

Ripples

(a coda to Mudita)

by athens7

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The carriage stops right in front of Patrick's house. He is the first to step out, I follow. As soon as my feet touch the ground, however, I abruptly find myself paralyzed with doubt.

Is my presence actually welcome, right now? It wouldn't be very odd, or unexpected, if it weren't, considering how much today's events defied all the rules. I'm still standing on the pavement, staring blindly at the cracks running like veins through the bruised stone, when Patrick, his hand already on the key in the latch, turns to look at me.

"Aren't you coming?" he asks softly, and for a moment I can see in his eyes a blue mirror of my every uncertainty, of every second thought. He smiles, small and tentative, and all of that nonsense melts away, and there's only the sensation of homecoming, filling both of our hearts.

"Yes" I answer, smiling in turn, and together we enter the darkened hallway.

Once crossed that final threshold, not to touch becomes an option impossible even to contemplate.

We take a bath together, sitting one in front of the other in the narrow tub, my hands wrapped in his hair and his in mine, tender touch and hot water there to soothe all our lingering aches. He's warm and supple and obliging while I towel him dry, his eyes closed and his neck arched back, and for a moment I swear I can hear him purring.

I take him by the hand, lead us to bed.

"... Do you want to cry?" I say once we are settled, both lying on our sides and facing the window and the shrouded moon. I already know the answer, but the words wanted to escape at all cost, an appeal whispered against his shoulder.

"It would be appropriate, somehow. But now I find I actually do not want to. Curious, isn't it?"

"Maybe not so much" I reply, caressing his ear, his cheek, my fingers grazing his mouth.

He grabs my hand, gently, exhales against my palm, traces its lines with his lips. Kisses made only of breath and fluttering of eyelashes.

"No one, not even the storm, has such strong hands", and his words seems to come from far away.

"You're delirious" I laugh, kissing the hair at his nape.

"When ever am I not?" he replies, smile and incoming sleep in his hushed tone. "My madness knows no absence, only degress of intensity."

"That's fine for me" I say. Our voices reverberate in the space between my chest and his back, lulling us.

Yes, that's fine.

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