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Jack awoke the next morning to the sound of Claire's breathy snores
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"If you spend your time hoping someone will su er the consequences

for what they did to your heart, then you're allowing them to hurt you

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a second time in your mind." Shannon L. Alder

Jack awoke the next morning to the sound of Claire's breathy snores in his ear. It was odd how quickly he had become used to the sounds she made. She was sleeping close to him, nestled up against his

she made. She was sleeping close to him, nestled up against his chest, her arm strewn across his torso in her slumber.

For what had happened the previous evening, Jack could not care less about Arthur Slickson. Claire had kissed him of her own will. She

It gave him the greatest hope for what might come out of a chance meeting in the library, and a plan that really ought to have exploded into flames. Though, he ought not tempt fate, as they were to announce Claire's pregnancy at luncheon, and that was a key conversation that needed to be believed.

had looked upon him with a desire in her eyes that he definitely

Jack had not realised just how much he had wanted to kiss Claire until he was able to. To hold her in such an embrace was unlike anything else, and he felt lucky Jack had certainly not considered himself a fortunate man in the emotional sense. But if Claire might love him, or regard him with enough tenderness, then he would be content for the rest of his days.

content for the rest of his days.

It truly felt like she might choose him

Jack had kept to his word, and he had not forced intimacy upon

Claire. And he knew that only a few short months ago, waking up with a woman having not had her properly, he would have felt cheated, or extremely dissatisfied. But this was dierent. It was contentment.

Fulfilment.

Jack turned his neck down slightly so that he could look upon Claire's face. She had not washed it, and so the rouge that she had been wearing the night before had smudged, making her look entirely rosy. Her hair, as well, had not been braided, and so it was quite untidy, but he enjoyed it. Jack smiled and laid his head back down on the pillow.

out of her eyes.

"Oh!" she cried, her voice still thick with sleep. She then turned her head to look at Jack. "Good morning."

Jack smirked. "Good morning. Did you sleep well?" he asked.

Claire nodded as she rubbed her eyes. "I still vehemently deny that I snore, but I do think I heard myself that time," she admitted reluctantly. "I do apologise if I was noisy."

A snore practically ripped itself from Claire's nose which shook her

awake, and she looked around in a daze, quickly brushing her hair

lullaby."

An amused smile teased Claire's face as she rolled over onto her elbows, one gently resting on Jack's chest. She then used her hands to cup her face as she looked at him.

Jack was startled for a moment at her sudden closeness, her comfort

sweetness that she could have asked him for anything, and he would

with him, and the very fact that she had such an expression of

Jack chuckled. "I am quite used to it now. It is my own adverse

have consented.

"Where did you learn to dance?" queried Claire curiously. "You are wonderful."

"Oh," uttered Jack bashfully. "I don't know. One attends three or so dozen balls and one learns a step or two."

"I remember thinking you were a wonderful dancer the very first time

we danced together," recalled Claire. "I wish I knew the steps to the

Claire did not yet know the family that she had married into. "Mother

will take Susanna to London for the Season in April, and we will most

likely join in the summer, when both of the children are born. There

are always grandiose parties to attend as we watch mothers like mine

finer dances that a house like this would host."

parade their daughters about."

Claire's eyes widened. "The Season?" she repeated. "Oh, my. How does Susanna feel being paraded about?"

"This will be her third Season, I believe. She is never without callers

or o ers, but I suppose Susanna is a romantic, and she wants what

everyone else does." Jack exhaled with a smile. "You don't watch

your older brother follow around the love of his life for his entire

childhood, spend the next decade pining for her, before finally

Claire's face so ened with a smile momentarily, before an expression

of remorse filled her face, and Jack knew exactly what he had said

marrying her, to settle for anything less."

that had caused that reaction.

"I didn't settle," he promised her.

Claire pursed her lips as her eyes warmed with relief. She leaned forward on her elbows and pecked him quickly on the lips. Jack grinned, enjoying the fact that Claire felt comfortable enough to bestow a ection.

