

Essence

by shefa

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Simplicity

Vision blurred by unshed tears, she traced his features, every texture and contour hers to hold.

At last.

Sooty eyelashes fell over pallid cheeks; wisps of baby-fine hair danced, irreverent, in the warm spring air.

Rest, now.

Harsh lines, worn into his face by fear and pain and loss; worn ever after as evidence, penance—smoothed now until only their echoes stood as testament to truth.

Look at me.

Tears spilled, then, bathing his sleep-warmed skin with her offering.

I see you.

And the wonder of hot breath against her neck as he breathed new life into them both.

Silence

It was the naked longing in his eyes that disarmed her that night.

He'd reached for her with trembling arms, bridging the space between them to unmask years of secrets and lies and truths untold.

Truth.

Not in carefully constructed edifices, no words obscuring the essence of a man whose actions spoke louder.

Oft betrayed by siren song, he used no voice to lure her.

He gave her only what he could hold in his eyes. Silence, saturated with his hope and tinged with the terror of finding none in her answering gaze.

Only his soul stripped bare before her.

Roughness

Bruised from decades' rough-handling, he'd feared his desires – certain they'd taint her innocence.

Instead, he showed her only roughened skin, scarred by the retribution of unyielding taskmasters and unforgiving friends.

He'd nearly laughed when she furrowed her brow and shouted at him.

He'd strangled his rage when she showed him mementos of battles waged too young, etched in livid trails across her body.

But he'd choked back waves of sorrow and loneliness, grieving for children unprotected and abandoned to fates they were too young to understand, as she brought his mouth to taste the worst of her scars—and cried.

Implicitness

His heart spoke to her in whispers.

Eager hands swept unruly tangles from the nape of her neck, brushing hot lips against cool skin. Woven into the marrow of his bones, his passion rang—unsung.

Never painted with fancy words or dressed in extravagant gestures, still, always, she understood.

She glimpsed it like fragments reflected in a shattered mirror. Each smouldering glance, a jewel. Every hitched breath, a cache held close and explored in moments spirited away from time and space—

—Where, cradled in night's strong arms, the space between them crackled with promise, and then... nothing separating them – nothing.

Naturalness

Ordinary impulses of children and other magical creatures had always mystified him. Envious of their freedom and ever wary of secret agendas, he regarded both from a careful distance.

But now, in the fading glow of a long summer's day, no more unfriendly eyes watched him—there was only her, and a future he never dared imagine he'd hold in his hands.

And on the cushion of soft grasses crushed under the weight of their bodies, he surrendered to her, heart and soul unshielded.

Incautious love, rough with unfinished edges and uneven pathways—theirs to hold and break... and restore.

Modesty

After an eternity of darkness, he still flinched in her light.

A life sentence: to be reviled, hidden—penitent. But now, her face, alight at the sight of him—terrifying.

Nascent hope drew him out, tentative and raw, from long shadows of guilt and regret. Himself, reflected in her eyes—

Luminous

—More imperfectly human than the discarded creature he'd concealed—punished and punishing.

He grew compassionate towards the child he'd been—

Hurt, alone, trapped by neglectful hands.

--And the man he'd become.

And in sun dappled days, nourished by their loving,

Finally...

... He turned his face to the light.

Normalcy

The sun rose and set on days he'd thought belonged to other men.

But now, sheltered in a life reclaimed, he savoured each moment, whole.

Eager words and mingled voices, warmed by the fire and the energy of ideas shared. Later, soft cotton sheets tumbled from their bed, forgotten amidst burning need; the sweetness of her mouth on his—eager and insistent.

Then, the crystalline sound of her laughter: a benediction—for him, with him, because *of him*.

His in joyous harmony, unpractised but true. An unexpected song of faith from a man who'd never before had reason to believe.