A Dictionary of Practical Medicine* by James Copland (1845) I also referenced the modern book, *The Technology of the Orgasm: Hysteria, the Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*, by Rachel P. Maines (1991). The latter is absolutely fascinating, and amusing. :) However, I question whether the practice was as widespread as she claims. Doctors of the time were concerned about threats of molestation and it may have taken a strong suspension of disbelief to think that what was going on during these massages was not sexual. However, the Victorians had different ideas than we do today about what is considered sex- that is, only traditional intercourse counted as sex (shades of Bill Clinton?). Many people became upset when the speculum was invented, for instance, because they were concerned that its use was too similar to "the sex act" and that it might cause maidens to become wanton. So maybe "pelvic massage" would get a pass, as it was not like intercourse. For his part, Dr. Briquet claims to have "massaged" over 450 patients.

As this story takes place in 1851, our dear creeper Dr. Donaldson would have both Copland's and Hollick's books available to him, but not Briquet's. He also would be aware of Priessnitz's device. Sigh. I really think he deserved what he got. Do you agree?
The Great Inhibition

"I see your temper got the better of you, once again." John's mother stood at the top of the stairs, arms akimbo. "And once again, you'll have given the servants something to talk about."

"Shall we talk about it in the hallway, Mother?" John asked.

The elder raven smiled wryly and directed her son down the hallway to her bedroom, where she shut the door firmly behind him. "What was that all about?" she asked.

"We will be needing a new family doctor," John began.

His mother barked a laugh. "That much was obvious. I was wondering why we are needing a new doctor."

"He suggested a course of treatment that was completely unacceptable."

The doctor's daughter lifted an eyebrow. "So unacceptable that you came to blows?"

"You do not want to know, Mother." John sighed. "Please do not ask."

Mother placed a careworn hand on son's shoulder. "Did he suggest a sanitarium?"

John's brows raised involuntarily. "No! Nothing like that. It was rather more... sordid. I will not share the details. I cannot."

Hannah frowned. "I see. I can guess."

"You can guess?"

"A woman's intuition. The man had a way of carrying himself that was off-putting. And of course there was that scene when Margaret was fevered. As though he never seen flesh before."

"Do not remind me! I should have dismissed the man then, and saved Margaret the indignity." John sighed again. "She will be worried about her mother's care."

"There are other doctors in Milton, John. We will find one as competent as Dr. Donaldson, and hopefully a good deal more ethical."

John nodded. "She needs a change, Mother."

Hannah nodded. "I agree, completely. And I know what you are thinking. I assume you'll want to take Jane with you?"

"Can you do without her? We really should see about an additional ladies' maid, shouldn't we?"

His mother shook her head and lowered her voice. "Although I'd never say this to either of them, it's
clear that Margaret will have Dixon to herself, soon enough. We will make do for as long as you plan to be gone. And how long might that be?"

"Two weeks, I think. The exhibition closes on October 11th, and we'll need a day to crate and load the machinery afterwards. We should be home on the 12th, barring any unforeseen circumstances. I have some good news, by the way."

"Oh?" his mother smiled.

"I'll share it with you at dinner. I'm going to check on Margaret, then I must run to Outwood Station to send a telegram to Brown's. I'd like to leave tomorrow, if at all possible."

"I understand, son. But it's raining cats and dogs, and I do think Margaret would like to interview any new physician, don't you?"

"I disagree, Mother. I want her well away from here, as soon as possible." John turned to leave, but a hand on his shoulder restrained him.

"I noticed something odd when I was preparing the payroll last week."

John turned and gazed at his mother with concern. Issues with payroll were not something to brush off.

"There is a lacquered box in the safe. I assume you placed it there?"

John breathed a bit more easily, but only slightly, given the contents of said box. "It was a gift from Mr. Bell. The deed to the mill is within."

"I see." His mother said dryly. "What an odd man."

John made a mental note to remove the envelopes that were also held within the small chest. The lock could easily be defeated by a woman as tenacious as his own mother.

"Is that all, Mother? No other issues with the payroll?"

"No son, of course not."

"Then you'll excuse me." He hurriedly exited the room.

His wife had half-cocooned herself in the master bedroom's yellow damask curtains. She stared out into the downpour, unmoving.

John stood behind her, and pulled her close.

"I heard noises," Margaret said when she recognized his presence. "And Dr. Donaldson left in a very great hurry. He shouted at his driver. Did something happen?"

"I am sorry, Margaret."

"For what?"

"I should have listened to you. That man-"

"He was holding a handkerchief to his face." Margaret disengaged herself from the curtains and from her husband's embrace, and turned to face him.
"Some time ago, I told that you had witnessed the first and only beating I had ever administered."

"Stevens."

"Yes."

John ran a hand through his hair nervously. "Well, tonight was the second."

Margaret's gaze was searching. "But why?"

"He impugned your virtue."

"How?"

His wife blanched.

John glowered. "Do not ask me to explain. I will not." He reigned in his anger immediately, however, when he observed that his wife was trembling. He led her to the bed, and spoke gently.

"He does not understand grief."

Margaret reached for his hand, and was silent for some time. Predictably, when she spoke, it was not about herself. "Mama will need a new physician."

"Mother will find someone, tomorrow." John cleared his throat. "Margaret, it is obvious that you need a change. The Exhibition is ending in two weeks, and I had planned to send Williams to break down our exhibit."

"Marlborough Mills has an exhibit? You never said so."

"Some of the Milton mill owners collaborated. I was nominated to supervise its installation and removal."

Margaret laugh was low and throaty. "Of course you were. Then you have been to the Crystal Palace?"

"Yes, the week it opened, and just before, of course, to get things set up."

"Is it as lovely as everyone has said?"

"To be honest, I did not have much time to inspect its offerings. After making sure the machinery was in working order, and ensuring the attendant Slickson supplied-"

"Slickson?"

"He did not want to risk any of his own machinery. He thought it would be cheaper to send the attendant to explain how the machinery works."

"I see."

"Well, after all of this, my only thought during the few days I was there was to look for investors." John nearly growled as the memory played out vividly in his mind. "Much good it did me. The first weeks of the exhibition were not really about the exhibition."

"What do you mean?"

"It was a social event, Margaret. Admission was £3 for men, £2 for ladies, quite steep enough prices to keep out the hoi polloi. There was even valet parking. No one there was actually looking at what was on display. Rather, they were looking at who was on display."
"How disappointing. I think my cousin attended during that time. But of course she would."
Margaret smiled sadly.

"Now that admission is only a shilling, things should be different. Although I'm sure the investor class will not deign to be seen in the company of the unwashed."

"I should very much like to go."

John's grinned at his wife's lack of pretension. How like her father she was. "I thought you might. And I thought we might extend the visit into a honeymoon."

"Really?" Margaret's eyes lit up, and John knew he'd stumbled onto the right decision.

"Not a six-week honeymoon, mind you. I don't know what Watson could be thinking. His mill will be a ruin when he returns."

"Two weeks is more than enough for me, John. I know how difficult it is for you to be away."

"You might call on your cousin-"

"Why would I do that? Edith didn't come to the funeral. She didn't even send a letter."

Petulance was a very good sign, John decided. Any emotion was, apart from sadness.

"But, Mama..."

"Dr. Donaldson's last report was that she was stable."

"You just dismissed him."

"That does not mean I found him incompetent."

Margaret shook her head. "Could we wait until we hear what another doctor has to say? I do not think I would be able to bear it, should something happen..."

"Of course, darling. We will leave on Monday, then." John smiled. "Now, I have some very good news I'd like to share."

The ride from Euston station to Brown's Hotel was uneventful. How different London was from Milton! While the streets were busy, they were not clogged with carts and wagons, and the cab made good time. Margaret seemed happy to be back in her old playground, and pointed out landmarks as they passed.

"There is Regent's Park," she cried out as the clarence pulled into Crescent Park, "We're quite close to Harley Street." John was taken aback by the colonnaded townhouses that ringed the semi-circle, and wondered about the type of income needed to be able to live in such imposing grandeur.

"They are beautiful, aren't they? They were built by John Nash. I think that Henry Lennox was thinking of buying one."

*That answers that*, John thought wryly.

They arrived at Brown's shortly and John helped his wife and her maid down from the cab, before tipping the coachman appropriately. A porter carried their baggage inside and John was pleased to see his wife look around her in wonder. At least there were some things in London that might still
impress her.

"You shouldn't have gone to the expense," she whispered in his ear.

"The mill account is paying for it," he whispered back, before directing her to a chair in the richly appointed lobby, to wait while he settled accounts.

"You see," he said after Jane had been directed to the small room adjoining their suite, "in business it is critical to play the part."

"The part?"

"All is reputation. I was telling you about Kirk?"

"The former lead magistrate?" She smiled as she embraced her husband. "Note the emphasis."

"Yes. Well, as I expected, because of his brother's wrong doings his reputation suffers. Hence, his business suffers."

"That is patently unfair."

"Yes, but that is the way of it."

"But what has that got to do with an expensive hotel?"

"If one is seen to be economizing, people will think ones business is trouble."

"They might think you are prudent, instead."

"They might, but they do not. This is not what could be, but what is, Margaret. At the master's dinner, it was clear you disapproved of the excesses that were on display. And I agree with you- they were excesses."

"Children were starving, John." She whispered the next. "It was...immoral."

He held his temper. "There is no room for such contemplation of morality in business. If we had not served such a dinner, my competitors would have thought my business in trouble, strike notwithstanding. And they would have pounced."

"Are they such jackals?"

"I never said they were friends. Your father-" John did not continue, but he did not need to.

"I see. There can be no friends in the business world. It is like a war."

"More like a series of minor skirmishes. Nothing is formally declared."

"Surely you have the upper hand. You said business is thriving."

"It is. We are back on our feet."

"I find that difficult to believe after all of the expenses from a funeral and two weddings."

"Those were personal expenses. Marlborough Mills is a separate entity. It must be, in case of bankruptcy."

"But you own the mill."
"Due to your dowry, and Mr. Bell's generosity. It went a long way towards helping us towards financial solvency."

"But does your owning the mill not co-mingle the two accounts?"

"The mill pays us rent. For the past few months, it was in arrears. But now that orders are flowing in, it can settle up. We are in good shape, I am happy to say. And that is why I was thinking of expanding, and why Kirk's misfortune could be our blessing."

"I see." She looked at him thoughtfully.

"You will need to dress the part, too, Margaret. While we are here, I would like for you to visit a dressmaker, as we never visited to Madame Coleridge's."

"I am in mourning, John, and will be for the next six months. I have no need for finery."

"You have two black gowns from my mother, both hastily made over. They will not do. And you will need half-mourning in just three months. You must be seen as the wife of a successful manufacturer, even during this time."

"And as the wife of a lead magistrate." Margaret smiled, as she leaned her head against her husband's chest. "This was no surprise, you realize."

"No?"

"It is your trajectory."

"I did not realize you had studied physics, my darling."

"I told you I played dread pirate as a child, did I not? How could we predict the cannon's blast without knowing something of Newtonian physics?"

John laughed at the thought of Margaret firing a cannon, even a pretend one.

"I'm sure you know more than I."

"I am sure I do not!" She pushed him away in faux indignation.

"We, she said. "You played with the boys?" She'd told him that before, hadn't she?

Margaret nodded. "I was a very poor study at being a girl, I am afraid. It was part of the reason my parents sent me to London."

"I wish I'd known you then. In Helstone."

"We wouldn't have been friends. For one thing you are twelve years older than I. You would have been twenty one when I was nine." Margaret laughed aloud, while John grimaced at the thought of such cradle snatching.

"For another, and I've already told you this, I was a snob back then. You would not have been in my circle of friends."

John's lips tightened into a thin line. "I see."

She looked up at him, through thick lashes. "You've changed me, your worship."
"Your worship?"

Her impish smile told him that she was on the road to recovery. "Stokes told me that in the courthouse this is your new title. Was he incorrect?"

"No, it's that, or 'sir'."

"Would you prefer 'sir'?"

"In the bedroom? Oh, I think "your worship" will do nicely." John scooped up his wife and deposited her on the bed. He rained kisses on her lips and her neck before stopping himself abruptly.

"Dinner is at six. I've reserved a dining suite. Jane should be ready for you. I'll need to call for a valet. He headed quickly for his dressing room. "I'll see you shortly."

The Crystal Palace was everything Margaret expected. Although invited, Jane had decided not to accompany them, much preferring the rare luxury of a day to herself to a day in the company of her mistress. Margaret did not mind. She would rather have John all to herself. Besides, the girl tended to giggle uncontrollably in his presence, which made Margaret distinctly uncomfortable.

Margaret had not realized how much she had wanted a honeymoon until she was actually in the midst of one. Having John by her side- having him all to herself- was something she had experienced only three times prior to their wedding, and not at all since. But now he doted on her, with a smile so warm and caring that she nearly melted each time he bestowed it upon her.

She had been to Hyde Park, the site of the exhibition, many times while living in London with the Shaws. Margaret therefore knew that it was but a short distance from Mayfair, the location of the Brown Hotel. Nonetheless, she could not convince John to walk the scant mile between the two locations. He continued to worry needlessly about her health. They took a hansom cab instead, and pulled up in front of the South entrance, which sparkled in the late morning light.

Margaret had read about the pink glass fountain in the *Illustrated Exhibitor*. However, the engraving therein did not do it justice. It escalloped tiers shimmered with a full spectrum of refracted light and Margaret stood mesmerized as her husband went off to purchase programs and a map of the attractions.

When he rejoined her she was still staring at the flickering rainbows that lit randomly on all nearby surfaces.

"You seem happy," he noted.

"I am. This is such a beautiful place." She looked around her. "And so busy." She accepted the map from John and perused it. "So where would you like to visit first?"

"Well, I must check the machinery, of course. But other than that, it is up to you. Although-"

"Yes?" She smiled brightly at her handsome husband, eager to please him.

"I would like to look at the carriages, if we have time. They are right next to the cotton exhibit, if I recall correctly."

"Of course, John."

"And you?"
"I would like to see everything."

The manufacturer laughed. "That won't be possible in a day. If we visited everything on display we would journey for miles. But we can certainly come back tomorrow and the next, if you are so inclined. Although, in that case I would suggest a systematic plan of attack."

"Attack? We will do no such thing, John. This is not a campaign. I plan to be enchanted."

Her husband removed his hat, and bowed to her, theatrically. "As you wish, my love."

Margaret pointed to a spot on the west side of the map. "'Machines in Action- Milton Cotton.' Shall we?"

The walked the length of the building, and Margaret was impressed to see how busy the place was despite the fact that the exhibition was in its closing days. The space was filled with an assortment of middle-class and working-class families, all eager to learn about the empire's latest technologies. As they moved down the hall, Margaret noticed there was a fair press around the hydraulic machines and marine engines, and a crowd around the cases showing the tools used to mine ores from the depth of the Earth. But the crowds were largest at the very end of the building, where a familiar clanking noised bounced off the cast iron supports of the building. The American display was in full action, as was the display from Manchester. Crowds five deep thronged around each, watching with rapt fascination as gears turned and axles spun.

John's countenance was a storm, and Margaret heard him grind out the word, "Slickson," as though it were the worst profanity one might utter. John removed a velvet rope and entered the Milton display, his brow darkening and his body growing ever more tense. Margaret did not follow. Rarely had she seen her husband so angered. The reason for his ire was obvious. The attendant Slickson had hired was nowhere in sight.

John examined each machine carefully, picking up a spanner or another tool Margaret could not name to adjust some element of one machine's gearing, then another, before spending the next ten minutes fine tuning the one machine Margaret did recognize, the power loom, finally moving its batten back and forth until he was satisfied its action was as precise as specified.

John threw the switch that engaged the drive belt to the first of the machines and tied on a leather apron. Margaret stood some distance away, well behind the velvet rope. Her mouth remained half-open for the next few minutes, as her husband continued to surprise her. By this time, people had begun to drift toward the exhibit and began to ask questions as John fed raw cotton into the first machine.

"It's an opening and cleaning machine," he announced in a crisp voice, holding up a portion of the continuous sheet of cotton expelled by the machine in a long roll, and tearing off pieces to hand out as souvenirs. These were eagerly accepted by small hands, and oohs and aahs issued from his ever-growing audience as the soft batting was held up to faces and rubbed along skin to test its softness.

"It's not as soft as it will get," the manufacturer pointed out. "The next three machines are responsible for that. The scutcher and lap machine will remove any stray sand from the cotton, and next it will go to the lapping finisher, which will take several of these rolls and combine them into one. The goal is to eventually narrow these rolls into thread." He pointed to the next machine and set it into motion, briefly. "This will take narrow the long roll of cotton into a narrow roll, called sliver." The crowd watched, as a thin cotton rope was expelled from the machine. Again John pulled the sample apart and held the pieces out to the crowd: the white fragments disappeared in moments.

It was embarrassing, Margaret realized, that she, the wife of one of Milton's leading manufacturers,
was learning as much about the operation of a mill as any of these visitors to the exhibition. She might have asked her husband for a tour of the mill on any Sunday, she knew. But that was John's only day away from work, and it hadn't seemed fair.

And in watching him now, she was learning about far more than the mill. People were drawn to John. He had a plain way of explaining things that was neither condescending nor overly simplistic. He knew his audience and gave them just the information they needed. That was a rare art, a teacher's art. No wonder he and Papa had gotten along so well. They must have viewed some aspects of the world through a similar prism.

A lank-haired man slipped behind the rope, and John's expression changed immediately. He pulled the man aside, and although his words could not be heard, it was clear to Margaret that this was Slickson's man, and that he was in deep trouble. She could not blame John for being angry. Here was Milton's opportunity to show itself to advantage, and its machines stood idle while its neighbors' hummed. A great deal of expense had been paid to mount the exhibition and for that money to go to waste was unthinkable. Margaret looked at Slickson's man and immediately recognized a few things about him. He was in the uniform jacket worn by many exhibitors at the Palace: it was clearly not his own. But his trousers were, and these showed signs of wear, as did his shoes. He was a working man, probably not so different from Higgins. But for once Margaret found that she did not automatically want to root for the lesser man. This one was clearly at fault, and what's worse, it did not seem to be one-time error. He allowed the machinery to fall into disarray: that could not have happened all at once.

Slickson's man, red faced, returned to his station, and proceeded with the demonstration. John returned to Margaret's side, still visibly irked, although Margaret could tell he was doing his utmost to hide it.

"Your lecture was very informative," she said with a smile. "I was thinking how remiss I have been not to have asked you for a personal tour of the mill."

"You have been very busy," John replied, catching her hand in his own, and guiding her away from the vibrating machinery. "These first months of our marriage have not been easy on you. I understand this, Margaret. You have not been remiss."

"Shall we look at the carriages?" Margaret asked, changing the subject. Surely such a display would elevate his mood. "Are you thinking of trading in your mother's?"

He shook his head as he led the way. "No. I was thinking you and I need something of our own. And certainly in the future..." his voice trailed off.

"You mean when we have children. Yes, you are right." Margaret kept her voice light. "What do you think of this?" She pointed to a large vehicle that appeared to seat four, plus coachman.

"Middleton's Improved Convertible Carriage?" John inspected the vehicle carefully, kneeling down to examine its springing, then engaging the attendant in a conversation about any difficulties in converting it from barouche to a closed form. Margaret listened for a while, but slowly drifted away from the pair. To be honest, one carriage was as good as another as far as she was concerned. John should choose the one that most pleased him.

Just past the carriages, but well within view was a case marked "Cottons." Margaret sauntered over to it, and found that it contained all manner of cotton fabrics: some plain-woven, but also twills, satins, diaper, and others she could not name. Most were white, some had medals pinned to them, and each was labeled with the name of its manufacturer. Her eyes lit immediately on a familiar name and she smiled. Then she found that name again, and again.
"John," she whispered aloud. "Why does he hide his light under a bushel where I am concerned?"

He was annoyed when he found her.

"Why did you walk away? I looked for you everywhere!"

"But I was right here. I could see you the entire time."

"I am not used to your bonnet and veil. Nor your dress. You are not the only person here dressed in black." John huffed in exasperation. "I miss your hat."

"My horribly outmoded hat?" Margaret laughed. "What would your sister say?"

"Why should I care what my sister says?" He calmed himself with difficulty, and Margaret tamed her own smile.

"Don't be angry, John. I am sorry that I walked away. I was bored. And then I saw here that my own John Thornton of Marlborough Mills has won the council prize not once but twice! Why did you not tell me this?"

"I was planning to. Eventually. It did not seem of immediate importance."

Margaret returned to the case and scanned its contents.

"Plus two gold medals." She added. "One for twill, one for damask. When did you find out?"

"It was announced at the start of the exhibition."

"I see. Did any other mill from Milton win?"

"Er, not that I'm aware of."

"Not that you're aware of," she scoffed. "You meet with these men monthly. I would think they would have told you. Crowed it. Hooted it."

John sighed.

"So you've known all this time and never told me?"

"How would I have told you without seeming a braggart?"

"Are not your successes my successes?" She could not hide the hurt in her voice.

"I should have told you." He pointed to a refreshment court that was in close proximity. "I think we are both in need of food. Shall we sit down and have some lunch?"

"I am not finished, John."

"I know." He guided her to table some distance from the others, and walked off to purchase a light meal of meat pies and lemonade for both of them.

"I would never think you a braggart, John," Margaret said quietly, once he had returned. "I am proud of you, and all you have accomplished. You know that, surely."

