Anne De Bourgh had of late moved more in society – her mother, sensing her own diminishing health, perhaps seeing at last the advisability of putting her where more than her increasingly attached circle of near relatives might view her. Her head and shoulders held carefully erect with the perfection of the finest finishing schools, she glided across ballrooms in the greatest houses of London, and she had as many suitors as might be deemed proper.

To these men she was, however, notoriously cool; “Had I no money, Mary,” she would say to her companion at times. “Had I no fortune but my face, they would dance all night with Miss Fothering, instead of merely gazing at her when they think I am distracted.”

Sometimes she would sigh, after – “Did I not seem likely to sicken, still more than I have already...”

Mary Bennett, undressing her – not a usual thing for companions, but such she was not and had not been for many weeks now – would pause and lean forward, press a kiss between the shoulder blades, picking the bows she had tied at the beginning of the evening out of Anne’s hair and letting it hang loose and beautiful.

“You shall live, Anne. You shall live, and with me. You shall.”

Mary Bennett, it must be said, had never cared much for popular opinion.
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