Going in Circles

by greenstuff

Summary

Even as he watches her carriage drive away, taking her away forever, John cannot banish her from his mind.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

He remembered with something akin to amusement how he had once watched nothing but her bracelet's repeated transgression as it broke free of her tapered arm and fell around her round wrist only to be pushed impatiently back up. How his heart had thrummed in his chest at that dance between cool, disobedient ornament, and warm, perfectly formed woman. He could almost laugh at his past self. What a fool he had been, captivated by a bracelet about her lovely arm, the dance of her delicate fingers about the tea things. A sentimental fool.

Then later, another lifetime, or so it felt, the bewitching sight of crimson blood seeping so slowly from her temple her heart might conceivably be stilled by death's cold hand. How that image had haunted him. No more than the feel of her arms about his shoulders or her head nestled against his breast. That day, no matter how many passed since, existed for him as a series of vivid clips, so real he could, if he dared, reach out and touch the blood as it seeped thickly from her temple. The knife edge of his love still twisted in his gut when the remembrance came to him. Her form in his arms as he rushed her indoors, safe from the violence of the workers, his love, his heart's only unfulfilled desire, limp as a broken doll, her face wet with tears, her beautiful hair matted with blood. To this day he did not know what he had said to her, he only knew his heart had wanted to leap from his chest, to nestle next to hers forever.

And of course, he could never quite banish the most exquisite pain of all. Trembling anticipation;
wordless, thoughtless hope; all crushed under the cold boot of her mortified anger. His beautiful Margaret, once again with her proud air of an unwilling slave, standing before him like one falsely accused, too indignant to explain, too noble to flee. How her face had gone suddenly white and then red and back to white, the only sign of her discomposure; that his words had meant anything at all. For all her icy dismissal, he would hold on to the flush of red, the glitter of a tear in her eye that would not fall. Magnificent Margaret, he defied her with his continued love and would do so until his own heart turned to dust.

Now she was leaving. Her carriage had long since disappeared from view, though he had not moved from the door-step, though snow was gathering in the folds of his jacket. He could not move, could not return to the Spartan familiarity of the dining room, to suffer Fanny's impertinent commentary or his mother's penetrating looks, not before he was back in control. It should not have affected him so. She did not love him, and more importantly, she was gone to London and would never return. Still, his mind clung to the image. A bare band of skin above the edge of her practical Milton shoes. Creamy, delicate flesh, untouched by sun or man, exposed for only a half second as she stepped up to the carriage. He could have dropped to the ground and grasped it, cradled her tiny foot and pressed soft lips to her maidenly flesh. But no, she would never be his, he should not even have looked. He certainly should not dwell on the image, but no matter how hard he tried within himself to forget, he could not erase the forbidden glimpse from his mind any more than he could banish the owner of that sweet, womanly ankle from his heart.

End Notes

Written in response to this challenge from Kittyknighton: North & South; John Thornton/Margaret Hale; he has a scandalous disposition, in either thought or deed, toward said lady's ankle.

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