Her husband smiled. "I do, Margaret. I should have told you. It's just that I felt cowed on my return from this place the first time. I was standing not far from here, meeting with men of the ton. They
remarked on the medals Marlborough Mills had won, and still they would not deign to invest. It was... crushing. And then the strike followed, and the loss of income from that."

Margaret laid her hand atop her husband's.

"So in the end, those medals did not seem so great a reward," John finished.

"That is entirely the wrong way to look at it, John. Were you able to demonstrate the machines for these men?"

"No, that fell to Albright, Slickson's man." He rolled his eyes, and added, "Idiot. Although I was not fully aware of it at the time."

"Perhaps that was the mistake, then. The people today were enthralled. I cannot imagine an audience of investors would not be the same were you to demonstrate rather than he."

"Perhaps the difference today was that I had you by my side."

Margaret shook her head as a blush crept to her cheeks. "I don't think you need a muse."

"It's too late. I have one." John flashed a toothy smile and his cerulean eyes lit his face.

They were both quiet for a while as they consumed their luncheon. John broke the silence, however after polishing off the remains of his meal.

"Are you still angry?" he asked with the grin of a boy caught with his hand in the biscuit jar.

"I wasn't angry. And even if I was, I couldn't stay angry at you."

"Good. What's next?"

Margaret smiled uncomfortably. "I am indisposed."

Her husband chuckled and pointed to the sign just behind her. "You are in luck." He fished in his pocketbook for a penny and handed it to her ostentatiously. "Don't be long. I'll be waiting for you at the carriages."

"Well?" He asked when she returned to him. "Where to?"

Margaret consulted the map John offered to her and said a single word. "Spain."

"Spain? Oh, yes, because of Fanny, and all of her talk of the Alhambra. What do you think it will be like listening to her, once she's seen the real thing?"

"That's exactly why we must see the exhibit- to have something, anything to add to the conversation."

But that wasn't all of it. Margaret wanted to see any artifact of the culture in which her brother lived. This was especially true now that she had come to a decision. She would write to her brother, certainly, as he must be told of Papa's demise, but she would implore him not to visit. It would be too dangerous. And apart from that, it could only be harmful to John. Reputation was everything in business, her husband had said. And as Kirk's example proved, a family member's misconduct could cause irreparable damage if uncovered. It was best to keep Fred far, far away. As a fellow tradesman, he would be sure to understand.
But the Spain exhibit was thoroughly disappointing. Perhaps this was a consequence of her gloomy thoughts, for John had found much to admire in the collection of swords from Toledo. Yet Margaret found little of interest. Most of the articles on display were minerals, and those were in the form of ores of lead and silver. Only the quicksilver was worth a second look, in Margaret's opinion. The idea of metal being liquid was quite curious. But even mercury could hold her attention for only so long. Margaret found herself composing a small speech to her husband as she waited for him to finish his inspection of enameled shields. She sat on a heavy oak bench at the entrance to the exhibit and silently tried the words.

*John, I should have told you this long ago, and surely Papa meant to as well, but I have a brother. He is wanted by the law. No, that was all wrong. Surely Fred's alleged criminality wasn't the first thing her husband should learn about her brother.*

*John, do you remember how I told you I had a friend living abroad? His name is Frederick, and he's my brother. Oh, that was worse.*

*Darling, I must tell you something. And you must promise you will not be angry, for it was done with the best of intentions. Some years ago I lost a member of my family. My parents never spoke of him and required me to do the same. It was very much a family secret. You see, I had a brother-*

"Margaret, you look so disappointed." John joined her on the bench and assessed her with piercing eyes. "Not what you expected?"

"I had thought I would see lace mantillas," Margaret explained. This wasn't a fiction: she had assumed that surely such accessories would be somewhere to be found in the display.

"Then we must go upstairs. That is where most of the fine fabrics and lace goods are, if I recall correctly. Perhaps Spain has contributed some."

They climbed one of a pair of graceful, helical staircases, and at its landing John looked at his wife with the same speculative glance as before.

"You are winded."

"It is only that I have lain in bed for two weeks, John."

"We must not push you."

John insisted that she rest for a good five minutes before exploring the upper level of the palace, where a vast space filled with fabric awaited them. Of course, this fabric took many forms. There were cases filled with taffetas, lacis and whitework, and scores of women strolled around the room ogling the contents of each. Because of the great number of visitors, it was hard to view the contents of every case, but eventually the pair discerned that there were no mantillas in sight. It seemed Spain was not represented, although France and Switzerland surely were. John noted that any draper would kill to have the stock spread throughout the large space.

But the wares displayed were not limited to fabrics. There were shoes of silk and leather, and corsets of the latest fashion. There were also mantles, and shawls of all descriptions. The most fascinating were those woven of a single color but with a multitude of textures. This made them appear as though they had been hand-knit by someone with tremendous expertise, although clearly they had been machine-produced in a fraction of the time. And the texture made a single color take on a multitude of shades.

"Could you make these?" Margaret asked, as she ran her hand over a particularly lovely example.
John looked carefully at the shawl. "It is of cashmere, so no, not exactly. But it would be interesting to adapt the pattern to cotton manufacture." He lowered his brows as he contemplated the possibilities.

In the center of the room were several mannequins, each wearing a gown more elegant than the next. Margaret was drawn, mothlike, to a bell-skirted example in a shade of madder she would not be able to wear for at least six months, if not longer. It was easily the most beautiful garment she had even seen, although the fabric undoubtedly had something to do with it.

"Is it a damask?" she asked John, when he drew close.

He nodded. "Yes, and it's of exactly the type I've been contemplating lately. Do you see how the figures are of a slightly darker color than the background?"

Margaret nodded.

"That's what gives such depth and interest to the fabric." The manufacturer looked around him before continuing. "It would require dying the thread before the weaving process rather than after."

"I see!" Margaret responded. "That's why you are so eager to purchase-"

He placed a finger on her lips.

"We will talk later. I will only say now that you have the most excellent taste, my dear. This is a Gagelin-Opigez & Cie design. They purchase the best fabrics." John bent to look more closely at the tag. "It's a pity they don't list the manufacturer. There's a lot I could learn from them." He jumped up spryly and surprised her with his eagerness. "There's something I want to show you, downstairs."

He offered her his arm, and then gazed at her with concern.

"You are tired."

"Only a little." Margaret smiled reassuringly, but the crease between John's brows did not diminish.

"Come." He led her to a bench in the a quiet area of the floor, where the steady ticking of watches and clocks drowned out the drone of voices. "I am sorry. I forgot-"

"I am well, John. Please do not treat me as though I am made of glass. I am not broken, nor will I break."

He did not seem to hear.

"Wait here. I will see about hiring a cab to take us back to the hotel. I think I saw a stand outside."

Margaret released a long breath once her husband left the area. His concern was touching, but it was also infantilizing. Could he not see this? But she did not want to argue.

She was rested, she decided after some minutes. She crossed the room, as a strange device had caught her eye. It was part of the exhibit labeled "Philosophical Instruments." It was easily the oddest contraption she'd seen all day. It looked a bit like a doby that children might ride at a fair, except instead of wooden horses arranged around a center pole, there were twelve small jars each partially filled with water. And unlike the former, this device did not revolve, nor was it quite so festively decorated.

"That is the Tempest Prognosticator, I believe." John rejoined her, and pointed to the small, worm-
like creatures inside each container. "I was told about this during my first visit but did not have time to see for myself. Those leeches have a remarkable ability."

Margaret crinkled her nose with distaste as she recognized the same vile creatures that doctors used to draw blood. Each jar contained a single leech, and attached to each jar was a wire. On one end of this wire was a tiny piece of whale bone that hung inside the jar. The other end, outside the jar, was attached to a small hammer. And each hammer was poised to strike a metal ball that hung at the center of the device.

John found a small placard to the right of the device and read aloud. "The Tempest Prognosticator is an atmosphere electromagnetic telegraph, conducted by animal instinct. After having arranged this mousetrap contrivance, into each bottle was poured rain water, to the height of an inch and a half, and a leech placed in every bottle, which was to be its future residence; and when influenced by the electromagnetic state of the atmosphere a number of leeches ascended into the tubes; in doing which they dislodged the whalebone and caused the bell to ring."

"It is cruel," Margaret said. "They may be hideous creatures, but surely even a leech should live as nature intended. I don't know what I would do if someone attempted to take away my freedom in such a manner."

"Thankfully, that will never happen."

Margaret turned away. Somehow, that horrible device had removed the color from the day.

Margaret allowed her husband to escort her down the gently spiraling staircase and through the transepts that led to the entrance.

"We will come back again tomorrow, if you wish," John said.

"No, I think I am done here."

Their hansom ride home was in silence.

Margaret did not argue when John suggested they rest before dinner. There was no place she would rather be than in his arms, after all. She desperately craved the comfort of his embrace. And more than that, she desired him.

"I've missed you," she said, as he held her close. "I've missed this."

John kissed his wife gently, and looked deeply in her eyes. "Indeed. As have I. But you should rest."

He crossed through the sitting room to knock on an unobtrusive door. When Jane answered, he gave her quick instructions to ready Margaret for bed.

"I will have dinner sent up," John explained. "We can dine on the town tomorrow. Your choice. I have an errand to run. I'll be back within the hour." He left the room to find the concierge and Margaret left herself in the capable hands of her ladies' maid.

He was gone the full hour, arriving just before dinner, a paper-wrapped package under one arm.

"For you. But after dinner," he said.

The repast was lovely. Of course it was: as this was one of London's finest hotels, how could it be otherwise? But her food might have been made of cardboard, for all Margaret's interest in it. She was tired of dining in her nightdress in her bedroom, even if this particular bedroom was different from
the usual, and even if John was with her on this particular occasion.

Margaret tried to be more positive. John was doing his best. But then again, wasn't she? She smiled her broadest smile as her husband looked up from his beef *a la* Windsor.

"Tell me, what was your favorite sight today?" he asked.

"You do not know?" his wife asked.

"Well, I am certain about your least favorite," John replied dryly.

"It was you, of course. This time Margaret's smile was real. "Your enthusiasm is infectious. Everyone around wanted to move to Milton and put themselves in your employ, I am sure of it."

John grinned. "And your second?"

"It is not fit to mention over dinner, I am afraid."

"Then I shall just have to finish!" John cleaned his plate with alacrity and pushed it aside. "Do tell."

"I will not."

"Let me guess. By any chance did it cost a penny?"

Margaret blushed, and John laughed.

"I am certain you are not the only visitor the Crystal Palace to find the retiring rooms a great attraction."

"Can you imagine how improved Milton would be by such facilities?"

"I can imagine the expense. Although only last week a scheme came before the magistrates. There is an idea to lay fifty miles of sewers throughout the city. Now would be the time to install such facilities, if the city were so inclined."

"It would be a great boon to the health of the community. Particularly to the poorer classes."

John nodded, and lifted his glass.

"And what was your favorite attraction today, John?"

"Apart from you?" he smiled. "Without question, the Spanish swords."

"Really?"

"I envy Fanny the opportunity to visit a country so closely bound to the middle ages."

"You would like to visit Spain." Margaret took a deep breath. "John, I -"

John picked up the package next the the table and passed it to her. But the moment had also passed and she lost her courage. Frustrated with herself, Margaret tore at the wrapping and was surprised to find a charcoal grey shawl worked with a paisley design in lighter shades of grey. She recognized the pattern: it was one she had studied for a good five minutes earlier that afternoon. The lighter colors were a result of the clever illusion of the weaving she had discussed with John.

"You seemed cold, earlier," John explained. "I am sorry that it is not in black, but there was not that
great of a selection from which to choose."

"I will wear it tomorrow. Papa would understand, and no one here will know. Thank you, John."
She rose from her seat to kiss him.

How very thoughtful he was.

"I think I will retire. Will you join me?" She could not hide the hopefulness from her voice, nor the passion.

"I thought I might read for a while. The lobby had copies of *The Economist*. I missed last week's edition with all that was going on."

"I see." Margaret bit her lip. "Good night, then."

She retired to her bed, and did her best to sleep, while he sat in the next room, reading his analyses of the stock market and its bulls and bears. But sleep would not come. She was still awake, hours later when John retired, although he assumed she slept. She waited until his breathing was light and even, then crept from the bed.

Her travel case just where she left it, on the inlaid writing table in the sitting room adjacent. She removed a quill, a bottle of ink and the several black-rimmed pages she needed. After several false starts, she was happy with her effort. She folded the mistakes into tight squares and threw them into the fire. The final product she folded once, then carefully addressed its envelope in the way she'd watched her father do. "Messrs. Barbour, Cadiz, Spain," was written large across its front, while in the upper corner, were the very small initials, "F. D." Margaret rummaged in the case for the container of stamps that should be there, but found it missing. That was of no consequence, however, as John was certain to have some. His Gladstone bag was just by the wing chair. She sat down next to it and unlatched the bag, unfolding its two halves.

While John was a highly organized sort, a Gladstone bag was not. Margaret needed to unpack its contents to find what she was after, a small silver box. She removed the needed postage and returned the container to the bag, then carefully began to repack its other belongings.

She didn't mean to pry. The envelope was not sealed and its contents spilled out on their own. And such images she'd never seen before! Margaret was certain the first would be forever etched into her brain. She picked up the small lithograph and held it by its edges, as though the image itself might burn her. She examined it carefully, turning it one way and then another, as it was impossible to tell which way was right side up.

A blush crept steadily from her breasts upwards, but still Margaret kept looking, at one print, and then another. And still another. She could not help herself. She was dispassionate as any scientist, lighting a candle and pulling it close to her so that she could view each images' tiniest details.

The bright pool of light blinded her to all but the prints before her. Therefore she was startled to hear John's cry of vexation.

"Margaret!"

But she did not look up. Instead, she gathered the lithographs, and slowly, carefully returned them to their envelope. Then she stood ramrod straight, and chin lifted, returned the packet to her John.

Quietly she asked, "Is this really what you prefer to me?"

Margaret did not wait for an answer. She swept past her husband with the hauteur of a high-born
princess, pulled the door closed behind her, and turned the key until the lock engaged.

Author's notes:

Thank you again to everyone is reading, and especially to those of you who are reviewing! Thanks especially to those of you who lent support about work. Another colleague resigned today (two in the past month) which makes it harder for the rest of us. Hopefully things will improve soon, or HR will put a stop to the problem. Fingers crossed!

I will get straight to the historical references, as there are quite a few of them this go round. I have never been to London, so my locations are from modern and historical maps. So if I get any of my geography wrong (or anything else!), please feel free to correct me.

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations opened in Hyde Park May 1, 1851 and closed October 11, 1851. Mills from Manchester and Oldham (part of greater Manchester), and the U.S. sent working displays of machinery. These were displayed alongside each other in an exhibit called "Machines in Motion," right next to the carriages exhibit. In the exhibits the machines accounting for all eleven stages of cotton production, from raw wool to thread, to cloth were displayed. Based on what I have read in the magazine, The Illustrated Exhibitor, many of the machines were functional with attendants to demonstrate and explain the process, as in modern science museums.

Right next to this exhibit was one of several of the first public restrooms ("retiring rooms") to be installed in England. They were designed by George Jennings and cost a penny to use. For that penny, a person would get a shoe shine, a towel and of course, the use of a flush toilet. During the exhibition, they were used 827,280 times, drumming up a lot of excitement. Ten years later, building codes suggest that new middle-class homes were being built with toilets and sewer systems were being built to keep up with demand.

Close to Hyde Park, in Mayfair, is Brown's Hotel. It was opened in 1837 by Lord Byron's butler. Because this hotel is the epitome of luxury and John was showing off by taking rooms there, I very, very much wanted to give Margaret and John a working bathroom in their suite. But flush toilets were just getting started in London 1851 and the city did not have the infrastructure to support them (which led directly to the "Big Stink" in 1856, as people began installing toilets without considering that the insufficient/non-existent sewage system couldn't handle the additional burden). In reality, Brown's did not introduce bathrooms in all rooms until 1884, and when they did so it was advertised as a novelty, meaning no other hotel in London was doing it. (The hotel may have been restrooms for guests before then, but they would have been shared, perhaps one per floor, the way some very old-fashioned hotels still do.) Note also that the hotel restaurant was invented by Brown's, but not until 1880. Until then, guests rented private dining suites if they wanted to eat in the hotel (but outside of their room).

For this chapter I referred to a variety of sources related to the Great Exhibition. Among them were a floor plan of the Great Exhibition from the Museum of Science and Industry, Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851; The Illustrated Exhibitor, which describes Middleton's Convertible Carriage, and gives details about almost every other item on display in the Palace, Recollections of the Great Exhibition, 1851, which shows the carriage display in color. Reports by the Juries on the subjects in the thirty classes into which the exhibition was divided (1851) lists the prizes awarded at the exhibition. There were 2 main classes of prizes. A council medal was somewhat analogous to a grand prize, but it not given in every category, only if they thought a particular entry had distinguished itself enough to deserve it. Prize medals seem analogous to the blue ribbons given at state fairs in the US, and were given to multiple entrants in every
category. For cotton, a council medal was not actually given, so I've made up John's two council medals out of whole cloth. :) Not only fabrics but embroidery, laces and actual clothing, including gowns, shoes and corsets were displayed at the exhibition. The world's first couturier, Frederick Worth, got his start at the exhibition. He was working at French design house Gagelin-Opigez & Cie at the time, and contributed several designs to the exhibition. The gown Margaret admires is his. As I could not find any records of the actual designs he contributed, I based the description on a gown in the Paris-based Journal des Demoiselles from 1851.

"Dobby" is the 1850s word for carousel or merry-go-round, and the Tempest Prognosticator was real, and displayed at the Exhibition, but never put into production. I do not think animal rights activists today would approve.
"Margaret?" John leaned against the locked door and whispered his wife's name urgently. Of course, there was no reply.

It wouldn't do to raise his voice or rattle the doorknob. He knew Margaret well enough to know this would have no effect, and only serve to awaken the neighboring guests, or worse, Jane.

No, Margaret was likely burrowed in bed, pillow covering her head, doing her very best to ignore him after running away. It was at times like this that their difference in age was thrown into stark relief. It was easy to forget how very young and innocent she was.

John crossed the room and sank into one of the two wing chairs flanking the dying fire as he pondered his next move. Going downstairs to the lobby to inquire for another key was out of the question, as he was dressed only in his drawers. He had stoked the fire just before retiring, and as the fireplace was quite close to the bed and the bedclothes many, a nightshirt had seemed superfluous. But even drawers plus nightshirt would be inappropriate attire for wandering the halls of a first-class hotel.

John eyed the needlepoint bell pull that hung to the right of the fireplace. Ringing for a maid—assuming any were awake at this late hour—was likewise out of the question. The poor girl would probably faint to see a man so under-attired. And if a porter came instead, how would John be able to hold his head high? It would be obvious to anyone except the most dimwitted that his own wife had locked him out of their shared bed chamber. It would be a humiliation to ask another man's help in gaining re-admittance. And what if Margaret reacted poorly when the door was opened? He needed no witnesses to their marital spat.

That left two possibilities that John could see, as far as the next few hours were concerned. He could wait until he was sure Margaret was asleep and try to find a way into the bedroom, or he could spend the night in this room. But there was no couch here to serve as ersatz bed, as the upholstered furnishings were limited to the aforementioned wing chairs and a dainty settee. To sleep in the sitting room would therefore require bedding down on the carpet before the fire. John's back complained at the very thought of this, and his vexation grew exponentially as he considered the situation. It was unlikely that he would sleep deeply under such circumstances, but he must sleep lightly this night, to be aware of the sounds of Jane stirring in the room beyond. He would need to rise before her, and hope that Margaret rose just as early so that she might let him back into his own bedroom before the servant began her morning duties. Gossip would ensue otherwise. Jane was a font of it. John's eyes rolled heavenward at the thought of the stories the servant might bring back to the mill house.

And of course they would gossip: the situation was patently ridiculous. A wife should not be excluding her husband from their bedroom, no matter what she might think he'd done.

And he'd done nothing wrong. John reached for a brass-handled poker, and stirred the dying embers of the fire as he contemplated his perceived transgression.

Those idiot lithographs.

They were just engravings, the published imaginings of one man's mind. But how was Margaret to know that was what was printing in ink was nothing like his own imaginings? These had none of the lithe grace that suffused every fantasy he had of his own love. They were crude depictions describing
only the functioning of the act that joined man and woman.

What she must think of him.

He had not so much as looked at those images since the night before their wedding. He had not needed to do so. Why would he, when reality was so much more vivid, so much enchanting than some second-rate artist's depiction?

Even in these past weeks, when she'd been ill, there had been no reason to resort to them. When not filled with worry, John's mind was filled with private, self-painted portraits of his wife's nubile curves, with memories of hours they'd spent together learning each others most intimate pleasures, with moving images of her ecstatic responses to his touch. It was always this way.

John stabbed viciously at the embers and was rewarded with a satisfying crunch as a glowing coal broke into small pieces.

That look on her face.

Her eyes had been round as saucers when he entered the room. She was focused so intently at the engraving of posture 6 that she had not even noticed him at first. Instead she'd turned the print of Bacchus and Ariadne this way and that, just as he had on first inspection of the image. She seemed perplexed at first, then... disgusted.

She must think him an animal.

No, worse. She'd grown up in the country and seen animals rutting. None of them rutted like that.

It wasn't fair. How could Margaret possibly think he might prefer such a coarse and shallow representation of lovemaking to what they had?

He should have burned the lithographs the night he received them. Damn them, and damn Adam Bell and his droll sense of humor that always seemed to come at another's expense.

