Railway Coda

by shirasade

Summary

Coda to the BBC mini-series, which ends with Margaret and John getting on the same train back to Milton.

Notes

As ridiculous as the BBC ending is (esp. when compared to the novel), I adore it, as I adore the whole mini-series. This is the edited result of a 750words.com exercise.

See the end of the work for more notes.

The rattling of the train wheels seemed to echo the happy pattering of Margaret's heart as they traveled further North - back to Milton. Back home, she supposed, now. She could not stop smiling, the barest brush of his fingers against her neck, pushing back some unruly curls, making her almost giddy.

They were sitting much too close, all alone in their carriage, and his disheveled state did nothing to restore any sense of propriety. However, Margaret could not bring herself to care, not even a little bit, not when she was so happy. She did not know what had changed his mind, what had revived those feelings he had disavowed so fervently, what had caused him to travel all the way South to Helstone. She would ask him about it later, but right now, all that mattered was the sensation of his thigh pressed against her petticoats, his big, strong hand holding her much smaller one as if it was precious, its warmth seeping through her gloves. In the window she could just about make out his reflection, the way his face lit up, as if he was no more able to cease smiling than she was.

"What are you thinking about, Margaret?" His whisper, rough and intimate, broke her out her reverie, and impulsively she turned back to him and captured his lips once more with hers, felt
them yield with already familiar passion and a half-swallowed laugh. Had it really only been a few minutes since their mouths had first touched? Because Margaret could not imagine a life in which she was not kissing John Thornton. His intensity had scared her at first, but not anymore, not for a while now, and, sheltered parson's daughter that she was, she could already tell that theirs would be a marriage of intense passions. She relished the thought, even as he pressed her closer to him, lifting her arms around his neck in a way that brought back memories of her actions on that fateful day at the Mill. Oh, if she’d known herself - and him - better then!

But what use were regrets. If she’d accepted his feelings, or her feelings, back then, she wouldn’t have had those precious last weeks in her parents’ house. Determined she pushed back all sad memories and instead laughed into his mouth, shifting around until she was half-kneeling on the seat, straddling him as best as her dress allowed. Scandalous, she knew, but there was nothing but countryside and sheep outside for miles, and no one to stop her need to be closer to him. He gasped, a delighted noise against her tongue, and she had to stop for just a moment to prevent his nimble fingers’ from doing too much damage to her hair.

"John... Be careful." Saying his given name she made sure he knew the gentle rebuke only applied to her appearance and not their behaviour, re-affirming this by moving his hands firmly lower, to her waist and then leading his right hand boldly around until it rested just below her bosom. Her courage failed her there, but he just smiled wickedly, in a way that should scandalise and not entice her. Easily he followed her lead, cupping first one breast then the other, teasing them through the restraints of her corset while planting kisses down her neck to the lace of her collar, making her skin feel almost feverish wherever he touched it.

She gasped and rested her forehead against his, just trying to catch her breath and gather her wits. As before he seemed to understand without words and simply held her, his hands stroking along her back languidly. Margaret considered that women's garments were certainly not made for this sort of exertion, and she envied John his freedom of movement. She glanced down at him, taking in his appearance. Her own hands had certainly mussed up his hair and made an even greater mess of his clothes, but it would only be a matter of minutes for him to be presentable again, while, barring John displaying unusual skills as a lady’s maid, there was not much more she could do if she wanted to arrive at their destination with any semblance of respectability.

Meanwhile he leaned back against the seat and allowed her scrutiny without a hint of embarrassment, although his chest was heaving almost as much as her own and, when Margaret dared let her gaze drift lower, she could make out that... other parts of him had also been affected. Of all the things she’d just done without hesitation or shame, not knowing what to call this most private part of the man who was to be her husband was the thing that made Margaret blush. She kissed him again, more gently this time, and moved to sit by his side once more, although still too close for propriety. They had so much to learn about each other yet, so many more parts left unexplored, and Margaret decided she could bear to be patient... for a while at least.

John let her move away and did not ask. He just smiled at her with the gentleness Margaret knew few people beside herself ever got to see, and took her hand in his again. She felt warmth spread through her body, although in a different way than their kisses had done.

“How shall I ever tell Aunt Shaw?” she whispered, after some time of delicious silence.
“Let me speak to her.”
“Oh, no! I owe to her,—but what will she say?”
“I can guess. Her first exclamation will be, ‘That man!’”
“Hush!” said Margaret, “or I shall try and show you your mother's indignant tones as she says, ‘That woman!’”

That wisely made him hold his tongue. “You’ll just have to hold my hand while we face her, Mr.
Thornton,” she finally said lightly.

His tone was equally teasing: “Only if you promise to return the favour, Miss Hale.”

He held her gaze, until they both started laughing like naughty children who were getting away with something. The rest of the train ride to Milton they sat in silence, only exchanging the occasional smile, their thoughts pleasantly occupied.

He did not let go of her hand once.

End Notes

Paragraph in *italics* is how the novel ends, very respectably in Margaret's aunt's house in London.

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