

March, late evening

by mazaher

March 8, 2015

--Jack.

--Yes, Patrick...?

--What is it that makes you go on?

Patrick Moriarty is slouching in the big armchair in front of the fireplace. His long legs are stretched toward the flames, but his face is hidden by the deep ears of the chair, covered in faded, russet velvet.

Behind him, Jack Waszowski has been writing at his desk under the steady light of an oil lamp. He stops now, the quill he so loves to cut and notch for himself held gracefully in his half-raised hand.

--"Go on". You mean ...living?

--Hm-m.

--Oh.

Jack cleans the tip of the pen, then sets it in the penholder. He leans back, reflecting, and purses his mouth. The clock ticks quietly. The fire crackles as gusts of the cold winter wind pull sparks from the logs.

Like water trickles in a hollow, Patrick's voice flows in the silence.

--Curiosity. Hard-headedness. Pleasure. Hope? What?

--Curiosity, yes. Even if it is only to know what the weather will be like tomorrow. After all, that is something Leonardo da Vinci never knew, just as I will never know about the shape of the clouds he saw on a certain spring day in 1461. Hard-headedness... Perhaps. Surely it pulled me through childhood and early adulthood.

Patrick bites his lip. A tiny drop of blood forms and is quickly licked up.

--I didn't want to remind you of those years.

--I know. They do not mind anymore. The great thing about the past is that it is, indeed, past. Pleasure-- ah, pleasure. The greatest gift and the greatest danger. Pleasure cannot be counted upon when one is young, and I begin to suspect that it becomes more and more elusive with age. Hope? No, not hope. Hope is a pastime for the idle.

For a moment there is silence, then the clock whirrs and pings eleven strokes. The sound fills the darkness of the house like ripples on the surface of a pond, widening and disappearing.

--What then?

Jack lowers his gaze to the armchair hiding his lover and his ice-thin question. For a moment or two he considers what he sees. When he speaks, his voice is sure.

--All those things help. But I find that none of them is enough. You want to know what makes me go on. Ultimately, I think it's you.

--Me!-- Patrick almost jumps to his feet, then lets himself fall back in the protection of the armchair. --How me?

--I had nothing to expect from life when I met you. I had promised myself that I would ...leave as soon as my interest would fade, and I could see that, for a young man without opportunities beyond a good education, prospects were not too good. You turned my deliberation upside down, went through my days like a spring gale, and before I knew what was happening, I found myself quite set on living. As you can see, it's quite simple.

Jack now stands up from his desk and steps toward the fire.

--In the following years, I never had reason to regret such a development. I was, as I am, completely selfish in this. I think nothing of pestering you with my continued presence. I don't even ask myself --or you-- whether you find the situation agreeable.

While he speaks, Jack has reached the back of the armchair. He slips his arms down Patrick's shoulders and his chest and leans his chin on top of the stuffed back.

--What am I expected to say?-- Patrick whispers.

--Nothing at all. Or, at least, not a bid to never darken your door again.

--It's our door.-- Now Patrick sounds peevish.

--Good. That's exactly how I like the door to be.

Patrick crosses his arms and covers Jack's hands with his own.

--Forever...

--Not forever, but for quite a bit of time still.

The flames crackle. The clock ticks. The lovers fall silent.