John ran his hands through his hair, in a familiar gesture of frustration. Why had Margaret even been awake at two in the morning? She should have been in bed—in their bed-sleeping. Heavens knew she needed the rest after a long day on her feet. It was more than obvious that she had overdone things at the Crystal Palace, and this was his fault. He should not have allowed it, but he'd been thrilled at the prospect of a day alone with his wife.

And why had she been going through his bag at two in the morning?

John smiled ruefully as he remembered a hurried conversation with his mother only a few weeks prior. It had taken place while Margaret was hemorrhaging. He'd mentioned there were no secrets between himself and his wife. His mother had laughed, almost sardonically. He hadn't time to query her: too much was going on. But now he understood. Husbands and wives needed some boundaries. Each needed a modicum of private space. Margaret preferred to keep things relating to her monthly cycle from him: that was quite reasonable. Likewise, she should not have gone into his Gladstone bag.

Of course, they had never discussed such boundaries. But they must. John was not looking forward to the quarrel he knew must follow. It would be like the meeting of two gale-force winds.

They would talk tonight— the sooner the better. John nodded as he realized the importance of doing so. It was Mr. Coleridge, the draper, who had impressed upon John the necessity of resolving marital issues as quickly as possible. His wife was a handful, easily as passionate as Margaret, and Mr.
Coleridge himself was known for his red hair and concomitant temper. But despite their many backroom arguments, there was a depth of understanding between the couple that John had not witnessed between his own parents. He had hoped to emulate it some day.

"What is the opposite of love?" the draper had asked his 15-year-old assistant one afternoon, after John had overheard one particularly pernicious blow up.

"Why, hatred, of course," John had answered, with a sophomoric certainty that made the older man laugh uproariously.

"No, no. You might think that, but consider how both are so full of emotion. How can they be opposites when they are so similar? No, my young man, the opposite of love is apathy. Never, never let the love you feel for someone turn to that. Better hatred than that."

John hadn't understood, not immediately. But Mr. Coleridge continued to drop the occasional hint, intuiting that the teenager needed an apprenticeship in manhood as much as the one provided as draper. "Never go to bed angry," he said on numerous occasions. "It can only breed indifference."

So, yes, John thought now, he would wake Margaret, if necessary. He would not let her sleep on her anger. That would only widen the gulf between them.

John glanced at the mantelpiece clock and wondered if his wife was asleep. But as she was as much a brooder as he, he decided the answer was, "no." She was probably lying in bed, stewing.

The room was cold, he realized. John knelt by the fire and used tongs to remove coal from the overly ornate container that stood by the equally ornate fireplace set. He carefully rebuilt the fire and used a brass-embellished bellows to breathe life into it, bending low to focus the stream of air at the base of the coals. As he did so, his eyes lit on several half-charred pieces of paper near the fireback. He pulled the scraps from the fire with the tongs. Here was his answer: she'd been writing a letter.

John let the scraps cool on the tiled hearth as he contemplated their significance. Whom would Margaret find important enough to write to in the middle of the night? He would soon find out.

Then John glanced at his Gladstone bag and realized his own hypocrisy. He was angry that she'd invaded his privacy, yet here he was ready to invade hers.

John tossed the folded papers back into the fire, and watched as the fire eagerly consumed them.

He sat for a while, eyes closed, in the luxuriant heat of the fire, as he considered possible ways to access the bedroom. It was only when his chin hit his chest that he realized he had nodded off. But in his half-sleep an idea had presented itself, fully formed.

John shook himself awake, and turned from the fire. His bag was nearby: he rummaged inside for the two items he needed: a penknife and quill. He found them quickly. He used the knife to remove the sharpened nib from the quill, cutting it bluntly, instead. Next, he sliced a small square of paper from his copy of The Economist and rolled it into a tight cylinder, which he wedged inside the quill. He carried quill, tabloid and candle to the door.

John knelt in front of the keyhole, held the candle before it, and attempted to peer through the opening. As he suspected, the key was still engaged in the other side of the lock. But it shouldn't be difficult to use the quill to push the key out of the lock. He would just need something to catch the key, so that he could then pull it back to his side of the door. John removed several pages from The Economist, neatly bundled them together, and slid them halfway under the door.

To his consternation, the pages disappeared. Rustling of pages, was followed by a considerable
silence, then more rustling.

"Margaret?" he whispered.

Metal rubbed against metal and the door sprang open with a click.

John found Margaret sitting on the floor, knees tucked up to her chin, hair cascading over her shoulders, eyes red. In the glow of the candle standing next to her, she seemed much younger than her nineteen years.

Margaret read aloud from the newspaper in her hand, brow furrowed. "'Cotton Crop of the United States. The New York Shipping and Commercial List, for September 10, publishes the following statement of the Cotton Crop for the year ending 31st of August, 1851.' I don't understand. Is this a peace offering of some kind? Is it in code?"

John wanted to kick himself. If he'd known that a simple "I love you," or "Forgive me," slipped under the door would have opened it so easily, he would have written the words a hundred times.

"You've been sitting here this whole time?" He said, instead. "You've let the fire go out. The floor is cold. Margaret, you'll have made yourself sick. What were you thinking?" He touched her hand only for a moment, as she shrank away, but this was long enough for him to recognize that she was ice cold.

His wife stood, any trace of childishness fully dispelled in a sudden display of hauteur. "I don't want to argue." She retrieved the candlestick and moved toward the bed.

"We need to talk. Get in bed. I'll see to the fire."

"Is it not obvious that this was exactly what I was doing, John? Do not treat me like I am a child."

He moved towards her quickly and grabbed her hand. "Do not act like one, and we shall not have the issue in the first place." Her stricken expression made him regret his words immediately.

"It's at least half past three. We can talk in the morning."

His voice was more emphatic, and more harsh than he intended. "We need to talk now."

"We do not. Anything we have to say to each other can be said in the morning." Margaret attempted to pull away from him, but John held fast.

"We will not go to bed while we are angry at each other."

"I am not angry, John." Her blue-green eyes gazed into his, and he saw only disappointment written in their depths.

"Margaret—"

"I am tired."

He let her go. He left the room, but not before removing the key from the lock. He knew his wife well enough to realize she might engage the bolt once more.

John returned immediately, bearing the shovel from the fireplace set, a smoldering coal balanced on its blade. Two envelopes— those bearing the lithographs— were tucked firmly under his arm. He set them on the bedside table before getting to work on the fire. Margaret, already installed in the bed, did her best to ignore him. She blew out the candle she'd carried to the bed, and rolled onto her side.
so that her back faced him.

"Please stay awake, Margaret. We have much to talk about."

He joined her once he was satisfied the room would stay warm for the next few hours. "May I explain to you the circumstances of earlier this evening? Things are not as they appear."

"Tomorrow, John." Her voice was as cool as autumn rain.

"Why tomorrow?"

"I have already told you. I am tired. You are the one who has said I must rest. Well then, let me rest."

"You are not angry?"

His wife sighed. "I have told you I am not."

John smiled in the dark, at the realization that he'd outmaneuvered her. "Then may I have a kiss, at least?"

There was a very long pause. "Of course." She rolled onto her back and lay statue still, as though a poisoned spindle had pricked her finger.

John's kiss was feather light, but luxuriant, and it had the effect he intended. His wife's lips parted, and she sighed. But this sigh was different in tone and substance to the one just moments before. It was filled with longing.

John pressed his lips against hers again, ever so lightly, and earned the smallest of moans for his efforts. He teased her, giving her only the slightest taste of what they both desired.

She shuddered as his lips moved to her ear lobe, to the silken flesh of the column of her neck, to her glorious and bountiful decolletage. Her tissue-thin gown (Was it silk? He'd not seen it before.) gathered itself above her thighs and he found himself nestled deliciously between them.

How he'd missed this. How he'd missed her.

"Stop."

John lifted his head, incredulous.

Her lips were red, her eyes dilated, her breath ragged.

"You want this," he murmured. He kissed her again, more urgently. She responded passionately—she always did— but then she pushed him away.

"I said, 'Stop.'"

He obeyed. "Tell me why," he said with as much calm as he could muster, as he retreated to his side of the bed. The blood was pounding in his head. And elsewhere.

The woman was driving him mad.

*His* woman. His obstinate, obdurate woman.

Her chin was jutted out in that particular way of hers, jaw set tightly. "You made your preference clear, John. Why would you wish to change it now?"
"My preference?" he nearly shouted. "What do you know of my preference?"

"I see what you choose to purchase. What you choose to view. And I know what I saw."

"And what did you see, Margaret?"

"I saw pictures... of men and women."

"Yes?"

"Must I elaborate?"

"I think so. Tell me what you saw."

"I saw... empty eyes."

That was not what he expected to hear.

"There was no love. What they were doing is not what we do. At least, that is not my conception..." Her voice trailed off.

"No. You are right." John reached tentatively for his wife's hand and to his surprise she allowed it. "Would you allow me to explain?" he asked quietly.

She nodded.

"Before we wed, the other masters threw a party."

"Yes, I've heard of such things."

"There was lewd talk and lewd gifts."

"I see. And these gifts appealed to you."

"Must you think the worst of me? Actually, Margaret, I threw the gifts on the nearest rubbish pile on my walk back home. They were obscene. This particular gift was waiting for me when I returned to the mill."

"Someone left these prints where anyone could find them? Where your mother might come across them?" Margaret turned toward John, her attention fully captured.

"No, they were in a locked box. I was given the key during the party." He stared at the ceiling for a moment. "I considered burning them, but I was worried."

"Worried?" Margaret propped herself on her elbow as she looked and listened intently. John willed himself to stop blushing, ineffectually. "I never had any instruction, you see. About men and women... and love. I was concerned about our wedding night."

A small smile crept across his wife's face. "You had nothing to worry about." She paused. "But I don't see how those prints would have helped. They don't seem..."

"Realistic?" John laughed. "No."

"You look somewhat like those men, but I don't look like those women. Is that how I should look?"

John chuckled as he considered the figures shown in the *Sixteen Pleasures*. Those women had not an
ounce of fat upon them, apart from breasts dolloped upon them like scoops of mashed potatoes. Likely they were drawn by someone with no appreciation for the feminine. "You are perfect, Margaret. Glorious. You look the way a woman should look. They do not." He grimaced as he considered the misfortune those images had brought him. "I should have burned them."

"Then do it now." His wife looked at him evenly.

John picked up the packet of prints from the bedside table, and threw them onto the fire. He was glad to be rid of them. The flames shot up as they consumed the paper, lighting the room briefly.

Margaret's triumphant half-smile disappeared as her eyes traveled from the fire to the bedside table, where she noticed the second envelope in the sudden glow emanating from the fireplace.

"There are more?" Her look of dismay was crushing.

Margaret rose and pulled the coverlet from the bed. Her intent was obvious.

"I will tell Jane I had a headache and needed to be alone. She will understand."

John leaped from the bed and blocked her way.

"No, Margaret. Stay."

She was crying, and fought him as he pulled her into his arms. John held her close until she calmed, then led her back to the bed. He propped pillows against the headboard and sat back against it, pulling her close beside him.

"You think I am an animal," he stated matter-of-factly. She did not disagree.

He handed her the second packet. "Look, and tell me what you think." He lit a candle and held it close to the images.

Margaret examined these lithographs carefully, as carefully as he'd seen her looking at the first set, hours earlier. But this time, her eyes were not round as saucers. After a time, she visibly relaxed.

"They are in love," she said, finally. "These are not like the others. I daresay they are... beautiful."

John noticed a blush had crept across her cheeks.

"What is it?" he prompted, gently.

She pointed to one print. "What is he doing to her?"

"Would you like to find out?" her husband asked.

The pale rose tint of her cheeks intensified. "I couldn't!"

"I could. If you'd let me."

John nearly laughed aloud at the words that tumbled out next.

"Well," his wife said in that ever-so-practical tone of hers, "I think I might allow that, if you'd allow me this." She pointed to another lithograph, one very much analogous to the first.

He might have died and gone to heaven.
"You would do that for me?"

"It seems very much the same thing, John."

"Margaret..."

"Yes, John?"

"I think we should spend the day in bed. What say you to that?"

"What will we do with Jane?"

"Surely you have some errands she can run. Enough to take all day? You'll need fabric for your visit to the dressmaker. And I'm sure there are numerous drapers in the vicinity."

"Yes, Edith had quite a few she was fond of."

"Well, then."

"Well, then."

She tumbled into his arms, and they began their reconciliation in earnest.

He could not have imagined a better end to their quarrel.

Author notes:

I apologize for not updating for the past few weeks. I have had a very bad cold, and also have been feeling discouraged due to some trolling on another website. But I am happy to say that I am ready to get back to a regular writing schedule. However, as I have been sick three times since Thanksgiving, I need to pay better attention to my health, and perhaps scale back on the all-night writing sessions. That might mean updating every two weeks- we shall see.

I hope I captured the intensity of feeling between John and Margaret in this chapter, and the passion of a lovers' quarrel.

On to the research: This time I focused on hotels, and what a hotel visit would be like in 1851. Today we take for granted that when we visit a hotel there will be a front desk, and that at a certain level of hotel there will be a revolving door, a concierge, a doorman or porter, a lift or elevator, etc. And of course, we take for granted that you can communicate easily with the front desk just by picking up the phone next to your bed. Brown's would not have had a revolving door- I am fairly certain the first one in London would have been seen on the Midland Grand Hotel (see below); however Brown's would have had a porter.

As for communication, hotels used bell pulls at least until the 1880s. I found an photograph of a board of bells used by one hotel in 1835 as its call bell system, and an article from a 1922 issue of Hotel Monthly discussing changes in communication devices since 1880, indicating that bell pulls were still in use at that late date. (Incidentally, that article would be very useful for anyone writing a story set in a hotel from the 1880s to the 1920s, as it goes into fair detail about the different devices used to communicate with front desk during that time range. Pretty interesting!) I am therefore confident Brown's would have used bell pulls for communication. The bell system used by hotels was not so different from that seen during the opening credits of Downton Abbey. However, there were many more rooms to keep track of. In a home, the bells could be made of different metals and of different sizes so that they would each have different rings that a servant could listen for.
However, in a hotel with over 100 beds this would not be feasible. Instead, the bells were numbered, and the coil attached to each bell vibrated for an extended period. This way, the servant would have enough time to look up at the board to figure out which room had rung. The pull itself was attached to the bell with a wire and a series of pulleys held within the walls between the bedroom and the basement servants' room.

About the lock: I grew up in a house that was built in 1800 and had locks with skeleton keys. My siblings and I sometimes did the trick I described, but using a wooden skewer or knitting needle instead of the quill. I think a quill would work, though.

Margaret is reading from the September 27, 1851 issue of The Economist. Wow, it is seriously boring. The modern Economist is a lot more interesting.

I have been a bit concerned that I have might missed some key research regarding bathrooms in the 1850s. I know, I seem to be stuck on this topic. Perhaps this is because my family does a lot of camping, and I find the outhouses at primitive campsites to be absolutely repellant, but if I had lived in a time of privies and commodes and a new technology like flush-toilets was invented, I would have absolutely clamored for it. I'd have happily gone into debt! But perhaps someone who lived in that time would feel differently, particularly if she had servants to do the dirty work. I read back issues of The Builder magazine from the late 1840s and early 1850s and did find several designs for primitive water-closets discussed during this era. However, until 1851 (after the Exposition) those described were not flush toilets: one would have to have to pour in water using a pitcher to get the toilet to activate. Still, to my mind that is still far superior to carrying a nasty slop pail around the house. But again, carrying slops is something a servant would do, not the woman of the house. I am not thinking like a 19th century lady!

In 1851, at the time that the Exposition was going on, would Brown's Hotel have had anywater-closets, even of the primitive type I mentioned above? The very first hotel to have water-closets of any type was the Tremont Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts, designed in 1829, and like Brown's, considered a luxury hotel. (Dickens stayed there.) It also had bath rooms (rooms with fixed bathtubs) with cold running water and a heater to warm the water for the tubs. However, the water closets were on the ground floor, and the bathrooms were in the basement, meaning that guests would have to traipe from their rooms down to the lowest floor of the hotel, the location where the servants were usually found. I would guess that quite a few of the guests preferred the familiarity of the commodes in their dressing rooms to a hike to the ground floor. I also found a sales listing for the Inns of Court Hotel at Lincoln Field, a hotel that was built in Holborn, London in 1867, sixteen years after this story takes place. It describes 112 beds, plus bath rooms, and water-closets on the samefloor as the bedrooms. (Now we're getting somewhere!) This suggests that hotels might have had several shared water-closets per floor by this time. (I have stayed at a couple of historic hotels with this setup.) These were installed with new construction, however. I don't think Brown's would have done a retrofit the same year as the Great Exposition- they would have had to close down to do so, and there was too much money to be made in staying open for guests visiting the Crystal Palace.

I also found information about another luxury hotel, The Midland Grand Hotel at St. Pancras Station (now the St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel), which opened in 1873 as a result of a design competition, and which was the one of the most innovative hotels of its time. It had revolving doors and a hydraulic lift, but even at this time, twenty-two years after this story, none of its rooms had en suite bathrooms or water-closets. (I would hope there were water closets on each floor, as at the Inns of Court Hotel, but I could not find any information to confirm this.) In fact, one of the reasons the hotel closed, years later was because of the expense involved in needing an army of servants to carry slop pails, and bring water and tubs to and from rooms for bathing. As I mentioned last chapter, Brown's Hotel describes installing en suite bathrooms/water-closets in 1882, claiming to be the first to provide them to every room. But doesn't 30 years seem like a very long time to wait for such a very necessary
convenience as a private bath and toilet?

But maybe I am looking at this the wrong way, as I have never had a staff of servants to wait on me hand and foot. A portable bathtub set up in ones dressing room is private, after all. It's just not permanent. If you have a servant to take care of filling it and emptying it, I suppose it is not much different from a fixed bath tub, where the servant turns on the tap for you and drains it when you are finished (heaven forbid you do that yourself!). And, as I mentioned a while back, in the early Victorian era, there were some commodes that had a reservoir that allowed flushing. So to a person using it, this would not seem so much different from a water-closet. That is, the only person who was inconvenienced by its use was the servant, who had to empty the slop pail. Maybe this lack of inconvenience explains why it took so long for en suite bathrooms to catch on. As long as there was staff to invisibly do the dirty work, no one really saw the need for a technology to do the dirty work more efficiently.

I am glad I live in the 21st century, even without servants. :)

Thank you again for reading, for your support (I so appreciate it!) and for putting up with my historical tangents! Tintin
The Letter

It was impossible to imagine a life without Margaret. It was true that they had been married only a short time: even through the haze of sleep John was able to quickly calculate the number of days at eighty-two. And she had been in his life for only a few months before that. Yet the many years John had spent without her, while not expunged from his memory, were colorless in comparison.

John rolled over in bed and reached for her, only to find her side of the bed empty, her pillow indented, but fairly cool. He sat up and stretched, then frowned when he saw her enter from the sitting room.

"What have you been up to?" he asked. John realized belatedly that in their quarrel of two nights earlier, and in the repeated reconciliations of the day before he had neglected to bring up the topic of boundaries. The pink tinge that immediately colored Margaret's cheeks suggested some guilt. John fell back against the pillows and sighed. He was not sure he had another argument in him.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I wrote a letter the other night, before we argued. But I don't know where I put it. I was looking for it. I haven't been going through your things, if that's what you're wondering. I know that was wrong of me. By the way, that early morning glower does not suit you."

John raised his eyebrows at this unexpected admission. Margaret never failed to surprise him.

"Did you find it?" he asked after a moment's contemplation. He pushed aside the question he most wanted to ask.

"No. Perhaps the char girl took it with her. I will have to ask Jane," She hovered near the doorway, as if considering whether or not to wake the servant.

"Lock the door, and take that off," John said quietly, gesturing at the thin silk gown she wore. She obliged, and John was reminded of one of the many reasons why it was so difficult to imagine a life without her.

"You are a goddess, you know." Her blush deepened alluringly, but she did not attempt to cover herself, as she would have only a few months before. His de Milo came to him instead, a small smile
"Only you would say that. I think I am getting fat."

"Voluptuous." He ran his hand over the curve of her hip. "I'm certain it's not time to get up yet. Come back to bed. And tell me, why couldn't you sleep?"

She moved around the bed and slid under the blankets. "Well, you see, the sad truth of it is, you snore."

He supposed he deserved that. Still, he rewarded her for her impertinence with a firm pinch to the bottom. "I do not snore. I can tell when you are lying, by the way. Your pupils dilate."

"I'm not lying. You do snore. Like this." Margaret rolled onto her back and made several pig-like snorts, punctuated with giggles.

John looked at her evenly. "You seem well-practiced. Perhaps you are the one who snores, Margaret."

"I most certainly do not!" She bolted upright in bed, mortally offended, and the blankets fell to her waist, revealing her naked form once again.

It was an invitation John could not resist.

Jane must have heard them, John decided, as he left the bed some time later to brief the girl on the morning's tasks. Servants always managed to hear. They picked up dirty sheets and dirty laundry and picked up on signs that might seem insignificant to the untrained eye. So really, it did not matter that only a room separated hers from the master bedroom. If Jane hadn't heard, she would have made up stories anyway. It was their honeymoon, after all. And that was the price one paid for having help.

He returned to his bedroom to find his wife slipping into a silken robe, a totally unnecessary garment, in his opinion. "What are we doing today?"