Church was not on the mind of anyone within Ashwood House that

morning, as evidenced by the fact that it was nearly time for

and Jack and Claire enjoyed their tray together.

their bedroom.

you tell?"

would be impossible to tell.

eliciting a hu from Claire.

as he tapped Claire on the nose.

nervous.'

added in thought.

pleasing her.

Silence. Shock.

robbed of that joy for some time.

Claire, and their wonderful blessing."

to him.

coolly.

warmed.

inclined."

all.

silently.

Beresford.

sofa.

Claire flinched at his tone.

be in there somewhere.

as well meant a great deal.

child."

luncheon, and nobody had arisen. Breakfast trays had been sent up,

"Can you tell?" Claire panicked, running from her dressing room into

Jack placed down his copy of The Tempestand looked up to see what Claire was asking.

Claire was wearing a plain, blue day dress, with very little detail. It looked to be one of the dresses she had come with and was perhaps made for Grace some years ago before being passed to Kate. Jack had noticed that Claire elected for simplicity around her mother.

Claire was standing on her side, pulling the fabric tightly across her

stomach. She was looking at him in alarm. "Well?" she insisted. "Can

If anything, Jack could see the smallest of protrusions, that could

consumed at breakfast. When her dress was hanging normally, it

Jack hopped o of the bed and crossed the room to Claire, daring to

Claire put her hands on her hips, still holding the fabric tight against

try his luck. "Well, let me look at you," he mused in a low tone,

easily be attributed to the three pieces of cake each they had

her front.

"Yes ... yes, I think I do see something," Jack teased in a serious tone.

Claire gasped. "Oh, no!" she wailed.

Jack playfully poked her belly lightly. "That's the plum cake," he joked, "and the honey cake is here." He swilly tickled her at her ribs.

Claire flinched and giggled, attempting to swat his hands away. "And

what do you know? There's a bit of brioche right here." Jack grinned

Claire laughed as she rolled her eyes as she went to retreat back into

the dressing room. At the door, she paused, and turned back towards

"We are having a child, Claire," reminded Jack. "This is a happy day

for us. And your family will be happy for us." Mine, too, God willinghe

him. "Thank you for making me laugh," she said gratefully. "I'm

Sunday luncheon was a grand a air, and Claire's whole family had joined the Beresfords in the dining room. Perrie and Kate's infant son, James, were both being cared for in the nursery.

There were at least a dozen conversations being carried on around the table and coupled in with the sounds of silverware on dishes, it was quite a noisy room. Claire, however, was silent, and Jack knew that she was still a bundle of nerves.

He would be the one to make the announcement. He was the proud

father, a er all. Jack gave Claire a reassuring smile as he stood up

The conversation quickly settled, and all eyes turned to him. Jack

unwittingly met his mother's curious stare as she frowned quizzically.

Would she be pleased? He didn't know. Jack was quite incapable of

announcement. We have recently learned that we are to welcome a

From everyone but Grace, who, of course, had already guessed it.

"Pardon my interruption," he began, "but Claire and I have an

from his chair and cleared his throat loudly.

And then there was an eruption of joy. Mrs Denham practically threw back her chair and hobbled around without her cane so that she could embrace Claire. Jack received congratulatory handshakes from his brother, Jim Ellis, as well as Claire's two younger brothers.

Susanna and Claire's sisters were similarly showering Claire with congratulations and well wishes, and Jack had to smile as he watched Claire experience excitement and anticipation. A child truly was something to look forward to, and Claire naturally had been

Jack then made the mistake of looking to his mother. Cecily was still

scene before her with a cool indi erence. Jack was not present when

wagered she would have been a sight more enthused. Even now, as

she carried on badgering Grace with silly old wives' tales to ensure a

firmly seated, glass of wine in hand, as she was looking on at the

Grace's first pregnancy had been announced, but he would have

son, she was at least taking an interest. What was she thinking?

"A toast, I think," announced Adam, li ing his glass. "To Jack and

The toast was echoed by their guests, save for Cecily, who merely

li ed her glass slightly. An intense irritation settled in Jack's stomach

as he resisted the urge to openly glare at her. For God's sake, this was

her grandchild. It would be, no matter the circumstances, and she

bloody well ought to be overjoyed about it. Or to at least o er an

obligatory congratulations.

