So I Stayed

by brilligspoons

Summary

The events that take place between Margaret and John meeting in the station and their wedding proceed both as Margaret expected, and not.

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When they walk into the house, Margaret is immediately and overwhelmingly aware of the fact that Hannah Thornton isn't exactly pleased to see her again. She can't help the flush of embarrassment, either, when she realizes how this looks, arriving on the doorstep with her hand in John’s, engaged but without a chaperone in sight. Still, Margaret holds her head steady and looks Mrs. Thornton squarely in the eyes as she stares them down from her place at the dining table.
"Mother," John begins. He opens and closes his mouth, but no other words emerge from it.

"Mrs. Thornton," says Margaret, squeezing his hand, "it's a pleasure to see you again so soon."

Mrs. Thornton sets her fork down next to her plate. She looks back and forth between them and, after a few moments of silence, settles her gaze on Margaret. "Well," she says, "the town will certainly have something to talk about now, won't they."

It could be much worse, Margaret decides as Mrs. Thornton resumes eating her meal without another word to either of them. She might have thrown something at me.

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Mrs. Shaw and Edith arrive the following morning, and Aunt Shaw demands that John take Margaret to the church that very afternoon and marry her.

"I'm sure I don't know what you were thinking," Aunt Shaw declares. "Running off with a man at a train station in broad daylight. I thought you had a sight more sense in your head, young lady, but I see I was sorely mistaken."

"It was Mr. Thornton, aunt," Margaret wearily replies, "not some strange man I met that day."

John, who's been sitting quietly at his desk next to the sofa while Mrs. Shaw bemoans their lack of propriety, coughs suddenly, and his shoulders begin to shake with barely disguised laughter. Margaret brings a hand up to her mouth to hide her own smile. Mrs. Shaw doesn't appear to notice anything amiss, however, and she continues to complain as loudly and politely as she possibly can. Margaret finds herself wishing that Edith hadn't retired to the room Mrs. Thornton had asked the maid to show her to, if only for the diversion news of the baby would provide them.

Margaret allows Mrs. Shaw to go on for far longer than she probably should, but the moment her aunt pauses her complaints and demands, she asks, "Are you quite finished?"

Mrs. Shaw splutters. "Am I finished? Margaret Hale, I -"

"John and I have already discussed the wedding date," Margaret continues. "We will be wed this Saturday."

"That's hardly enough time to -"

"It is our wedding, and we will see it done our way."

This time, the muffled laughter comes from Mrs. Thornton herself.

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There's a knock on Margaret's bedroom door the night before the wedding. It's late, and she's been pacing the floor near the fireplace for almost an hour, unable to calm her nerves long enough to undress and go to bed. She considers ignoring whoever it is, but a second round of knocking follows, more insistent this time. Margaret opens the door just a little and, much to her surprise, finds Mrs. Thornton standing in the hallway.

"I thought you might still be awake," Mrs. Thornton says. "Might I come in?"

Margaret ushers her inside and shuts the door behind her. Mrs. Thornton sweeps over to the window and stops, pushing the curtain aside to stare at the sliver of moon above them in the sky. In her short time staying in this house, Margaret has learned that Hannah Thornton is not a woman
to be rushed into speaking, so she sits down at the vanity and waits.

"You've managed to surprise me several times now, Miss Hale," she says. She turns and stares down at Margaret. "Most people are predictable and therefore bore me immensely. You have proved yourself to be neither predictable nor boring. It's impressive."

"Thank you," says Margaret. She's unsure of where this might be going, so she leaves it at that and waits for Mrs. Thornton to continue speaking.

"I wonder, then, how your new life with my son will progress."

"Every marriage is different, I believe."

Mrs. Thornton offers her a short-lived smile. "Indeed," she says. "And I suppose you will learn certain facts about our family in time."

"John has already told me much of what happened to his father," says Margaret, "and if that is what you're worried about -"

"It is not," Mrs. Thornton interrupts, "and I'm not entirely sure your stomach for that is truly an indication of your ability to accept other...things."

Margaret seethes internally. "I'm sure I'll prove you wrong, given the chance."

Mrs. Thornton smiles again, wider and sharper than before. Margaret shudders a little at its intensity and wonders if she's overstepped herself. She says nothing as Mrs. Thornton walks past her to reach the door.

"Get some sleep, Miss Hale," she says. "Tomorrow will be a busy day for all of us. I do believe we Thorntons shall test your mettle yet."

Margaret forces herself to rest. Every noise makes her toss and turn until she settles into a fitful sleep. She dreams she's falling down a well, and when she reaches the bottom, there's a crescent moon waiting to catch her.

Works inspired by this one

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