John slid the fine cloth down her shoulders as he drew her close. "I'd rather spend it here, with you, but I need to visit the crating company. The exhibit closes Sunday, and they'll need to be on site Monday to pack up the machinery. Rather foolishly, they broke down the crates completely on arrival. That means they'll need to build new ones for the trip back to Milton. They have the measurements, of course, but they may not have begun work yet. A visit is in order."

Margaret nodded. "May I accompany you?"

"I am afraid you'd be bored. We only have another nine days here. I would suggest you visit the dressmaker's today."

"If you tell me the name of the dressmaker, I will leave a letter with the concierge," John replied. "Perhaps he will be able to set something up for tomorrow."

"Yes. Well, Edith was fond of Miss Sloane's in the Burlington Arcade. Are you sure you don't want me to go with you, John?"

John shook his head. "I have a number of errands to run. I need to stop by Barclay's for one, as we
are running low on funds."

"Barclays? Are they set up in Milton?"

"No, but I have a circular letter of credit. It's something similar to the letters of credit I use for the mill, although of course this is for our family account. It is dangerous to travel with large amount of money on ones person."

"Credit?" Margaret's brow furrowed. That did not seem like John. "I was just thinking I might go to the drapers today as I could use new stockings and garters, and it did not seem that Jane ordered everything I called for yesterday. Very few packages arrived last night. But I could certainly do without. What I have could easily be darned."

"You worry too much about cost, love." John kissed his wife's forehead. "We are not on the verge of insolvency by any stretch of the imagination. Quite the opposite, in fact. When I said I was 'running low on funds,' I simply meant I did not stop by the bank before we left Milton. A letter of credit is not a loan. It simply assures a London banker that there are funds in the Milton bank. They settle up via telegram later. And you should be dressed as the wife of a leading manufacturer, Margaret. You must do that for me. No mended stockings or undergarments. No second-rate goods."

The furrow remained. "If you insist. But it seems foolish to spend so much on clothes that must be discarded in two month's time."

"Many customs are foolish. Still, we abide by them."

There was a knock on the adjacent sitting room door, and John left to speak with a porter. The young man waited in the hall with a small team of understaff. One stood sentinel by a wheeled table, laden with the morning's breakfast. Two others bore a large brass tub. Upon the porter's signal, the latter made their way into the dressing room as breakfast was set up in the sitting room.

"Kippers! Lovely," said John as he returned to the room and removed a silver cover from a plate. Then he gazed at Margaret with concern as he seated her at the table. "They aren't going to be a problem for you, are they, love?"

Margaret shook her head and blushed. "I feel perfectly fine, John. You are being silly." She ate her breakfast with gusto, to prove the point.

He polished off his own breakfast remarkably fast, but the morning's activities might have had something to do with that.

"I assume you want the first bath?" John rose from the table and retrieved his Gladstone bag from its location by the wing chair. He unlatched it quickly and rummaged inside until he located one of two leather pouches. He placed the drawstring bag on the table, next to his wife's finished breakfast. "That should cover your needs for today."

Margaret poured out the contents of the purse to find an abundance of sovereigns and crowns. "This is too much, John."

"We will have no more discussion on this, Margaret. No middling goods will be purchased."

"Yes, John."

"I will be back at one, if you'd like to luncheon together."

"Of course, John."
Margaret left the room to take her bath, and John took up his deconstructed copy of *The Economist*, and settled into a wing chair with a cup of tea to mentally prepare for the day. It would have been better to leave John Thornton the mill master in Milton, he knew. Surely Margaret deserved a full two weeks of his undivided attention. But in a few hours time, he would put mill business away again and let the honeymoon resume.

They'd have each other all to themselves again.

"You and Mr. Thornton are getting along quite well."

Jane had heard.

*Obviously,* she had heard. Margaret willed herself not to turn pink, as Jane ran the boar's hair brush through her hair. Margaret thought quickly. If she accused the girl of impertinence, it would only make things worse. The tale would be embroidered, no doubt, and by the time the trio returned to Milton, the story of the connubial delight of the Thornton honeymoon would bear little resemblance to what had actually transpired. Although delight had definitely transpired.

"We get along famously," Margaret replied after a moment. "I am lucky to have such a good man as my husband."

It was interesting that Jane was talking at all. John had identified her a gossip, and Margaret had no reason to doubt him, but in her presence the girl said very little. But perhaps that was because the servant spent her time listening. Or perhaps she'd deemed Margaret not worth gossiping with. According to John, Jane gossiped readily with Fanny. But she said nary a peep in front of the elder Mrs. Thornton. Margaret laughed aloud as she regarded herself in the mirror, wearing the raven's cut-down mourning clothes. Did Jane think she was also cut from the same cloth?

Well, maybe several days without an audience had loosened the girl up, because she was very talkative this morning.

"May I ask where we will be goin' today, Mrs. Thornton?"

Margaret turned her head to look for the woman, before realizing who was being addressed.

"There are several drapers on Piccadilly. At least, there used to be when I lived here with my cousin."

Jane nodded her head vigorously. "Yes, ma'am. I visited one yesterday. But there were several t' choose from, I noticed."

"You only visited one? But I gave you quite a list. How did you spend your day?"

"I'm sorry, ma'am. You see, I got lost. I was quite turned around. I walked for several miles in the wrong direction. Into quite a seedy neighborhood. I was about t' buy a map when this nice man approached me-"

"A man?" Margaret raised her eyebrows as she glanced at Jane's reflection in the mirror. Jane focused her attention on the braid she was coiling on Margaret's head, and continued.

"Yes, a very nice man. And so handsome. Tall with sandy blond hair and a ginger beard. And lovely hazel eyes. He saw me sitting on bench in a very big park. I don't remember the name. But I guess he could tell I was lost. I must'a looked confused or worried or somethin' because he offered to buy me a lemonade. That was very nice of him, I think."
"Yes." Margaret frowned.

"And when I told him what I was after, and that I worked for a wealthy cotton manufacturer and his wife, he said, 'Oh, you'll be wantin' the best, then love!' and then he walked with me all the way back to Piccadilly. Now what kind of man would do that 'cept a gentleman?"

"What kind of man indeed?"

"I don't think I've ever met such a man in Milton." Jane blushed. "Except for your Mr. Thornton, that is. So in the end, I only had time t' buy fabric for one gown. All the black fabric was exactly th' same! I couldn't tell it apart."

"Well then, I guess we'll have plenty to keep us occupied this morning." Margaret patted her hair, and satisfied with her appearance, asked for her bonnet.

"I wish the gentleman had stayed with me. He could have sorted out the fabric, y' see. He told me he was a draper's son."

"Is that so? But that hardly would have been appropriate."

"I know, ma'am. But I just thought it seemed rather fateful, given that your Mr. Thornton also got his start as a draper."

"I see." Margaret furrowed her brow, because actually she did not see. She had no idea where Jane was going with her current line of reasoning. Thankfully the girl dropped it.

"I hope it is not rude t' ask, ma'am, but I do not have much experience of mourning, apart from Mrs. Thornton, who has been in mourning forever, but not high mourning... It's different for my class of folk."

Margaret looked at the girl expectantly as she tied the ribbons below her chin.

"How much longer will you wear th' veil?"

"It has only been twelve days, Jane. Custom dictates that I should wear the veil for a month, and black for three months. Then half-mourning. You've seen women in gray and lavender, no doubt."

Jane nodded, and Margaret was struck by how attractive she was. Her wavy, ash blond hair was styled very becomingly, although in the simple style that befit a servant, and her huge, gray eyes were quite striking. Margaret wondered how often "nice" men introduced themselves to her. The girl probably would not remain a servant for long, as marriage and service did not mix.

"Then why does the elder Mrs. Thornton still wear th' black?"

Margaret blinked as she came back to the conversation. "Well, it is different for widows. They must wear black for a year. Although some to choose to wear it for longer. Mrs. Thornton must miss her husband greatly."

"I hear he was a rascal." The girl fairly leered at Margaret.

"Jane! You are lucky Mr. Thornton has already left. But I will not suffer you to speak in such a way about his father! Misfortune and grief come to all of us, in time. You must remember this. And even if you do not, you will experience it, in time."

Jane bowed her head, and busied herself locating Margaret's reticule, while Margaret picked up the
purse John had left behind for her. No apology was forthcoming, but Margaret did not expect one. It was clear the girl needed to work on her attitude.

"Jane, you were in these rooms for a while yesterday, were you not?"

"Only for the briefest of times, Miss. I mean, Ma'am. The master banished me, he did." The slightest of smirks played over the girl's lips and Margaret did her best to maintain her composure.

"Did you happen to see a letter? I might have placed it on the mantelpiece. Or the writing table. I do not remember."

"No, ma'am."

"I thought you might have mailed it."

"I wouldn't do so without asking, ma'am."

"Do you think the char girl might have?"

"I doubt it. Anyway, it's clear she hasn't visited. Look at the state the hearth is in."

Jane was right. The pile of ash in the grate was more than twenty-four hours worth, and the brass was beginning to oxidize.

"Was it important?" There was a gleam in Jane's eyes that made Margaret hesitate.

"No, there were no documents or any things of that nature enclosed. It's just that I spent several hours on it. I'd hate to have to write another. I was informing an old friend of Papa's death."

"I'll be sure to let you know if it turns up, ma'am."

The morning passed quickly, and by half past twelve, Margaret had purchased enough stockings to last her through the winter, and yardage for not only two more black gowns, but silks in dove gray, plum and charcoal as well. After finding trims quiet enough to suit such gowns, she was ready to return to the hotel. Margaret had never enjoyed the very feminine activity of shopping: she found endless discussion of the merits of one passementerie or other to be frivolous and difficult to follow. This morning's labor, with one sales girl or another nipping at her heels, extolling the merits of this French gimp or that English piping had been quite exhausting.

"Shall we?" she asked Jane, after directing the sales girl to send their purchases back to the hotel.

"Do you want me to call for a carriage?" Jane asked. "You look a bit tired."

"I am quite well. I need the fresh air after my confinement, and it is a very short walk." The pair left the shop and journeyed along Piccadilly toward Albemarle Street. However, their progress was slowed by a very large crowd that completely blocked traffic.

Disconcertingly, it was mostly men who filled the road, rude, rough, shouting men who seemed to be having a great deal of fun as they pointed and laughed at some spectacle they encircled. Just what the spectacle was, Margaret had no idea. She was not tall enough to see.

"What is going on?" Margaret asked. Jane left her side without her leave and pushed through the crowd, returning breathlessly some minutes later. She led a large, sandy-haired man by the hand, a man who despite the early hour had clearly had a nip or two. He did not stagger, but he had that high coloring that responds readily to alcohol. His nose and cheeks flushed red to match his scraggly
"Mrs. Thornton," Jane said, "this is the gentleman I told you about, Mr. Leonards. What a pleasant surprise to find him here!"

Margaret was glad of her mourning attire when the man spoke, for the veil hid her features from view. It also camouflaged a look of shock that she was unable to control. Although she did not recognize this man, his Hampshire accent was unmistakable. And there were several flags that this man was Navy, each as clear as the semaphores her brother had shown her years earlier.

"George Leonards, at your service," he said, as he doffed a wool cap of the type worn by sailors and extended a work roughened hand, one that undoubtedly had coiled many thick, hempen ropes over the previous years. Margaret noticed he wore a light jacket of fustian, like most working-class men, but his trousers were linen front-falls. Only seamen wore those. She put her up her guard, and put on her best London accent to hide her own southern origins.

"How do you do?" she asked. "Just what is the disturbance over there?"

"It's some strange American ladies. They call themselves Bloomers. You'll not believe what they're wearing! Short skirts and trousers. I think they want to collapse our civilization, they do." Leonards held out a handbill for the women to inspect, snickering as he did so.

Margaret read the handbill as Jane looked over her shoulder.

\begin{quote}
A Call to Sartorial Action

Women of London!

Are you not the equals of men?

It is time to throw of your brutal oppressors,

and to adopt an attire

better suited to the dignity of person-hood.

Stays and crinolines were invented

to restrict and constrain.

But if we cannot bend, if we cannot reach,

how can we reach our full potential?

Do we not have a right to wear what we wish,

so long as we injure neither health nor modesty?

Join us in throwing off these chains!
\end{quote}

An engraving of a woman followed these emphatic words, and Margaret blinked in surprise as she scanned the image. Above the waist the woman's garment was not so outlandish: she wore a open-front jacket that appeared to be figured with a lozenge design. It might have been silk, or damask, in some somber color. Under that was a ruffle-fronted shirtwaist. But her skirt, which belled out with several layers of ruffles in the latest style, looked as though her draper had been short a full four yards of cloth. It stopped two inches below her knee, exposing the model's legs for all the world to
see. True, those legs were covered with cloth. The model wore very full trousers gathered at the ankle, so that they resembled the Turkish garment seen in books.

Jane laughed. "Her hat looks a lot like the one you always wear, Mrs. Thornton!" The engraving showed it to be of straw, with a brim about four inches wide and a rounded crown.

Margaret self-consciously touched the black silk bonnet she was wearing, which effectively cut off half her field of vision, even without the veil. Perhaps these Bloomers were onto something.

"You have been standing here watching the show, Mr. Leonards? Do you not have some place to be?" Margaret asked haughtily.

"It's been quite entertainin'." Leonard responded with a cheeky grin. "Although those young ladies should be careful. They're likely to get find themselves in a predicament. They're courtin' trouble, they are."

"I hear you were able to get my maid out of a predicament only yesterday." Margaret had taken an instant disliking to this man, even before learning he was from Hampshire, or that he was most likely a sailor. She felt like an animal acting solely on instinct. There was something about this man, something unsavory that rolled off him like the scent off a fish monger's stall.

"Aye, but that was different. Your miss is clearly a better class of person, isn't she. She wouldn't parade around half-dressed."

"They look fully covered to me, Mr. Leonards."

"Perhaps you'll be joinin' them at their ball, then! Leonards pointed to the bottom of the handbill, where a date and location were printed. You'll have to dress for it though!" he guffawed, and Jane looked from him to her mistress with an appeasing smile.

"What do you do for a living, Mr. Leonards?"

"Looking for work at the moment. Was a seaman, but I'm done with that."

"On a merchant vessel?" Margaret was fairly certain the answer would be 'no.' She steeled herself.

"With the Navy. I sailed with the Orion-

*Frederick's first vessel.* Margaret did not hear the rest. By the time she had regathered her wits the conversation had turned to Leonard's imminent relocation.

"I thought he might apply for work at the mill," Jane said.

Margaret nodded, unable to do otherwise. She would just have to ask John to reject Leonard's application. "There is plenty of work in Milton for those who are a quick study. Jane, we should be off. We will double back on Old Bond Street instead. Mr. Thornton expects us within the hour. Good day, Mr. Leonards." She did not extend her hand.

Although it was not quite one, John was waiting for her when she arrived back at Brown's.

"Are you well?" he asked as she removed her veil and bonnet. Margaret waved Jane away, and beckoned John into the dressing room, well away from prying ears before speaking.

"I am fine," she said as she sank into the slipper chair that to the side of the small dressing table. "But Jane and I saw something that disturbed me." She reached into her reticule and pulled out the
handbill she'd folded into quarters.

John laughed as he read it, then pulled up a chair to sit so that his knees touched hers.

"I'd heard about these young ladies. I believe one of their leaders spoke recently and caused quite a stir. But Margaret, I don't quite understand why you would find this so upsetting."

"You don't mean to say you would find such a choice of clothing acceptable attire for your wife."

John grinned. "No, frankly. Although I do quite like the hat." He gazed intently at his wife. "It can't be this that is bothering you."

"It's not. I think their costume is ugly to be honest, but in no way immodest. While I wouldn't wear it myself-"

"-Thank heavens!"

"I can see why some women might want to. They are correct when they say that the vast number of undergarments we wear are quite limiting. It is almost as though that is by design."

"By design? I suppose you mean by men. And yet some women, like Fanny, choose to wear their skirts even wider. By whose design is that?"

Margaret smiled. "Touché."

John reached for her hand. "What is it, Margaret? This cannot be what is troubling you. This is... frippery."

"It was Jane. She has found herself the most unsuitable of companions. I know you have said that it is none of your business what your employees do on their own time, but this man made me very uncomfortable. The way he talked of these Bloomers." She gestured at the paper John held. "It was as though he wished them harm, or as though he might be thinking of harming them himself. There were at least three hundred men hooting and hollering at these girls and he was one of them. It was...disconcerting."

John looked at her gravely. "You should not have been there. Not among such men."

"This was Piccadilly, John! It's quite safe during the day."

"Yet you did not feel safe this day."

"No," she agreed. "I did not."

"To your point, Margaret, there is a vast difference between the employees of the mill and those in our home. We trust the latter with our secrets, so they must in turn be worthy of that trust. And this trust must extend to those they hold in confidence. But this is a London man, correct? We will not see him once we return to Milton."

"He is out of work. And apparently he is so smitten by Jane that he will be relocating to Milton. She asked if you might employ him. Right in front of me. The cheek! I did not know how to reply."

"And you do not want me to."

It was not a question, Margaret noticed. She nodded her reply, head bowed.

John shrugged. "Then I will not. It would be unseemly, at any rate, to be employing the beaux of
household staff. There would be talk, no doubt.

There was a knock at the sitting room door and John rose. "Luncheon is here. You know, you haven't asked me about my day, yet." He grinned at her crookedly.

"Oh, do tell, John!"

John waited until the servant had left and they were both seated at the table to tell her his news.

"Everything is on track to have the machinery crated up on schedule. Well, it is now. They had quite forgotten, but I soon put them right. But that's not what I wanted to tell you."

"Oh?"

"The crating company is out near Spitalfields."

"Where silk is woven."

John nodded. "The very place. I ran across an acquaintance of mine who said he would be more than willing to set up a tour of some of the weaving establishments, if you are interested. You'll find it is very different from Marlborough Mills, and given your interest in the plight of the working class I thought you might be interested."

"The plight of the working class? You mean Engel's book?" Margaret pursed her lips as she sorted through her husband's words. "But just how is Spitalfields different from Milton?"

John grinned. "It's traditional weaving as opposed to modern methods. I think you'll find it illuminating. I certainly did."

"I'd love to see it, John. How thoughtful of you."

"There's something else."

Margaret gazed at him raptly.

"It seems I was in just the location today. I ran across your friend, Mr. Lennox."

"Henry? My friend?"

John frowned. "I suppose it wasn't surprising, as the Inns of Court are so close by to Spitalfields. He was leaving work for the day." John scoffed. "At eleven. He said he would be paying a call on Edith, who would be overjoyed to know that you were in town. And that she would want us to come for dinner." John produced a note from his waistcoat pocket. "Edith has already sent over the invitation."

"But she did not attend the funeral. Why would she re-establish communication when she's already cut me?"

"I don't know. I didn't open it."

That was so very like John: the missive was addressed to both of them, but he put her feelings first. Margaret opened the note and scanned Edith's words.

"She and her husband were on the Continent," she said after a few moments. "doing a tour of hot springs with her mother. Henry did write to her, but the letter followed them. Edith only returned on Sunday. She hopes we will forgive her and join them at seven tonight."
"And do you want to, Margaret?" John asked, his clear blue eyes piercing.

"Yes," Margaret said. "I love her."

"Seven? We'll still have plenty of time, then."

"You're insatiable!"

John laughed. "That was not at all what I had in mind, but now you mention it..."

"What did you have in mind?"

"Do you have a passport?"

"The Shaws always talked of getting me one, so that I could accompany them to the Continent, but it never happened."

"Let's go to the Foreign Office and apply for one, then."

"But why?"

"That is a surprise."

"But won't we need documentation of who I am? My birth is recorded in the church at Helstone, and our marriage at the church in Milton. As far as I know, those are the only records of my existence."

"You forget I am a magistrate."

John crossed the room, opened his Gladstone bag and pulled out a leather folio. In it, Margaret noticed, were a number of printed documents. He pulled one out and laid it on the table.

"This is a certificate of identity. As a magistrate, I have the power to ascertain that you are indeed Margaret Thornton of Milton. And that is enough to obtain you a passport. We can head to Charing Cross this afternoon."

"Yes, but where are you taking me after?"

"That is a surprise, love. We won't leave until next week."

John closed the folio and began to place it back in his bag, when Margaret noticed familiar black-edged stationery.

"Isn't that my letter?"

John's brow wrinkled in confusion as he retrieved the letter from the bag. He shook his head as he handed it to her. "I didn't know it was there."

"I'm sure it was my fault. I must have inadvertently placed it there that evening, when I was looking for a stamp." Margaret's cheeks burned as she inspected the intricate pattern of the parquet flooring. The letter bent in her tightened grasp as she felt John's gaze upon her.

"I couldn't help but notice the address," he said slowly. "Is that why you were so eager to visit the Spanish exhibit at the Exhibition?"

"It's not what you think," Margaret began.
"How would you know what I think?" John shot back in a whisper.

"Please, give Jane the afternoon off. And I will tell you," Margaret pleaded. "His name is Fred."

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Author's notes:

Thank you to everyone who is continuing to read and review! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. :)

About the circular letter of credit: these are the forerunner to the ATM, credit card and (for those of you who are old enough to remember) the traveler's check, and have been around in some form or another since the crusades. I obtained my information about CLOCs from a website belonging to the Columbia University law library. A circular letter of credit worked in the following way: a bank would issue a document to wealthy traveler for a certain (large) amount of money on deposit in the bank. (This tool was not for common folk.) The traveler would present the document to a different bank, who would release a certain amount of money to the traveler, and contact (using the telegraph by the 1850s) the original bank to have the funds sent on. The merchant would also record the amount of funds to be deducted on the document itself, so that the traveler could keep track. After a while, to prevent fraud, travelers were asked to keep either their passport or another document, called a letter of indication with them, which had a signature the merchant could compare against, to prevent fraud. This sounds a bit like a debit card, doesn't it?