"Do you have any ideas on names?" Mrs Denham asked enthusiastically.

Jack was unfortunately reminded of the fact that Claire had once told him she had thought about naming the baby a er its father.

"Well, if he is a boy, I was thinking of naming him a er his father,"

Claire replied to her mother, as though she was reading Jack's mind.

Jack nearly coughed up his sprout.

"Jack would be a good name, don't you agree?" Claire asked, turning

Jack was quite speechless and was bloody well honoured! The very

"Jack's Christian name is not Jack, but John," Cecily interjected

Jack ignored Cecily and o ered Claire a grateful smile. Her cheeks

"I think Jack or John are both fine names," Mrs Denham said calmly.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack saw his mother's posture straighten.

"Yes, I quite agree with that, Mrs Denham." Cecily's tone was oddly

firm about that. Jack had half expected her to fight for Peregrine to

But then, Jack thought, perhaps Cecily was fond of the name. She

had chosen it as one of Jack's middle names when he was born, a er

"And Edward suits both as a second name if either of you are so

idea that his son might not only share his surname, but his first name

"Would you mind if his second name is a er my father?" Claire asked him quietly in hope.

Jack didn't mind at all.

A er expressing her approval over the name Edward, Cecily removed herself from all conversation for the remainder of the meal, and Jack was becoming more and more irate. Claire was his wife, and she deserved as much respect from Cecily as she bestowed upon Grace.

Jack wasn't expecting her to rustle up a bladder to feed Claire, but

A er the meal, the party retired to the drawing room for cards and

music, and Cecily surprised Jack by inviting both he and Claire into

her parlour. Her tone was serious, and Jack and Claire followed her

The parlour was a room reserved for ladies and seeing as Cecily rarely

befitted with an imposing portrait of the duchess if one ever needed

"Won't you sit?" Cecily o ered nonchalantly as she took a seat of her

Claire had been staring at Cecily's portrait, and did look quite

intimidated as Jack took her arm and led her over to the opposite

"Are you to apologise, Mother?" Jack asked bluntly as they sat down.

entertained friends in the country, it was hardly used, but was

to be reminded of their inferiority when being received by Cecily

some politeness would not go astray.

own on one of the settees by the fireplace.

of Cecily. Jack was too angry to be ashamed.

both. It is a most serious matter."

Anyway, hope you enjoyed it!

cute.

Cecily's eyes widened. "Apologise?" she gasped. "Why, one only does such a thing when they are wrong, and I am afraid I am unfamiliar with the sensation."

Jack gritted his teeth. Was that supposed to be a joke? "You are to be a grandmother and yet you could hardly charge your glass. I take great o ense," he snapped.

Claire was frozen still, and Jack knew it was because she was terrified

Cecily rolled her eyes as she shook her head. "Oh, do not be so

dramatic. Of course, I o er you both my well wishes for the child's

health. My hesitation to celebrate is why I have asked to speak to you

Tell me why I just started singing in my head - "Don't tell me not

to live, just sit and putter. Life's candy and the sun's a ball of

butter. Don't bring around a cloud to rain on my parade!"

Spend half a day in my classroom today putting up displays and trying to organise myself. I uploaded pics to my Instagram (littlelo62) if you want to go and see them! I'm so happy with how they turned out and were totally worth the hours I spent laminating and slicing and crying about how much laminating

and slicing I had to go. Thank god for my guillotine because if I

not nearly finished yet but I set up my calm corner and it is so

had to cut my hand I would have been in the foetal position. I'm

I was the only one at my school today so I took advantage of the

silence and basically listened to drivers licence for three hours

straight. And then in the car home. I've heard it's the most

I saw a comment and meant to reply but I lost it and I can't remember what chapter is was on, but someone was asking about my upload schedule. The reason I'm updating more frequently is because in Australia, it's summer holidays, and so I'm not at work at the moment. When term starts in a week and a half, it will be back to weekly updates. Sorry!

Vote and comment!

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