I obtained the information about passports from the Dictionary of Commerce and Commercial Navigation (1877). This reference is 25 years beyond the time frame of the book (which bothers me), but it was the closest reference I could find. I will update if I find an earlier reference (or if someone points me to one). :) A certificate of identity verified a person was who he said he was and could be issued by any mayor, magistrate, minister of religion, physician, surgeon, solicitor or notary. They were used from at least 1867 on as formal documents, perhaps earlier. From what I have read, with the advent of train travel in the 1850s and the very large increases in the amount of people traveling, passports were not always needed to travel from England to Europe. However, I would think that some form of identification would have been needed. I decided to err on the side of caution and get a passport for Margaret, as John would be required to have one as an importer of cotton. If anyone has further information, please let me know and I will revise!

The description of the attire of the Bloomers is from two places: the November 1851 edition of The Journal of the American Phrenological Society (because phrenology, the study of how the shape of a person's cranium predicted their character and mental ability was a thing in the 1850s!), and The London Illustrated News. The former describe the attire of a 35-year-old woman named Mrs. Dexter who gave a lecture at the Literary Institution in London, and of two younger woman parading on Piccadilly as they passed out handbills extolling the virtues of Bloomerism and advertising the Bloomer ball that was to take place in London on October 29,1851. Great crowds of gawking men congregated whenever these women appeared, for obvious reasons. The Illustrated London News of July, 1851 (pp. 85-86) has an accurate drawing and description of the clothing worn by Amelia Bloomer, the founder of the movement. If you Google "Bloomerism an American Custom" you will easily find a caricature from Punch that gives an idea of the clothing.

Thank you for reading! Tintin
John did not reply. He picked up his hat, grabbed the letter from her outstretched hand, and left the room as quickly as he could, closing the door behind him with a forceful thud. He bounded down the hotel's wide staircase and across the marble-floored lobby, pushing the porter out of his way in his rush to exit the space.

He had no idea where he might go, just that he needed to walk. He moved with purpose and alacrity, and found that the crowds on the street readily parted for him as he crashed down Albemarle Street and then onto Stafford. He rushed without any care to propriety, as though he were extremely late to an appointment, or party to an emergency. The scowl likely helped, too: he found people usually moved out of his way when he was angry. And certainly he had not been so angry in a very long time.

He felt more machine than man at the moment. But steam-engines were equipped with valve that might be tapped in emergencies, allowing any dangerous build up of pressure to be released. He, on the other hand, had no such device. He felt likely to blow, to fragment into several sharp-edged pieces that might sail through the air and wound whomever they happened to encounter on their journey back to Earth.

It was for Margaret's own good that he left so suddenly, before injurious words were said. Before they wounded her.

Walking would help.

John's pace slowed slightly by the time he reached Berkley Square, but he made three circuits of the long oval, and scared at least eight nursemaids and the infants they pulled before he was calm enough to find a seat. He headed for the pump house at the center of the park, and found his glower still effective enough to scare off the three young nurses who sat there, rolling their carriages back and forth with their kid-clad feet.

John sighed as he claimed a vacated bench, and rubbed his forehead in frustration.

Fred. Who was this Fred, and why was he important enough to write to in the middle of the night?

John felt the anger within him surge forth again in a monstrous wave, and his fist clenched ineffectually. If he had stayed in the suite, it would have ended up through the plaster and lath wall, or perhaps even through the solid oak door. He would never hit Margaret, of course, but she would not realize this. She would not understand and she would be understandably frightened. She, who'd grown up in such gentle surroundings, could not possibly relate to such a display of untempered wrath. This, despite her own passionate nature.

Even now he wanted to yell.

Yes, it was better to be away until the anger abated to a gentle simmer.

But why was he so angry? Why, over a simple letter?

It was because Margaret had lied, obviously. Because she had specifically asked to visit the Spanish portion of the exhibition without explaining why. If her business with this Fred was completely innocent, there would be no such need for such a lie of omission. But there it was. She had not seen
fit to tell him about someone so important to her. Because clearly Fred was important.

John turned over the letter in his hand as he examined Margaret's perfect penmanship.

_F.D._

_Who was he?_

_A lover?_

The thought of Margaret in another man's arms was enough to drive John to madness. That his Margaret might sully herself in such a way should be unthinkable. Nonetheless, an image manifested, a cruel, taunting image that John could not help but examine in excruciating detail.

He saw her in his mind's eye with perfect clarity, although her lover was much more grainy. Margaret's taper arms were thrown with abandon around this Lothario's neck, her petaled lips were pressed against his, her voluptuous breasts- of course she was scantily clad, his mind would serve up the worst, it seemed- flattened against his naked chest.

John drew a ragged breath.

_Such a thing was not possible. Not of Margaret._

Of course it was not possible! He closed his eyes as he banished the image from his consciousness, and allowed the reasonable part of his mind to regain mastery. Margaret had come to him a virgin, completely unschooled in the ways of love. She did not love another, and no other had loved her. This was nonsense, sheer nonsense. There must be a reason that she had not told him about this Fred, a very good reason. Margaret did not keep secrets, nor did she lie. She simply was not that kind of person.

John's thoughts were interrupted by a chickering sound. He looked up to see a squirrel scolding him. Perhaps his bench was too close to the plane tree the animal called home, for the white-breasted animal ran up and down the tree as though defending a fortress. John leaned down and picked up one of a pile of achenes deposited at the base of the bench. Perhaps that was what the squirrel wanted. He tossed the round fruit towards the tree and the squirrel jumped from branch to branch, then onto the pagoda-style roof of the pump house, where its scolding intensified.

John looked around him, and belatedly noticed his surroundings. The plane trees, majestic in their clothing of mottled, peeling bark, were just beginning to ready themselves for autumn. Vivid green was already fading to chartreuse and yellow. John realized that he should not be there alone. Margaret would appreciate such a place. She would laugh if she saw the squirrel, and she would know with much more certainty than a Milton boy the cause of the animal's upset. But more importantly than that, he should not be in such a place at all. Margaret was likely worrying about him, and wondering where he'd gone. He hoped desperately that she was not crying.

John stood as understanding dawned on him. He did not need to know. Trust was enough- it must be enough.

He quickly exited the park and retraced his steps to the hotel. He handed the letter to the concierge upon entering, a smile upon his face.

This had been a tempest in a teapot. Hopefully, his apology would quickly put things right.

John called his wife's name as he entered the suite, and noted the untouched plates from luncheon, their contents already beginning to congeal.
"Where is she?" he asked, when Jane entered from the adjoining room.

"I have no idea, sir. I've been in my room this entire time. I only just heard you."

John bolted from the room. He should have realized she would follow him.

Margaret's lower lip quivered as she looked from Jane's doorway to John, her eyes pleading. But he did not seem to hear her. He gathered his hat, plucked the crumpled letter from her hand, and stormed out of the room, his face as full of thunder as it had been that day he'd set upon Stephens.

She had not realized she'd possessed the power to make him so angry. Nor did she want such a power.

Margaret paced the room anxiously as she waited for him to return. She bumped into the writing table twice before realizing that she would end up black and blue by the time he returned. She gathered her cloak and bonnet with its veil, and quietly left the room.

In the lobby, she found the porter and enquired after John.

"He headed down Albemarle." The young man pointed to his right, and Margaret smiled appeasingly, as the porter did not seem at all happy to be helping her. John, of course was nowhere in sight. But why would he be? She'd wasted a good ten minutes in the sitting room pacing back and forth when she might have been looking for him. Margaret turned onto Piccadilly and was relieved to find that it was no longer thronged. It still contained the usual contingent of shoppers, as it would on any weekday afternoon, but the rowdy men she and Jane had encountered earlier appeared to be long gone. Margaret breathed a sigh of relief. That was one less problem to deal with.

Margaret looked up and down the street and was pleased to see a familiar, tall beaver hat some distance away. The poker-stiff posture and broad back, as well as the raven-black clothing more often seen on an undertaker left no doubt in her mind that it was he. Her quarry turned into a shop and Margaret quickened her pace. In a few minutes she found herself outside of a bookseller's. But to her consternation, she found the stacks inside empty. And the shopkeeper himself was no help- he had no recollection of a dark, handsome man in a very foul mood recently visiting.

Margaret returned to the street and continued down Piccadilly. If he wasn't in the bookseller's he must be somewhere nearby-she was certain she'd seen him enter a shop in the vicinity. She peered in the windows of several, as well as an alehouse she had no right to enter and another establishment of dubious credentials. John was nowhere to be found.

Then she saw his hat again, this time four blocks ahead, near Bolton Street. He, along with a large group of people, were crossing Piccadilly to enter Green Park. She hastened to follow and soon found herself on a footpath that ran alongside the Queen's Basin. She joined the procession heading West across the park, but was unsuccessful at pushing through the crowd to get any closer to him. Still, the crowd carried her along and after a few minutes she found herself at Hyde Park Corner, where the Wellington Arch stood, along with its famous bronze atrocity.

A feminine voice, quite strident in its effort to be heard, was speaking and Margaret could not help but register her words as she continued to push her way toward John.

Despite her harsh American accent she was an excellent orator, it seemed, for the crowd laughed every couple of minutes, even when what she said did not appear to be particularly amusing.

"Eighty years ago, a woman of style could not said to be dressed unless her hair was a good two feet tall. This of course made her much, much taller than her husband or beau. And those wigs were said
to be a fire hazard."

The crowd laughed, and some guffawed. "Them Frenchies were worse than us!" cried out one fustian-clad worker in the front, clearly a latent nationalist.

"Oh, but there were women of all countries who dressed just as foolishly."

Margaret looked toward the voice and was rewarded with a view of the speaker, as the young lady in question had climbed onto the base of the monument to stand between two of its Corinthian columns. Even in her Bloomer dress she was striking, although her costume did her no credit. In conventional clothing she would likely be a celebrated beauty, with scores of men eager to claim her hand, regardless of her social status. She had charisma, as well: the crowd seemed to hang on her every word, and immediately hushed when she went silent. The blonde speaker's lips curved into a small smile with this knowledge of her power. No wonder such a large crowd had gathered. She might have been the pied piper, and they the rats of Hamlin.

The Bloomer continued extemporizing. "Of course, there was also a problem with doorways, as women wore panniers that made their gowns four or five feet wide." She nodded sagely as the crowd laughed, and Margaret turned away to scan the crowd. She saw several tall beaver hats, but none attached to anyone wearing a black frock coat.

"We can laugh about the fashions of the past and how ridiculous they were, but today's fashions are just as foolish. Women wear corsets that do not allow them to breathe, or to carry a child with ease. We wear skirts that do not allow us to move, and which will burn us to death should they catch on fire. And this they do quite easily."

There was a murmur of discontent from the crowd. Margaret ignored it. A man in black stood not far from her, close to the wrought iron fence that surrounded the arch. He was hatless, his back to her, but it had to be John. Margaret pushed toward him with some effort, whispering apologies to those around her as she did so. Once again, she was glad of her mourning dress, as it seemed to excuse her foray.

John turned, just as she was about to call out his name.

Except it wasn't John.

He wasn't half as handsome. And he wasn't hers.

The stranger looked at her quizzically as she backed away, and replaced his beaver hat on his head.

Margaret bit her lip as the crowd surged around her. Apparently the Bloomer had just said something that had incited them.

"Consider any dress that does no injury to health or offers no affront to modernity-"

"Your dress is an affront!"

The young woman continued, unabashed. "I say a woman has the right to adopt such a dress. If my costume harms no one, I demand to be at perfect liberty to consult my own taste-"

"Taste, she says! I'd like to-" Margaret covered her ears at what was said next by the men around her.

Her compatriot, a dark-haired girl with hair arranged much like Fanny's, climbed upon the ersatz stage to support the blonde. This girl was even prettier than the first, Margaret noted, although
perhaps not half as charismatic. "We will consult our own taste. Hear us! We will consult our own taste in the matter of decoration of our persons, and our own feelings with regard to convenience and even comfort." She punctuated her words with the umbrella she held, stabbing the air with it as though it were a rapier.

"What about our comfort?" shouted a voice from the back of the crowd.

"Your comfort? What ever do you mean?" the dark-haired girl responded.

"It makes me uncomfortable t' see you like that. Women should na be wearing trousers. Them's man's clothes. It goes agin the order of things. It's shocking, it is!"

The blond shouted back, "Why is it so shocking for women to wear trousers when men in Scotland are known to wear petticoats, and quite short ones at that?"

A murmur ran through the crowd. Apparently some of the Northerners present did not find it amusing to hear their neighbors' national dress insulted. The two girls looked at each other and jumped down from their perch. The crowd pressed in, but after some moments it was clear, at least to some, that the pair had escaped. The steady clip clop of hooves against cobblestones attested to their safe delivery.

But not all came immediately to that conclusion.

Margaret shrank against the iron fence as the crowd pressed forward, eager to give the pair their comeuppance.

"Who do they think they are? That's a war hero's monument they've tread upon, I'll have you know."

Margaret slid against the spires of the fence, but only for a moment, only long enough to realize that her cloak was caught against the sharp finials spaced evenly along the fence's length. Worse, was the realization that her movement made her visible to the men pressed close to her.

"What have we here?" one particularly unsavory specimen said. Margaret wanted to kick herself. He was at least a foot taller than her, and he might not have noticed her at all if she'd just stayed still. He pulled back her veil and the fine tulle ripped.

His neighbor laughed, and at his urging, the first tore it clean away.

Margaret blinked back tears. "Stop it!" she cried.

They refused.

"You're a pretty little thing, aren't you?" She hadn't thought the crowd could press closer against her, but somehow they did. Six men formed a tight ring around her, the faces masks of casual disdain.

She felt a hand below her chin struggle with the bow to her bonnet, and soon that silk-covered object- the most expensive hat she had ever owned- was trampled underfoot. And in a moment, the pins holding up her coiffure were gone, as well.

She tried hauteur.

"Unhand me!" She pulled herself up to her full height and set her jaw defiantly, but it made no difference. The hands kept coming for her. She felt the finials against her back, and the tear of fabric, first the silk of her reworked gown, then her chemise as the pointed iron jabbed into the fine fabrics. She felt her upper arm bruise as a large calloused hand grabbed her; her sleeve tore at the shoulder as
she tried in vain to pull away from him.

She tried pleading.

"Please. I beg you. I have done nothing wrong. Do you not have sisters? Or daughters?"

"How do you think she would look in bloomers, Tom?"

Margaret felt her skirts lifted from her ankles and felt her vision begin to grow dark. She clutched the fence behind her and breathed deeply.

"Get yer hands off of her!" There was a flurry of fists and the crowd parted. Blood spattered, and a nauseating crunch that could only be the sound of bone against bone was followed by a low moan.

She moaned, as well.

"Margaret?"

She opened her eyes, and was greeted by a pair of clear, cerulean ones, the most beautiful eyes she'd ever known. She looked around and realized she was on the ground, atop her tattered cloak. The crowd had dispersed, apart from several men who lay nearby in poor condition.

"John..."

He pulled her into his arms, but not before she noticed his bloodied hand.

"You saved me."

He sighed. "Not entirely. In truth, I had very little to do with it." He refused to release her from his embrace.

A constable arrived shortly, along with a sandy-haired man she immediately recognized. Margaret pulled away from John and sat up with a start.

"You know this man?" he asked. Margaret nodded, distraught.

John helped her up and the pair moved to a nearby bench. He took the constable aside as that man approached.

"I think it may be better to conduct the interview back at the hotel. My wife is in no condition to answer questions at the moment."

The constable gazed at Margaret and nodded.

"Clearly, she has been through a lot. If it wasn't for the quick thinking of this man," he nodded at Leonards, "well..."

"We will not discuss this now," John scowled.

"Why was she in the park alone?" the constable asked.

"She wasn't," John snapped. "We were separated. And as I told you, we will answer your questions, later."

The constable assumed an appropriately obsequious expression. "Tomorrow morning at eight?"
John nodded and turned away, "Leonards, isn't it? A word."

Margaret looked on as her husband approached the former navy man. A handshake and a slap on the back from John concluded their conversation. It was not a good sign, she realized.

It wasn't until they were installed in a carriage that she asked him.

"He saved you, Margaret," was John's terse reply.

"How?"

"When I came upon him, three men were already on the ground and a fourth was flailing. I only took out one myself. If he had not been there..." Margaret paled as she noticed John's unbloodied fist clench and unclench.

"You offered him a job." It was not a question, as it was obvious that he had.

"I have no choice- it is a matter of honor. Although we'll have to move Jane to Watson's, to avoid any talk of favoritism. But that will likely make Fanny happy. She seems to be very fond of the girl."

"Oh. I see. Yes, I think Fanny will be happy." She tried to smile, and failed.

John grasped her hand in his own.

"I would tell you that you should not have been in the park, and that you should not have followed me, but this is entirely my fault, Margaret. You are not to blame."

She shook her head, but he did not see as he had turned away to stare out the carriage window.

"I might have lost you today. I could not bear that." His voice broke, and Margaret embraced him.

Any sign of weakness had disappeared by the time they reached Brown's, however. He directed the coachman to the back entrance of the building, and upon alighting, helped Margaret arrange her less-tattered cloak to cover the very torn sleeve of her gown. They took the back stairs up to their rooms.

With a minimum of fuss, Margaret was quickly installed in a bath as John gave Jane a list of tasks to complete. Margaret overheard all of it. Jane was to supervise her, keeping her in the bath as long as possible, as she needed the time to relax. In the meantime the maid should mend her dress, and no, it did not matter how it had gotten torn, nor should she bother her mistress with such questions -she would find out soon enough. John himself needed to run several errands. He would be back as quickly as possible.

Margaret sank into the fragranced water, and was half-asleep when Jane came in to wash her hair.

"It sounds like you had a busy afternoon," the girl began, the gossip in her readily ignoring the direct command from her master.

"Hmm," Margaret replied, before sliding down into the tub to fully submerge herself. More questions awaited her when she came up for air.

"He was quite upset when he came back. Where did you go?" She rubbed a bar of castile soap between her hands, then applied the lather to Margaret's wetted curls.

Somehow it was becoming easier to lie, Margaret found. Particularly to Jane. "We were going to Green Park, but we were separated. The Bloomers were there and unfortunately there was an incident. Your Leonards saved me."
Jane dropped the soap. "He did?"

Margaret nodded.

"My goodness! Look at your arm! Someone grabbed you. And your leg!" The bruise on her leg was from walking into the writing desk repeatedly, but Margaret held her tongue about that.

"You should be very happy," she said, instead.

"Let's rinse you off," the girl replied, but pride dripped from every word.

Margaret was sitting by the fire, toweling dry her hair when John returned, a paper-wrapped parcel in hand. She jumped up to greet him, and was rewarded with a frown.

"You should be in bed."

"But we are going to Edith's for dinner. I must get ready."

Her husband looked at her incredulously.

"You nearly- Margaret, you might have been-" He pulled her close and noticed as she winced. He carefully slid the dressing gown down her arms and his face darkened as he noticed the finger-print-shaped bruises on her upper arm.

"They did this to you."

"It is nothing, John. I am well. And Edith will not understand."

"She does understand, because I have already spoken to her and her husband. They will come here for lunch tomorrow, instead."

"You decided this without even asking me? She is my cousin, John."

"And I am your husband, Margaret."

"Yes."

He took her hand, and guided her toward the bed. He spoke to her softly, as though she were a child.

"There can be only one head to a family. Just as there is only one head to a factory or other business."

Margaret regarded him, wide-eyed. She had no response at first. When she dis speak, her voice was small.

"Our marriage is a business?"

"You know that is not what I meant, darling. I simply mean that we can share some decisions, but others must fall to me."

"I understand, husband." The final word was said with more bitterness than she intended. "Will any decisions fall to me?"

"Of course. The management of the household, for instance. That is fully your sphere."

"I mean decisions that affect both of us."
"The household affects both of us."

"Chicken or pork. Steak or roast. These are decisions of great import."

John sighed. "Did you not make a promise before God in our wedding vows?"

"Yes, John."

"Then I would ask that you fulfill it."

"Obey you, you mean."

"Yes."

"I will, John. I already promised that."

Margaret climbed into bed and rolled onto her side to face the wall. John climbed in next to her, and attempted to pull her close, but she did not allow it.

"I am sorry, Margaret."

"For what?" She tried not to cry and failed. The tears flowed readily.

"My eyes were opened today. It simply is not safe for you to be walking out alone- even with Jane."

"That is what this is about? My 'obeying'? Will I be a prisoner of the mill yard?"

"I cannot lose you."

"I will not come to harm."

"Because I will not allow that to happen."

Margaret groaned in frustration and covered her head with her pillow. John rose from the bed and left the room, but not before taking the key to the communicating door with him.

He poured himself a large glass of brandy and sunk into a chair in front of the fireplace. He half emptied the glass without pausing, then closed his eyes as he reviewed the conversation he'd had with his wife. Clearly, he'd chosen the wrong words. But he needed to protect her. What exactly was he supposed to have said differently?

And why did it feel like everything was spinning out of control?

Author notes: Thank you again to everyone who continues to read and a special thanks and a virtual hug to those of you who leave reviews. They mean a great deal to me and hugely motivate me. :) This chapter was pretty intense, hence the trigger warning. I hope it was not necessary for anyone, but I would not wish what Margaret went through on anyone, nor want anyone to have to relieve such a memory. In case you are wondering, I did not include such a scene gratuitously. There is a reason for every scene I am writing. (I do have a plan...) John has violent thoughts and overbearing actions in this chapter, but I promise he will be redeemed and his character will develop. Margaret needs to grow up, as well. :) 

I have created a Pinterest page to store some of the images that have served as inspiration as I've been doing the research for each chapter. You can find it by typing in the following, and replacing the "dot" with a "," and removing the spaces: pinterest dot com / Tintinnabula1 / north-and-south /
In this chapter, John visits Berkeley Square Gardens, which is only a few streets over from Brown's Hotel, just to the west. On 1851 maps it is called *Berkley Square*, however, so that is how I have referred to it. The modern square (which is oval) is not much different from the way it was then, although some of the houses surrounding the square were bombed during World War II and others were renovated so that they look very different from the way they did in 1851. The pump house or gazebo that John sits in is still there, but it is disused. I would imagine it was in much better condition in the mid-1800s. The London plane trees are the same trees that would have stood in 1851. The baby carriages John notices are very different from what we think of as baby carriages or strollers today. You can see a couple of examples on the Pinterest page I linked. The idea of a baby carriage came about in 1733. It was devised by architect William Kent for the children of the Duke of Devonshire, and it was intended to be pulled by a goat or pony. Over time, human-pulled versions were devised. You can see an example of a human pulled version in the painting by John Wykeham Archer, and more ornate versions from this time period on my Pinterest page. In 1848, American inventor Charles Burton came up with the idea of a carriage that was pushed instead of pulled. For whatever reason, the idea did not take off in the U.S., so he brought the idea to England. He exhibited it at the Great Exhibition in 1851 and patented it in England in 1852. Queen Victoria bought several of these new push-carriages. However, at the time of this story it seems really unlikely that the carriages would have made it onto the market, so the ones John sees on the square are the type a nursemaid would need to pull behind her, like a child's wagon.

Margaret visits Green Park, which has a different layout today than it did in 1851. In 1851 there was a long reservoir known as the Queen's Basin that supplied water to the palace, a central pond and a well-tended path that led to the reservoir. Additionally, there was a house that stored the ice needed for parties, and several lodges. None of these structures remain in the park, and there are many more paths through the park today than there were in 1851. Additionally, the famous Wellington Arch is in a different location than it was in 1851. Today it stands in a traffic island, cut off from the park. But in 1851 it was within the boundaries of the park, at the western corner.

The Wellington Arch has an interesting history. It began its life as the Green Park Arch and was intended to serve as an outer entrance to Buckingham Palace. It is rather stark (and to the my eye, rather elegant) but it was intended to have much more decoration and statuary. (In other words, it was meant to fit the Victorian aesthetic.) However, due to cost overruns, the decoration, including a statue of a chariot drawn by four horses to be placed atop the arch, was omitted. Then, in 1846, at a poorly attended committee meeting, a decision was made to place a statue of the much-beloved (and still living) war hero Wellington atop the arch. This created a furore, as people thought the statue ugly and out of proportion (and I am sure many thought the way that the decision was made was quite underhanded, as well). The arch was moved in 1883-85, and the statue moved to a new location. Then in 1912, the statue now seen atop the arch, *The Quadrigia*, a chariot drawn by four horses, was finally installed.

In the last chapter I mentioned the Bloomers, and the reports of them passing out handbills as they strolled along Piccadilly. Per an item in *The American Phrenological Journal and Repository of Science*, a pair of Bloomers made their way along Piccadilly to Green Park, until "the pressure of the crowd became so great that the missionaries found it convenient to call a cab, which they entered, amid much laughter, mingled with cheering." In my story, the pair have borrowed liberally from the words of Mrs. Dexter, who had spoken to a large, mixed audience in 1851 at the John Street Institution. I also paraphrased Amelia Bloomer's words regarding Scotsmen wearing petticoats. Her exact words were: "Sir- May I be allowed in your columns to ask why the British public is so horrified at the idea of women dressing in trousers, seeing that they have for many years tolerated a number of men from the North of the Tweed in wearing petticoats, and shockingly short petticoats at that?" I have made up the part about the duo climbing onto the Wellington Arch so that the crowd can better see them. It would have been quite rude for the pair to climb onto an arch celebrating the
nation's most noted hero to speechify, but they were flouting other customs and were (gasp!) foreigners, so perhaps that explains their lack of social graces :)

Thanks again for reading! I would love to know what you think. Tintin
The Inspection

Not a Gentleman

Chapter 25

The Inspection

John swirled the dregs of brandy in his glass as he considered the events of the day, and most importantly, Margaret’s reaction to his display of familial authority.

Of course, he was in the right. He was the husband. It was not his privilege but rather his duty to be the head of the Thornton family enterprise.

John shook his head.

No, that sounded too cold and businesslike, and if that was how he’d come across to Margaret she’d surely had reason to be upset. But they had stood before God, hadn’t they? And Margaret had promised, quite clearly, to obey. She must understand what that entailed. Every woman did, from the housewives in the humblest cottages to the Queen herself. Even she deferred on occasion to her husband, it was said.

John wondered for a moment what those arguments might be like. That poor man.

The master of Marlborough Mills knocked back the final drops of liquor, then stood to stretch out the kink in his back. It was half past nine and he was ravenous, and surely Margaret would be, as well. But a full twenty minutes after ringing for a staff member, he learned that that kitchen was closed for the night. Five minutes of quiet entreaty did not help, nor did a judicious application of the grease that did so much to move the gears of capitalism. So much for the amenities of a “full-service hotel.” Clearly, he’d spent too long ruminating.

Of course, this wasn’t the first hungry night he’d experienced. It was just the first since age 15 or so.

John crept into the bedroom and held the candlestick high enough to illuminate the better part of the room. Margaret’s steady breathing indicated she was asleep. He hoped she would not awaken famished, long before morning. John stretched again. The bed looked inviting, even if its inhabitant had rejected him. As quietly as possible, he made his way to the dressing room to ready for bed.

He’d already removed his cravat when he noticed the gown, slung over the back of the chair where Jane had carelessly tossed it hours before. On the floor beside lay the rest of Margaret’s garments in a higgledy-piggledy pile. John picked through them, folding each as after examining it, until he came to the hopelessly torn cloak. He sighed. Such a waste of a beautiful textile. Still, he folded it as neatly as was possible given its tattered state, and set it, along with the gown on the nearby vanity. Margaret’s chemise was also damaged, he remembered. He sorted through the last of her garments until he found it, his brow creasing as he examined it. Its neckline was in a state of disrepair, its delicate lace trim torn through in places and ripped from the chemise in others. It bothered John immensely to consider that a garment that so close to Margaret’s skin had been damaged so thoroughly in her struggle with those ruffians.

And then there was this mess.

John fumed. He’d explicitly directed Jane to mend the garments straightaway, as Margaret had need of them. John replaced the candlestick on the vanity, careful to avoid dripping wax on the still
salvageable fabric of Margaret’s clothing, and dropped to his knees to more easily unlatch the
leather-banded trunk where his wife’s belongings were stored. He rifled quickly through the meager
assortment of items, noting the everyday appearance of the other made-over gown she’d packed for
their trip. Such a garment would not do for visiting with her cousin Edith, he knew. Thankfully, the
supplies Jane should have collected were also in the trunk. He gathered Margaret’s workbasket,
several paper-wrapped parcels of fabric, and a large, sharp pair of shears from the items stored in the
trunk and added them to the tidy bundle he’d made of Margaret’s clothing.

As quietly as possible given his exponentially increasing anger John crossed through the suite of
rooms until he found himself at the door to Jane’s quarters. He tapped lightly, so as not to disturb
Margaret, and then ever more insistently. There was no answer. Like Margaret, Jane seemed to be a
very deep sleeper.

John looked in again on Margaret, then shut the door quietly. It had been 14 years since he’d last
held a needle and thread, but some skills were not so easily forgotten. He cleared off the writing
desk, lit every lamp in the room, and set to work.

The gown was more damaged than the chemise, so John turned his attention to it first. He found a
stiletto in Margaret’s sewing basket, and used it to unpick the stitches holding the sleeve to the
armscye, and then the two long seams running the length of the sleeve itself. As luck would have it
(and luck was not kind), both portions of the sleeve were damaged. No matter-- he would use the
existing portions as a pattern. John smoothed the gathers of the sleeve head between his fingers, then
laid the cloth on the table. It would not lie flat, curved as it was by pressing and multiple wearings.
He would need both box and goffering irons, as well a wool pad to do the job right. And those items
must be in Jane’s quarters, as he had not seen them in the dressing room at any point over the past
few days.

John knocked again on Jane’s door, to no answer, before reluctantly reaching for his key ring. His
anger rose again as he opened the door. Jane’s bed was unmade, her small trunk open to display a
disordered mess, and the overpowering floral fragrance that hung in the air only added to the feeling
of chaos. But the irons and pad were easily found on an open shelf. John quickly exited the space,
shutting the door behind him with a firm click, before crossing the sitting room to rebuild the fire,
place the goffering stand on the hearth, and the iron slugs among the coals.

It was short work to cut a new sleeve, but even in the relatively dim light afforded by the room’s
lamps, John could discern a slight difference in color and weave between the new fabric and the old.
In daylight it would be obvious: the new sleeve would stick out sorely from the other. Symmetry, he
knew, could mask differences in the fabric used to mend a garment. With a decisiveness that would
be easily recognized on the mill floor, John flipped the patterns and smoothly cut a second sleeve
from the remaining cloth, then unpicked the unblemished sleeve from the bodice.

John found himself humming as he eased each sleeve cap in place, and smiled to realize his horrible
mood had dissipated. He was working quite slowly as he lacked a thimble—Margaret’s barely fit on
his little finger. But the slow pace had done much to ease his anger. Perhaps that was the value of
work: it allowed a person to lose himself and forget his worries for a time. Or maybe it was the
nature of this work. With needle in hand, he could not help to think back to his time as an apprentice.

They did argue a lot, Mr. and Mrs. Coleridge. But the draper and his wife were as passionate in their
arguments as they were in all things. Was that not a positive trait in a marriage? The teenaged John
had witnessed many glances and touches in passing that evidenced the abiding nature of his mentor’s
marriage.

And really, this was the only marriage he’d witnessed in such close proximity. As a child he’d never
considered the state of his own parents’ union, and when he’d reached the age where he might think about such things he’d been packed off to school. And soon after, of course, it was too late to witness any interaction at all.

John turned his attention to the black bombazine bodice. Both inner and outer layers of fabric were torn. It would take hours to reconstruct the bodice in its entirety, considering the number of reinforcing tapes, and hooks and eyes that would need to be removed and resewn. A woman’s garment was a marvel of structural engineering, after all. John counted twelve seams in the bodice, not including the sleeves and his thoughts alighted on the several sewing machines on display not far from the mill’s equipment at the exhibition hall. Those would make short work of an intricate task, and would likely also increase the demand for fabrics of all quality.

John chided himself. The impact of sewing machines on the textile industry, and how best to capitalize on said impact was certainly something worth contemplating, but as the hour was growing late this was not the time. He rubbed his eyes as he regarded the torn garment again. Hadn’t Mr. Coleridge once shown him quite a clever way to patch a garment along its seamlines? John smiled as the memory ignited. He carefully unpicked just the pattern piece that was damaged and used it to cut its twin in fabric, as well as a mirror image for the inner part of the garment. Then he stitched the pieces into the garment with a stitch that was sturdy on the inside, but almost invisible from the outside. Surprisingly, his fingers remembered the stitch.

John’s thoughts returned to marriage as he sewed. Mr. and Mrs. Hale were another example of a successful union, he reasoned. But their marriage was one consumed by illness. It was obvious Mr. Hale had loved his wife, and she him, but things were necessarily disordered, so much so that their daughter had often occupied the role of hostess and even at times, the role of parent.

Perhaps that was the problem. Margaret had been given too much responsibility, too young. What had Mr. Hale been thinking allowing his daughter to roam the streets of Milton looking for a house to let? Who would give his daughter such a masculine responsibility? Or for that matter, train her up in so masculine as discipline as the classics?

“Now you sound like that bastard Doctor Donaldson,” John said aloud.

“You judge much too soon, John, and much too forcefully.” John’s face reddened as another memory sparked. He stood on a stepladder, placing bolts of cambric on the shelf, arguing with the young man of twenty-or-so who passed him the fabric—a laggard, as John recalled. The subject was whether the laggard’s wife-to-be should continue working after they wed. The voice was Mrs. Coleridge’s long before she became Madame.

“How is it that a 15-year-old knows all there is to know in the world?” she asked, eyes blazing, as soon as the laggard had left the shop to return to one of the Milton’s warehouses. “You don’t know. You haven’t met one percent of the people that live in this city. And the people that live in this city are not necessarily the same as the rest of the people in the world. Who are you to say why a wife might need to work? Now do you judge me for working alongside my husband?” The draper’s wife stood fiercely, chin jutting, hands upon her hips.

“No, Ma’am. Of course not. It’s just that she’ll likely be having children soon enough, and don’t you think—”

“I think that some mothers must work. Their husbands die. Their husbands drink. Their husbands leave. Their husbands are laggards.” She pointed toward the door.

“Yes! The laggard should be working, not leaving that task to his wife. That is exactly my point.”
“No, it was not, John. You were speaking of the larger example—that women should be at home. You, young man, think in black and white.” She pointed to a range of fabric along the wall. “I would advise you to consider gray.”

Gray.

Not everything in life had the precision of machinery or the reliable outcome of a column of sums. Real life was remarkably sloppy.

Horribly so.

Mrs., and then Madame Coleridge worked, first as partner to her husband, then by necessity, as a widow. Had she wanted to work? Did she enjoy it? He had no idea. John’s mother worked—over his objections, at first, but Mrs. Thornton had proven her usefulness to the mill time and again. She was as much as partner as any man could ever be. And indeed, she did enjoy working. John knew his mother would be unhappy to retire, when that time eventually came.

But Margaret was different. She was a gentlewoman. His wife was not meant to to scrub linens or polish silver or cook. Her household skills were likely limited to embroidery and tatting. And that was as it should be. She should be living a life of refinement, a life he was happily able to give her. Eager to give her. Why on Earth would she want something else? Why would she want to spend long hours in a mill?

He didn’t understand, he realized, as he placed the final stitch in the garment, and began to carefully press it into the proper shape. He placed the woolen pad on the floor, as the table was far too fine to risk scorching. His back protested.

With an extravagant yawn John began the final task. The cotton lawn of the chemise was intact, thankfully. It was only the lace that was shredded in places, and as it had been whip stitched on, it was easy enough to remove. He broke a thread and pulled, broke another and continued. Margaret had a fair enough selection of lace in her work basket to choose from. John chose a long strip of Bucks point lace and with impossibly small stitches whipped the lace to the neckline of the garment. He held the garment close as he did so, and could not help but inhale its fragrance.

How was it possible to miss the woman sleeping in the next room?

Margaret awakened well before sunrise to find herself nestled against her husband. She inhaled John’s scent until her lungs were full of him, stretched herself luxuriously against him, and very nearly placed a kiss at the nape of his neck before remembering their horrible quarrel. She stiffened, annoyed that he had come to bed. But where else would the man sleep? The settee in the next room was far too small, and marriage did grant a husband the right to sleep in his own bed, even if that bed were the transitory sort offered by a London hotel.

No, Margaret, realized, her annoyance was with herself. She had not awakened cocooned within the safety of John’s embrace. Rather, at some time during the night, she had clutched her husband possessively, sliding against him until their torsos nestled like twin spoons in a cutlery drawer. She’d thrown her leg over his as well, her sleeping self repudiating her waking self’s rejection of the man.

Disgusted at her own inconsistency, Margaret gingerly untangled her limbs from her husband’s and crept from the bed, turning back warily once she was well clear of the fourposter. But John breathed as deeply and regularly as a sleeping man should. This was unusual. In Milton he’d be up with the
songbirds, long before the first glow of dawn. Margaret stood on her toes to better peer at her husband’s face. He looked tired. Dark smudges colored the fragile skin below the fringe of his eye lashes, and it was easy to infer that he was sleeping deeply, but not restfully. His eyes moved under their lids and he grimaced as he clutched his pillow. Margaret sighed. How late had John stayed up? she wondered. She padded across the room to the peer into the sitting room, and noted the single chair pulled close to the fire place, an empty tumbler and bottle on the floor beside it. He must have spent the evening with spirits for a companion. Margaret lifted her chin as she turned away from the sight. It did not signify. She had no desire for her husband’s company last night nor this morn. Not without an apology.

Margaret crossed the room quickly but quietly, firmly closing the door separating bed chamber from dressing room before opening the drapes to better illuminate the space. Then she poured cool water from a porcelain jug into a bowl and splashed herself fully awake. She contemplated the coming day as she methodically combed her recalcitrant curls into order, then plaited them into a thick cord that she arranged into a simple knot at the base of her neck. There was no reason to disturb Jane, although the girl should already be at work. The girl would want a full account of her beau’s feat of derring-do, and would likely be insufferable for hours, if not days afterwards.

A thin line of worry appeared between Margaret’s brows. She did not fully remember the events that had transpired the day before. But she must do her best to recollect them, as a constable would soon be arriving to interview her. John had clearly said Leonards had run off four men. Yet six had surrounded her. She was certain of that. Margaret closed her eyes and breathed deeply as she situated a shadow version of herself back in Green Park, back against the row of spiked iron finials, a clot of leering men eyeing her flesh as though she were a side of beef swinging from a hook in a market stall. Six men. Six. Her mind’s eye moved from left to right across the half circle of roughs. The first was blond, his hair so fair it was almost white against the rough blue hessian of his jacket. That man had shouted something ugly: no wonder she remembered him so clearly. The next two were blurrier: one man was short and pasty, the third fully bald, but otherwise almost his twin.

“You’re a pretty little thing, aren’t you?”

Margaret calmed her breathing. The fourth? Brunet, tall, whiskered. But most men were. His clothing must have been non-descript because she had no idea what he might have been wearing. But what he said she remembered clearly.

“How do you think she would look in bloomers, Tom?”

Tom. That must have been the next man in the half circle, the one standing next to the speaker, because that man had guffawed, sending spittle in her direction. He had a scarf, a thin red neckerchief with small black and white sprigs. Or paisleys. Yes, paisleys. Odd how she could remember such trivial detail, but not the color of his eyes or the shape of his nose or ears. Although he did have particularly bad teeth for his age and station in life: she remembered that, too. Some were blackened stumps.

And the last man? Margaret opened eyes clenched shut to find she’d twisted her nightgown into knots. She willed herself to breathe as scattered images of a face with ruddy skin and a fringe of sandy hair extending from a Monmouth cap flew into her mind.

The turn of a key in the hallway door interrupted Margaret’s belabored musings.

“Why didn’t a wake me?” Jane cried as she entered the room, eager to turn her own tardiness against her employer. Margaret placed her forefinger against her lip in reply, then pointed to the bed chamber. The girl made a cursory effort at a curtsey in reply and picked up the hairbrush from the vanity.
No need, Jane. My own efforts will suffice,” Margaret said softly as she patted her simple coiffure. “It’s unlikely I’ll be leaving the hotel, you see,” she added by way of explanation, then frowned. She did not owe Jane or anyone else a rationale for her choices in dress or hairstyle. She picked up the garments she’d worn the day before, walking across the room to inspect them by the window, where the light was brighter. Her brows raised in surprise. One might never have guessed that her garments had been damaged. The torn lace at the neckline of her chemise had been carefully removed and replaced with a lovely, modest lace from her workbasket. The seam joining raw edge to edge was almost invisible and the stitches joining it to the cotton of the gown were impossibly fine. Likewise, the large tear in her shirtwaist sleeve, one that had allowed the entirety of her upper arm to become visible to park visitors, was gone, and the back was whole. Margaret ran her fingers over the fabric, feeling unsuccessfully for the mends. She bit her lip as she glanced up at Jane. The girl’s skills put her to shame. She had not expected a chambermaid to be so skilled a seamstress, but of course, it was John’s mother who had hired the girl, and doubtless from a score of applicants. Clearly, she had chosen the best, and clearly the matriarch had found reason to keep on such a flighty girl, apart from Fanny’s preference for a companion in gossip.

Well, Fanny could have her.

Margaret quickly changed into the renewed chemise, and murmured a thank you, as Jane approached with corset and stockings. “You did an exemplary job.”

“Did I?” The girl stared at her, a quizzical expression on her face. “Are you quite right today, Mrs. Thornton? You don’t look well.” She did not wait for a reply. “I think we should lace you up a bit more loosely than usual. Wouldn’t want to have you swoon on us, would we? There.” Jane tucked the long ends of the laces into the corset. Margaret stifled a laugh. That near-armored garment had been unharmed by the prior day’s activities.

She stood patiently as Jane fastened the many small hooks running down the back of her bodice, and even allowed the girl to help with her stockings and shoes, tasks she normally would have insisted upon doing herself.

“Jane, would you see to breakfast?” Margaret pointed to the door. “No, go down directly to the kitchen. I’d rather Mr. Thornton wasn’t bothered by you ringing for a porter. And I’d like to check on today’s luncheon menu. Service for five, and I didn’t take care of it last night. I’m not sure that John did, either.”

Chicken or pork. Steak or roast.

Yes, John had undoubtedly left the decision of today’s menu to her, given her critical role as mistress of household.

“Mrs. Thornton?”

“Please inquire, Jane. I won’t awaken Mr. Thornton over something so trivial. Return with a menu if the kitchen has not been informed and let them know that I’ll send down a request directly.”

The girl left, and Margaret returned to the vanity. She grimaced as she regarded her reflection, then frowned as she held up a mirror behind her head to view her earlier handiwork. It was a wonder Jane had not laughed openly at her. Margaret removed the pins from her hair, combed out the unruly length with a wide comb and rearranged her hair repeatedly, until she was satisfied with the low braids that coiled over each ear and intertwined to form a low bun at the base of her neck.

She might not be the most stylish but surely neither constable nor cousin would have anything to laugh at now.
Margaret consulted the timepiece that hung from her chatelaine and jumped. Five after seven. It was much later than she’d realized. The police officer was due in less than an hour.

“John?” she entered the bedroom to find her husband still fast asleep. She perched next to him on the bed, and called his name again. It took a gentle shake to awaken him.

“What time is it?” John sat up groggily, and Margaret noted the shadows under his eyes were still present, although perhaps not quite as dark as an hour earlier.

“The constable is coming at eight.”

John grunted in response. Apparently, the songbird was not such a lover of mornings this day.

“You were up quite late.”

“You know I have a temper. I needed to work off my anger.”

“You’re angry at me.” It was more of a statement than a question, she realized.

“No, Margaret. Not you. Never you. I was angry at the day. At what might have happened. At how I treated you as a result. I don’t want—”

Margaret waited for him to continue, but John rose from the bed instead and moved across the room with some alacrity.

“We’ll talk later,” he said, before closing the dressing room door to grant himself some morning privacy. Twenty minutes later, John emerged.

“You look lovely, by the way.’

She half laughed. “I do not.”

“Very few women look well in black. You do. The cut of the dress becomes you, as well.”

“I suppose I am an old soul, then. I was surprised to find it so expertly mended—” a knock interrupted their conversation.

“Breakfast,” Jane said cheerily as John opened the door. Two young men stood in the hallway behind her, each holding a tray laden with food. “I assumed you wanted a full spread. Mrs. Thornton,” she added as she bustled into the room. “Luncheon has not yet been ordered. Martin here will be happy to take your order.” Her smile at the porter was less than subtle.

“It can wait,” John said. “I know you must be hungry, Margaret. Martin, is it? Leave the menu. We’ll have the order ready for you at a quarter past nine. We’ll want a private dining room, of course. The Crystal Room on the second floor will do nicely, I think.”

Margaret bit her lip. She could easily choose from the menu in a matter of a minute or two. She knew Edith’s tastes better than her own. It was really quite simple: choose the most expensive items on the menu.

And were these decisions not under the wife’s purview?

But John had things under control. The table was laid, the porters tipped and out the door before she even had opportunity to object. She sat down and gazed at the vast array of food piled on the table.

“You’re not eating.” John asked as he piled kippers onto his plate. “But surely you must be hungry.
We haven’t much time, you know.”

“Indigestion.” Margaret patted her stomach. Made worse by the ungodly smell of oily, smoked fish and sulfurous eggs. Who had ever nominated these things as a breakfast food?

“You’re worried. Darling. Don’t be.” John reached for her hand. She let him.

“As a magistrate, you’ve dealt with these things, before, haven’t you?”

John nodded. “Yes. Mind you, any truly serious cases would be quickly handed over to the crown court—”

“Truly serious?”

“Not that your situation isn’t. By serious I mean loss of life. Margaret, I don’t want to speak of such things with you.”

“But we must.”

“No. I most heartily disagree. Not today.” John cracked an egg and dipped a buttered toast point into its oozingly soft yellow center. “Darling, please eat something. Or at least have some tea or coffee.”

Margaret did manage a few sips of tea before the porters returned to clear away the morning meal. Such a colossal waste of food. Where did the leftovers go? She wondered. Hopefully, at least the staff was well fed.

But this train of thought was interrupted by Jane’s rather brazen announcement.

“The peeler’s here! And he’s an important ‘un!”

She hadn’t cried. In fact, John thought as he sent the sergeant away, he would have thought his wife completely unaffected by the previous day’s events if he hadn’t known her better.

She’d sat ramrod straight on the small divan, her chin jutted in that familiar way that he’d once mistaken for arrogance. But it wasn’t arrogance at all. The jutting chin, he’d learned, was a sign that she was gathering her courage. And there were other small signs that spoke of her nerves: the slightest tremor in one finger, the parting of her lips before she spoke, and the unwavering attention she paid to the hand-painted truncheon the sergeant had placed on the low table in front of her.

John had reached for Margaret’s hand, but she’d ignored him, focused as she was on her responses.

She’d done splendidly. He couldn’t have asked for a better witness were he sitting at Milton Town Hall. Her voice had held steady in volume. It didn’t had not changed pitch nor cracked. She had not embroidered her story nor had it wavered. And somehow, prize that she was, she had managed to tell the truth while omitting the fact that they’d arrived at the park separately and argued before hand. Margaret might have been a first-rate solicitor in another life.

The interview had lasted longer than he expected. But London police were more highly trained than their Milton counterparts, so perhaps John should not have been surprised. And this one had carried a small, well-used notebook in addition to the truncheon and wooden rattle that was standard equipment. He had carried apologies as well. He’d apologized that neither of the force’s
commissioners had been able to attend in his place. As both were personally involved in the policing of the exhibition they were quite concerned that a family member of an exhibitor had been so brutally attacked. Without glancing at her, John had felt Margaret’s posture become even more rigid as the man finished his apology. But the sergeant had continued, either ignorant of the effect he was having on the victim, or actively provoking it. He’d apologized again, this time for needing to ask “just a few more questions.”

“She’s already given you a full accounting!” John had objected vigorously, nearly leaping out of his seat.

“Yes, but sometimes in the retelling, additional details make themselves known.”

“I am well aware of the procedures of policing. If you have learned that I am an exhibitor, you must have know I am a magistrate. My wife has given you a full statement. I think it is time for you to go.” The anger had risen quickly, and it had taken a great effort to maintain a veneer of civility.

“Dearest,” That single word had been a balm. He’d felt much of the anger dissipate as her hand found his. “It is no matter.” Margaret had continued quietly. “I think the sergeant is right. Perhaps there is something I have forgotten.”

She’d continued, evincing just the slightest chinks in the wall she’d constructed.

“You did well, love” John said now. “I am proud of you.”

She turned away, but from the slight quivering of her shoulders it was clear that she was crying.

“Edith will be here soon. I must see to the menu.”

His wife left the room in a hurried rustle of starched cotton and silk.

Author’s note:

I hope this chapter is a pleasant surprise, as it has been a very long time since I have updated. In that time, quite a few people have checked in, and I know that others have been patiently waiting for an update. Thank you to everyone who has sent their regards, concerns, hopes, or worries. I apologize that it has taken so long. Life has very much gotten in the way.

When I last updated my job was in crisis, and I was actively looking for new employment. Given that the work I do is specialized, it took more than a year to find a position that would not require me to relocate (something I could not do, due to my husband’s job). During that year+, conditions at my workplace continued to deteriorate. During my last few months on the job, five out of nine of us with similar positions left. The fallout was intense (or so I heard). I cannot give exact details (small world!), but the company is not the same as it was (in name or function). That makes me sad, because I worked with some excellent people there. Before the wrong people came on board, it truly was a great place to work.

I am happy in my new job—treated with respect, doing challenging work, etc. However, I have not had time to write over the past year, as I have been working extra hours to prove my worth to the
organization. I haven’t read any N&S fan fiction during this time either, as I did not want to accidentally conflate my story with another. (Let me tell you, this has been very difficult!) Yet every night, while falling asleep (especially after a stressful work day), I have been playing in my mind the movie of the continuing storyline. At this point, I finally have the time to take it up again. I am very, very happy about this, and I hope that you will be too. Please let me know, as your words mean a lot to me.

Best, tintinnabula

About the chapter: This one seems a bit morose, but after what happened in the Green Park, I think it is appropriate. I’d like to point out that the John and Margaret I am exploring are a product of their time and location. So, yes, John has some rather regressive attitudes toward women and marriage, and Margaret as very young wife is a bit immature. The thing I love about Gaskell’s North and South (and the BBC production, and any good story) is its character growth. So, I promise that John and Margaret will be growing. Right now, John has an anger issue, and a control issue. And Margaret is a little lost. And she has gotten hold of the wrong end of the stick here. So, lots of growth to come. And for those who have asked, yes, they will be discussing “the letter.” It will all unfold. I hope you will bear with me.

Thank you again for reading.

Historical notes: I hope you don’t mind that this chapter contained so much about historical sewing. It is my other love.

John is likely over-tipping. Tipping has a long history, but was primarily used by the aristocracy until the 1800s. But as the commercial class grew, the practice spread. Wealthy Americans picked up the practice while visiting Europe and were often frowned upon for tipping too much. I am thinking that a nouveau-riche industrialist might also misunderstand the subtleties of the practice.

A box or slug iron had an insert (or several inserts) that could be heated in the fire, then picked up with tongs and placed inside the iron. It was an improvement over the charcoal iron, which contained burning charcoal, and therefore gave off smoke and soot and sometimes left ash on clothing. A goffering iron is cylindrical with a rounded end (somewhat like a modern curling iron for hair, but without the clip part). It was used for ironing collars, lace, ribbons, sleeve caps, etc. The first folding ironing board was patented in the 1860s, after the time period of this story. Before then people ironed on a well-padded table, or on a board propped between two chairs.

(Point a rabattre sous la main) is a specialized stitch that was used in hand sewing in the 18th century to sew both lining and exterior fabric at the same time. Super efficient! However, based on my reading of Victorian home sewing guides it would not have been a stitch in the repertoire of young women of the 1850s. However, I think it may likely have been within the repertoire of older dressmakers and drapers (and possibly passed down) as it might be tremendously useful for mending.

There were at least seven different sewing machines displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851, from France, Great Britain, and the United States. Barthelemy Thimonnier, a French tailor, had patented a chain stitch machine (similar to the stitching that closes very large bags of dog food today) in France in 1830, and received a British patent in 1848; he was represented at the exhibition by the British company Barlow and Payne. (Notably, Thimonnier set up a factory to sew uniforms for the French army. It was burned to the ground by workers angered about being displaced.) W&C Mather of Manchester exhibited a machine that used a running stitch to sew together two pieces of fabric. It seems similar (to my understanding) to modern hand smocking machines. Charles Tiot Judkins, also of Manchester exhibited a lockstitch machine that could sew in straight lines or circles. Importantly, it
could be hooked up to an engine to run at 500 stitches per minute. Like today’s machines, the hole in the needle was in its the point, and the machine locked together two separate threads to form a stitch.

A Monmouth cap is the original name of that knitted hat (a.k.a. watch cap, beanie, skullcap) that is ubiquitous in winter. Its origin is Monmouth, Wales. These hats have been knit since the 14th century, were a standard (and regulated) part of the daily costume of sailors, soldiers and laborers. They were a part of low-ranking sailor’s uniforms throughout the 19th century. Unlike today’s knit hats, Monmouth caps were knit large and felted to make them weatherproof.

The first professional police force in London was set up by Sir Robert Peel. Hence the name “Bobbies,” or in the 1850s, “Peelers.” During the 1850s, the standard London police uniform included a tall beaver hat, somewhat like John’s except with a wicker armature. The hat was intended to serve as a sort of protective helmet, but given that it really did not cover that much of the head, I have to question its usefulness. 😐 Constables carried a wooden truncheon. These were hand-painted in ornate designs (because shouldn’t the device you are using to head bash be aesthetically pleasing?). To raise the alarm, constables used a wooden rattle, that they swung in the air to make a clattering noise. This was the precursor of the whistle, which did not become a part of the uniform until 1884. During the 1850s, London had dual police commissioners. Both were appointed to the role of justice of the peace, and both came from the upper echelon of society. While it is true that both commissioners were actively involved in the policing of the exhibition (and argued over who would play the larger role), I thought it would be highly unlikely that they would find an exhibitor important enough to pay a visit, given the snobbery of London towards the industrial cities at that time.

You can find images of some of the artifacts I mentioned here on my Pinterest page for this story at: https://www.pinterest.com/Tintinnabula1/north-and-south/ (remove spaces and change dots to periods!)
Epiphany

Not a Gentleman

Epiphany

"Margaret!" Edith swept into the sitting room, her arms outstretched. In a moment she located her target and pulled her cousin close to murmur her regrets. "You poor, poor dear. We would have been there in a heartbeat if only we'd known. But Henry's letter followed us from spa to spa. It was only when we returned that we learned the news. Oh, to lose your dear papa and then—"Her voice lowered to a whisper. "Are you quite recovered?"

Margaret nodded and did her best to keep her features even. Clearly this afternoon would be one for a brave face.

"I lost two, you know." Her cousin bit her lip in surprise as the words tumbled out, seemingly without forethought.

"You did?" Margaret stepped back and her eyes widened, both at the news of the miscarriages and at the fact that her cousin had chosen to keep this information from her.

"It was not easy. But then Sholto came along. He did a lot to soften the pain."

Edith smiled angelically as she removed a grosgrain-trimmed cloak to reveal a blue-grey gown in keeping with the season. What's more, the silk moiré fabric was the exact color of Edith's eyes, Margaret noted, and suited her coloring to perfection. The skirt had the flounces Fanny had stated were de rigueur this season, based on her reading of La Moniteur de la Mode, but the bodice was missing the pagoda sleeves Fanny had banged on about incessantly. However, given the cool weather, it really wouldn't make sense for a garment to have such wide sleeves, Margaret reasoned. Perhaps fashion did bow every now and then to reality.

"Where is Sholto?"

"With Nurse. He is cranky at this time of day, and would not do well among such a large group of adults."

"Yes, of course." Margaret sighed. "Is he much grown? I was hoping to meet him."

"Well, I'm sure that can be arranged, silly. You will be in London for some, will you not?" Edith glanced across the room. "What do you think the men are talking about?"

Margaret had been remiss. As the captain was not at the wedding, it was her obligation to introduce him to John. But clearly Henry had seen to that. The three men had installed themselves by the fire and were animatedly talking about something or other. Margaret glanced at her timepiece. Still a half hour until luncheon.

"Would you mind terribly if we visited your dressing room?" Edith asked.

"No, of course not." Again, she was remiss. She should be seeing to her cousin's every comfort. Edith should not need to ask such things. Of course, she might have need of the facilities, even though it was only a short carriage ride between Harley Street and the hotel.

"You really need to let your girl go," Edith giggled once they were alone. She strolled over to the
vanity and patted the chair. "Your hair is just—I don't know how to put it without insulting you, Margaret, but I hope you weren't planning on leaving your rooms today. Braids? Really?"

Margaret sat down at the vanity and peered at herself in the small mirror that hung above the table. She patted her coiffure. It seemed perfectly serviceable to her, and not at all ugly.

"I don't think it is so very bad," Margaret began as her cousin quickly dismantled this morning's effort, as well as her pride.

"Have you seen the plates in the latest Bon Ton? There are two hair styles in fashion at the moment. One is the "Mary Stuart", but it wouldn't do for you." Edith shook her head and clucked as she ran a comb through Margaret's thick curls.

"Why is that?" Margaret was almost afraid to ask, as an insult or compliment both seemed equally likely replies, given Edith's current temper.

"Well, the "Mary Stuart" is rather severe, and it requires stick straight hair to pull off. It would take hours to iron yours straight. And even then, the style puffs out over the ears. A perfectly oval face is needed for it to look well."

"I see…" There was the insult, a very oblique one. So oblique that perhaps Edith was unaware that she'd made it.

"It's important to be realistic about one's assets and defects. You, for instance, have wonderfully thick and lustrous hair. We should take advantage of that. We'll dress it in the "Chambord," like mine. Your hair will take well to it, and of course that style hides all manner of facial imperfections."

And another!

They weren't going to talk about Edith's miscarriages, Margaret realized. This onslaught of petty slings and arrows was Edith's attempt to deflect attention from her previous outburst. Margaret smiled ruefully. There had been a time she might have picked up the rope her cousin had offered and entered into an all-out tug-of-war. But now she let it lie there.

And at any rate, Edith was right. Margaret knew this even before she saw the quick results of her cousin's handiwork. Edith was always correct about matters of clothing and style. Margaret's hair did look nicer, much nicer than before. It rose over the forehead in a slight roll, and was pulled close behind her ears, allowing a mass of slightly-controlled curls to cascade down her neck.

"Thank you," she said instead. "I am sure the men are missing us. Shall we rejoin them?"

Edith looked duly impressed as she walked into the Crystal room. The table held a low arrangement of yellow roses (that was John's doing, Margaret realized with surprise), and was simply set, but with high-quality crystal and silverware that sparkled in the early afternoon light. The bone china place settings were understated, rimmed with a simple, thin band of gold rather than the exuberant flourishes that were all the rage. The overall effect was quite restrained, Margaret thought.

Her cousin nodded in approval as she took her seat and read one of the hand-lettered menus placed on each salad plate.

"Tomato bisque sounds lovely. Mivart's had suggested it for our wedding banquet, but Mama thought it too risky." She rolled her eyes. "As though we would have a mishap at the table!"

Margaret had decided against turtle soup, although she was certain her cousin would have been thrilled to dine on such an expensive delicacy. John would have had no problem with the selection,
but Margaret found she could not justify the expense. She knew her cousin to be a person of rarified
tastes, but also one who looked down on arrivistes. Although Edith might exclaim over the novelty
of a dish she'd consumed only one or two times previously, Margaret knew her well enough to
understand that it would not do to outshine her golden-haired cousin. Serving such a soup would
likely cause Edith to infer that Margaret's industrialist husband was aping a class to which he'd never
belong.

In contrast, tomato bisque, made of a fruit that was inexpensive in summer, but glasshouse-grown in
autumn was just expensive enough at this time of year to appeal to Edith's taste for the hard-to-
obtain.

Yes, she'd thought this through. The amount of forethought resembled a game of chess, Margaret
thought with a smile. She'd always known her cousin needed to be the queen bee in all situations, but
it had never really bothered her until now. Margaret pushed the thought aside, and concentrated on
the conversation instead.

"Which London sights have you taken in since you've been in town?" the captain asked. This
elicited a blush from both Margaret and John.

Her husband replied. "Just the Exhibition, for the most part. As the mills have a rather active display,
I've needed to see to it. Other than that, we've kept to our rooms."

Edith smiled. "Well, you are newlyweds. The proper thing would be for the two of you to stay with
us at Harley Street, but I won't ask, because I know you would decline. I am sure the reason you are
away from Milton, after all, is to enjoy some privacy."

Margaret felt her color rising, and wished she had a fan.

"We will be touring more of London in the coming days, if Margaret is feeling up to it," John
offered.

Edith shot her cousin a look of concern, and Margaret silently prayed that the conversation would not
veer towards Green Park and the prior day's events.

Thankfully, someone seemed to be listening.

"You must visit the Horticultural Gardens," Edith said, "Margaret has been there many times, of
course, so she can be your guide. It's not quite as nice at this time of year, but some of the trees will
have autumn colors."

"That sounds like an excellent—"

Edith did not allow John to finish his thought. "Oh, I know! The Diorama! Darling, don't you think
that would be just perfect?"

The captain shrugged. "It's likely to rain. Madame Tussaud's might be just the thing. I hear it's quite
historical."

Edith emitted a giggle-snort at the déclassé suggestion. Her expression said, "Can you even imagine,
Margaret?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of the Polytechnic Institution," John said. "Or perhaps an
offering of the Philharmonic Society."

"Yes, well, both of those are perfectly fine choices," Edith agreed reluctantly.
"And I had also promised Margaret a tour of the silk weavers in Spitalfields's."

Edith made a moue of disdain.

"And I think we would very much like to dine out tomorrow. Somewhere besides Brown's. I fear Margaret is becoming bored by the hotel's offerings."

"That's not true," Margaret replied. "But I would like to dine in a restaurant. That would be a novel experience. But why tomorrow?"

John smiled enigmatically.

"Well," Henry said with a cough, "There are a number of places I can recommend that are suitable for ladies. I can give you a list if you'd like. There are a few not so far from Hyde Park. Speaking of which, can you tell us more about your display at the exhibition?" Henry asked. "I did visit it when we did the tour some months ago, but there was quite a crush. I wasn't able to hear everything your man had to say. Is the display meant to show the processes shared among mills or within a single mill?"

"We shared the expense of mounting the display, but each of the mills has the capacity to do each of the tasks demonstrated, from opening cotton, to carding, spinning it and weaving it. A power loom is on display, but some mills, like Marlborough also have a Jacquard shed. And there are certain concerns that dye the thread after it has been spun, or dye or print the fabric after it comes off the looms. I have been thinking…"

John was interrupted by the removal of soup plates and the presentation of the main service. As it was luncheon, the meal Margaret selected was rather light, including only a lobster salad—Edith's favorite—plus chateaubriand with mushrooms, barded pigeon, potatoes au gratin, asparagus, and flageolets.

Edith clapped in delight. "Margaret, you are a first-class hostess! And someone has very good taste in wine," she noted, as a server poured from a bottle of Clos de Vougeot. She raised her glass in John's general direction.

"That would be the sommelier," John said drily.

"I would love to hear your thoughts regarding textile production. Are you thinking about some type of vertical articulation?" Henry asked.

"Yes, that's it exactly. There are economies that can be made when one runs all aspects of a process from beginning to end. At the moment, jacquard fabrics are a small portion of our production, as we do not dye our own yarns. It's difficult to turn a profit given the outlay for raw materials. But if we were to dye our own and scale up, that would change. Several years ago, I did intend to branch out into dyeing and purchased some of the glassware needed to begin experimentation. I'd even reached out to a chemist. But a downturn in the market ended that foray before it began."

"And now that you've rebounded—"

"Henry," Edith asked her brother-in-law after taking a bit of her entree, "have you tried this pigeon? It reminds me a bit of the dish we had at the Campbells last month. Do you remember?"

Henry was nonplussed. John smiled benignly.

Margaret ignored Edith's continued chatter about wildfowl and instead drank in the scene. The captain and Henry were dressed to the height of fashion—not ostentatiously, but it was easy for a
trained eye to discern that their tailors were from the Row. Edith, of course, was the epitome of good
taste, dressed in fabrics that were clearly expensive, but understated. John was a contrast to these
three gentlefolk. There were superficial similarities, of course. He was every bit as good looking as
the men, although in a stronger, more masculine way. Likewise, his suit was made of fine worsted
wool, the best England had to offer. But what else would one expect from a textile manufacturer?
The difference lay in the details. The suit's color was not the vogue for anyone but undertakers and
its cut proclaimed that it was made by a tailor from somewhere well-outside London. And his
furnishings, from shirt studs to cravat, were several years out of date.

Then there was the room itself. It was lovely and elegant, but not, Margaret knew, quite as lovely
and elegant as Mivart's, where Edith had married, or even Clarendon's.

In her second epiphany of the day, Margaret realized that this was by design. John had no desire to
proclaim to his so-called "betters" that he was their equal (even though he knew this to be true).
Rather, his goal was to show that his business had met some financial standard that these
gentlefolk might recognize as "good enough." Therefore, it was acceptable (perhaps even preferable)
to dress differently, or less fashionably, to let the "betters" keep the culture they had built for
themselves. Margaret looked at her husband with new understanding. He gazed back at her
quizzically as Edith's monologue ended.

"You've said little this afternoon, Margaret. Do you have an opinion about the pigeon you'd like to
share?"

She nearly choked on her beef as she tried not to laugh. It was difficult to stay angry at the man.

"It's not often I get to hear you talk business. I have been very interested to hear about this—what did
you call it, Henry? Vertical articulation?" This was true, of course. John hadn't talked business much
with her since they'd married. That was a contrast from their engagement. Why was that?

"The only constant in business in change. Therefore, one must continue to consider how the
marketplace will react to even the smallest alterations in technology. The Exhibition has been a
valuable asset in making these predictions."

"How so?" the captain asked, just as an array of desserts was served. After a barrage of delighted
exclamations by Edith, the conversation continued.

"Were you able to spend any time looking at the smaller inventions in the hall?" John asked. Both
men nodded.

"There were an overwhelming variety of ideas. British—and to a lesser degree, European—creativity
is astounding," the captain ventured.

"Yes, but what did you see? If you were going to predict how life is likely to change in the next five
or ten years, what would you say?"

"I would say that rail travel is likely to become more luxurious," said Henry.

"And carriage travel," the captain added. "The springs on the carriages I saw were amazing!"

"I agree," John said. "Now, how would that likely affect the marketplace?"

"People may be more likely to travel, which means more rail lines," the captain began.

"And more products related to travel, from portmanteaus to overcoats," Henry finished.
"Exactly," said John. "Now, what about textiles?"

The brothers thought, and were silent. Finally, Henry spoke.

"There was a large display of designs for some type of printing blocks. Do you remember, Edith? You thought they were for wallpaper, but on closer inspection it seemed they were for printing cotton."

"Yes," Edith said as she helped herself to another serving of semifreddo. "There were quite a lot of those."

"So that suggests that printed fabrics—cotton fabrics—may be coming into vogue?" Henry suggested.

John nodded. "I am not at liberty to give names at this point, but I am in talks to buy a dyeing concern in Milton. The company dyes yarn, which would mesh nicely into Marlborough Mills current jacquard production. They also dye finished fabric, which would extend our production another step. And just before their recent difficulty, they purchased the machinery to print via brass rollers."

"Why are they selling?" Henry asked.

"Embezzlement by one of the partners. I can't say much more at this time, as they are hoping to keep it quiet. But I have reviewed the books and agree with the findings of the other partner. Key suppliers were not paid for many months. Their only option is to sell up."

"I see," Henry said. "You would not be taking on their debt?"

"That is something I would not do. To be clear, they are liquidating to clear these debts. The other partner is an honorable man. I have had dealings with him in the past."

The captain spoke up. "My brother and I have been thinking about this for some time. Our capital is sitting in the three percents and we feel we could do much better. We are eager to dabble in the cotton industry."

Margaret felt something in the air change. Across from her, Edith's eyes widened, and to Margaret's left, John stiffened.

"I would not call what I do 'dabbling.'"

"My brother only meant that we would not actually be involved in the day-to-day running—" Henry glared at his brother.

"Dabbling implies a very casual, lackadaisical approach to investing. I am not interested in investors who are likely to liquidate at the first bump in the market."

"I assure you, we would be in it for the long haul." It was clear to Margaret, at least, that Henry keenly wanted to be a part of this business venture.

"Marlborough Mills has seen tremendous growth over the past few years, but in the short term of any business cycle there can be downturns. As you know, we and the other mills in Milton have just weathered a strike. It was difficult, but after a great deal of hard work, we bounced back over the last few months. Not all of Milton's mills did. An investor must be aware of the short-term risks. The three percents exist for a very good reason and are a legitimate choice for some. The dabblers, I'd call them." John didn't glower. He didn't need to.
"I would love to talk more," Henry said. "Perhaps over brandy and cigars?"

"Edith," the captain asked, "don't you have an appointment this afternoon?"

Margaret couldn't help but smile. What an abrupt dismissal!

But Edith nodded. "Yes, to the modiste." She smiled. "I am in need of a new winter wardrobe."

"That's a coincidence," Margaret said. "I have an appointment with Miss Sloane this afternoon myself. John, you had the concierge send a message, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—" John began.

Edith interrupted. "Not Miss Sloane! Oh, you hadn't heard! Well, I can't tell you the details in mixed company."

"There was a house of ill repute above her store," the captain pointed out helpfully. "In the Burlington Arcade of all places. It's possible she was connected."

"Darling! Don't say such things!" Edith reproached her husband, but turned to Margaret with the sparkling eyes and flushed skin of someone with a juicy tale to tell. "It's true, though. They say that some of her girls were girls of another kind. Anyway, she's no longer there. So, she must be guilty." Edith shook her head and the her golden singlets bounced in happy discord. "Mademoiselle DuMaurier is now London's most fashionable modiste. That's whom I'll be visiting, and you are certainly welcome to tag along. Since it looks like we may be doing business together we can just put anything you order on my account and we can settle up later."

"John?" Margaret looked at her husband questioningly.

"Where is Mademoiselle DuMaurier's atelier?" he asked.

"Oh, it's not far at all," Edith said breezily. "At her house on Grosvenor Square. She sees very few people, you see. It's not at all a commercial venture."

"Nonetheless, I'm not comfortable with the two of you walking there unaccompanied."

"Walk?" Edith laughed. "Why would we walk when our carriage is outside? We can bring Margaret's maid, as we'll need her to carry anything we happen to purchase. And if you're worried about protection, our driver is a burly fellow. He'll keep us safe."

John sighed. "Go."

"But I don't have a bon-"

"Oh, but you do!" Edith seemed ever more merry, seemingly at Margaret's expense. "When your husband stopped by yesterday, he mentioned that it was crushed. I gave him the address of a milliner straightaway."

John nodded, color rising to his cheeks, and Margaret remembered he'd returned to the hotel the previous evening with a paper-wrapped parcel under his arm.

"You'll find it in the armoire," he murmured.

Margaret rose. "We'll leave you, then. When would you like me to return?"

"Let's say five?" John smiled before turning back to his guests.
It would have been quicker to walk to Grosvenor Square Margaret realized as the brougham pulled into traffic. It was a distance of only ten short blocks between the hotel and their destination, but traffic was horrific at this time of day.

Margaret leaned back against the cushions of the plushly appointed carriage and listened to her cousin carry on. As always, Edith had a lot to say.

"We'll stop at duMaurier's and then back to our house. I know how much you want to see Sholto!"

"I do. I'm sure he's everything you've described."

"You know, your Mr. Thornton is growing on me, Margaret."

Margaret smiled, although her patience had already been worn thin by her cousin's need to sidetrack the conversation over luncheon. "Is that so?"

"I was shocked when he came by yesterday! Why in heaven's name didn't he send a servant? But then," she reached across the carriage to clasp her cousin's hand, "the look in his eyes as he talked about what had happened to you—why it very nearly brought me to tears! He loves you so much!"

"Yes, he does. But I told you that months ago."

"It was just so hard to believe at the time, after those letters you sent describing him as such an odious man, with odious northern ways."

"I was mistaken. I told you that in a letter, as well."

"I'm not so sure you were."

Margaret's eyes widened at the slight, and Edith hastened to explain. "What I mean to say is that your dear Mr. Thornton, while a charming, ruggedly handsome man is not the type of man you would have been expected to fall in love with. He is not of our circle."

Traffic was at a standstill, Margaret noticed. She could easily open the door and exit this conversation. But that would just make things worse with John. She took a deep breath and maintained her temper.

"No, he is not of your circle. But I am of his circle. Do you disapprove, Edith?" she asked coolly.

"No, I find I do not. It seems that all of us may be better of from the connection. But you will need to train him."

"Train him?"

"All men need training, Margaret. Surely your mother told you that. It's just that some men need training more sorely than others."

And my Mr. Thornton, with his northern ways falls into that latter category, I gather?"

Edith smiled. "Pish posh, Margaret. You are being much too serious! You heard the ridiculous suggestion my own husband made this evening. Madame Tussaud's. As if any one of the quality would be seen dead in such a place. And this from a man of breeding!"

She continued, incognizant of the effect of her words. "Now, Henry will provide a most adequate list of places for your evening out tomorrow. Have you figured out the occasion yet?"
Margaret shook her head in response and Edith smiled smugly. "You will. Don't let him take you to The Symposium. It's ghastly."

"Ghastly?"

"No one from our circle would ever be seen there, Margaret. It's a pedestrian attempt by that showman chef—what's his name?"

"I have no idea who you are talking about."

"That chef who is in the papers all the time. He is trying to profit off the exhibition. And failing miserably from what I hear."

"You feel very strongly about this, Edith."

"He's opened up Gore house to… anyone!"

There was the crux of the matter.

The carriage started moving, and Margaret took the opportunity to change the subject.

"I was very surprised to hear the captain and Henry suggest investing in Marlborough Mills. I would not have thought Londoners to be interested in northern industry. You seemed to be surprised as well."

Edith shook her head. "No, not at all. Henry broached the idea to me at your wedding, actually."

"So you knew he was going to bring it up?"

She nodded. "We've talked about it at length on several occasions."

"May I ask— how went this discussion with your husband? Do you often talk about such things?"

Edith giggled. "Lord, no! Cousin, haven't you learned how marriage works? We are not equals."

Margaret frowned. These were not the words she had hoped to hear.

Edith continued. "I am the one who brought the money to the marriage, remember? And more of it is tied up in a future inheritance. But it is important for any man to feel that he is in charge. So, of course I would not discuss such things as investments with my husband. Those are his decisions. In fact, I make it seem as though I couldn't care less about such things. But Henry understands. He's known since the outset that I think investing in your mill is a good thing. So, it will happen. Henry will manage it."

"I see."

It seemed Edith was playing chess, too.

Margaret never enjoyed visiting the modiste. Undressing in front of others made her feel like a prize turkey on display, ready to be poked and prodded. But even before the plucking commenced, tape measures would be wrapped around her bust and waist, like a farmer choosing the best specimen to send to the county fair.

It was some consolation that Mademoiselle duMaurier was quite kind, and more genuine than Margaret had expected. For one thing, she was actually French, unlike most of the Gallic-named modistes found in the better streets of London. For another she was older, and unmarried, but did not
hide this fact behind the title "Madame," or dress in garments meant for someone half her age. Margaret found this most refreshing.

It was a greater consolation that Edith was served first. Margaret sat in a plush arm chair with half an eye on her cousin, and half on the fashion plates in Le Bon Ton. It was a bit exhausting to watch her cousin. Edith enjoyed the attention, and had no qualms about disrobing for a relative stranger. She knew exactly what she did and did not want in her winter's wardrobe, and Margaret nodded in recognition as she saw the modiste's eyebrows raise in amusement.

She was surprisingly straightforward when it was finally Margaret's turn.

"You are here for new mourning clothes, I gather."

Margaret nodded and was surprised to find tears stinging her eyes.

Edith rescued her.

"Her father passed away a little over three weeks ago. As you can see, her clothes were made over in a hurry. They belonged to her mother in law, who is a widow."

The modiste examined the fabric of the bodice closely as she took Margaret's measurements over the garment. "It is very well-made. This is very high-quality silk. Not French, but almost as good. Will you take off the garment, please?"

Jane helped Margaret out of her bodice, skirt, and petticoats, laying each garment on a nearby chair. The modiste quickly took her measurements, then took up a sketch book to draw a quick likeness of her form. Margaret was surprised when the modiste did not enquire about the bruise on her arm, although it was clear the woman noticed it. Instead the dressmaker engaged her in a discussion of her likes and dislikes, nodding as she developed a clear picture of her client's taste.

Then, surprisingly, she picked up the abandoned bodice and inspected it closely, walking towards a window as she did so.

"Did you know that every garment tells us its history?" The modiste smiled as she ran her fingers over the garments seams. "Madame Lennox, you said this garment was made over in a hurry, but this is not the case. In fact, it was made over twice. And both times, with great care and consideration."

"You can tell that by looking at the fabric?" Edith asked.

"No, by looking at the quality of the stitches. The first person who sewed this garment did so ten years ago. Of course, I guess this by the cut of the bodice. It is a little bit dated, no? It was not sewn by a modiste. The stitches are lovely and even, but there are certain time-saving tricks even the lowliest dressmaker knows. This seamstress did not follow them."

"And the second person?" Margaret asked.

"In contrast, this person is a professional. Do you see this stitch? Look, how perfect." The modiste walked over to Margaret and pointed to tiny, even stiches running along the margin of one of the new pieces of fabric on the bodice. "I have not seen this stitch since I was an apprentice. It is called "point à rabattre sous le main."

"A professional?" Margaret repeated. She looked at Jane, who blushed.

"Yes. I can see that this bodice was damaged in several places and ingeniously mended. What I would not give to have someone of such talent on my staff!"
"Jane, this is quite a compliment Mademoiselle duMaurier has paid you." The girl turned an even deeper shade of crimson.

"Mrs. Thornton, may I speak with you in private?"

"Yes, Jane. Is something the matter?" The pair left the room, but Margaret returned with alacrity.

"I am sorry, Edith, but I need to take Jane back to the hotel straight away."

Margaret expected to find him in his shirtsleeves, sans cravat and even waistcoat, behind the desk in the sitting room. She was not disappointed. He came to her as she entered the room but wrapped his arms around her only after she buried her face within the wrinkled folds of his linen shirt.

"What's wrong, my love?" He asked quietly.

"Nothing." She shook her head and sighed.

"There must be something."

"I learned a few things today."

"Do you care to elaborate?"

"Some things about you."

"Oh." He was deflated.

"No. Good things. Some parts of your worldview, for one thing. I think I begin to understand."

"Do you?"

She felt his lips graze her forehead, and she shuddered. "Yes. And I think I agree."

He stepped back, and lifted her chin so that he could gaze into her eyes. "Do you?"

"Yes. I was troubled by your use of... wealth. Why you had such a lavish dinner during the strike. Why we took such expensive rooms at Brown's, why you said I needed to dress as the wife of a manufacturer. But after today I understand."

He took her hand and kissed her fingertips, then led her toward the bedroom.

She stopped him. "But that's not everything."

"No?" He chuckled. "What else did you learn today?"

"That I appreciate your patience with my cousin."

"She did behave very strangely today."

"I learned something from her, too. Didn't it seem like she was completely uninterested in what you were discussing over luncheon? Yet she and Henry have been talking about investing in the mill since the wedding. Or so she said. She just didn't want her husband to know it was her idea."

"Why not?"

"She said he needs think it was his idea."
"Ah. I see." He frowned.

"Then she said I did not understand how marriage works."

"Oh, Margaret." John ran his hands through his hair in a familiar gesture of frustration.

"John?"

"I owe you an apology."

She offered him her hand and he led her to the bed, seating her on its edge. He knelt by her side and carefully folded back her skirts, smoothing each with a carefulness that was tantalizing in its slowness. He removed her boots, and unclipped each garter, pausing to smooth the indentation left in its absence. His lips then anointed a line of newly-uncovered flesh as he slowly rolled her stockings down her legs. He then reversed the journey, moving higher still until she gasped at the pleasure his mouth was able to produce.

John's voice was hoarse with desire and regret when he finally spoke.

"I shouldn't have said those words. That there is only one head to a family."

"Is it a hydra, then?" She half laughed for fear of crying.

"No, just some two-headed beast. The one with two backs."

She laughed freely this time, at her northern brute's casual reference to Shakespeare.

"We are partners, Margaret, in our wedded life."

"You truly mean this?"

He rested his head on one knee as he caressed the other.

"I do think it would be fair for me to claim senior partner, as I have significantly more experience. And that means at times I will have stronger opinions—"

"I've noticed that."

"And might even overrule you. Occasionally."

"For example?"

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it."

She would not argue. Not now.

"Will you undress me?" she asked instead. She rose and exposed her back to him. Slowly he unfastened the hooks that ran the length of her bodice and she shrugged herself out of the garment.

She turned to face him as she folded the garment back on itself, so that the finely-stitched square of fabric was exposed.

"I learned something else today."

"What's that?" he murmured as reached behind her, slipping his fingers into the gap of her corset in search of the tails of her laces.
"That you are a better seamstress than I." She showed him the evidence and smiled.

"Tailor. But yes, definitely your better."

They collapsed onto the bed in a fit of laughter.

"You will pay for that remark."

"Gladly. For as long as you desire."

Author notes:

Thank you to everyone who took the time to read and review. As always, I value your comments. It takes me a good amount of time to do the research and writing for each chapter, so I appreciate it when people let me know their thoughts.

Historical Notes

When devising the menu for the luncheon and dinner, I did a search for Victorian menus from 1851 as of course, I wanted to be accurate. 😊 I did not find many menus from England from that time period, so I widened my search by time and by location. The New York Public Library’s Buttolph collection was a great help. In 1889, Mrs. Buttolph donated over 25,000 menus to the library, continuing to add to the collection until her death in 1924. In this collection I found menus from American hotels from 1851-1853 and Manchester and London hotels from the 1860s. I think it is likely that in 1851, American cuisine would have lagged behind the cuisine of London a bit, as London and Paris were the international leaders at that time. So, I reasoned that something on an autumn American menu in 1852 may have been in fashion in 1851 in London the previous autumn.

Turtle soup was fashionable throughout the 1800s, but as sea turtles grew more endangered, the soup became more expensive. As a result, turtle soup appeared on fewer menus. However, it remained part of the culinary scene as evidenced by the rise of mock turtle soup. This was a substitute for turtle soup made out of organ meat. It is on many middle-class menus from the 1850s in the US and England. As it was on the menu for Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in 1861, I think is safe to say that both turtle and mock turtle soup stayed in fashion for a good amount of time.

I chose the other items for the luncheon from the Tremont hotel menu and the wine from the daily menu for the Irving House Hotel in New York City, as it gave me an idea of what vintages were available at the time.

La Moniteur de la Mode was a bilingual magazine published monthly in French and English. It described what was being produced at the finest Paris ateliers and made pronouncements of what should and should not be worn at different times of day in any given season. It also contained patterns and instructions for small articles of clothing. The Autumn, 1851, issue describes the cape and gown Edith wears, and there is a fashion plate of the ensemble, as well. Additionally, this issue describes the two new hair styles Edith describes to Margaret. Le Bon Ton was another fashion magazine of the time. It was published under various names from 1851 through 1927.

I referred to Tallis’s Illustrated London for descriptions of the locations Edith suggests John and Margaret visit. This two-volume set was published to coincide with the Great Exhibition and gives details of each neighborhood in London, as well as many of the hotels and entertainments available at the time. Edith refers to Mivart’s hotel. Mivart’s was established in 1815, and was sold to the Claridges in 1854. Tallis describes the Mivart as being the hotel where visiting royalty stayed (and therefore presumably a cut above Brown’s.) I would therefore see it as the hotel where a socially conscious person such as Edith would very much want to have been married.
Tallis and other sources also discuss the lack of restaurants in London in 1851. At this time there were many clubs where upper class men could dine, but few places for ladies to dine apart from confectionaries. If a woman was to dine out (with her husband, father, or guardian, of course) it would typically be in a hired room within a hotel, or in one of very few restaurants. I will have more to say about this and the chef Edith bad-mouthed in the next chapter.

The three percents were a conservative way to invest, based on government annuities. They had a low rate of return was much lower than the average of 8% return on railway investments. However, until 1856, business investments (such as industry and railways) were risky because investors and their estates were liable for losses. John is therefore quite serious when he asks Henry and John about their willingness to invest.

I will be posting plates from La Moniteur de la Mode and engravings from Tallis of some of the places Edith suggests on my Pinterest page. You can find it by googling "tintinnabula1" and "Pinterest" and then scrolling down to "North and South" once you land on my Pinterest page. Alternatively, type in https://www.pinterest.com/Tintinnabula1/north-and-south

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