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All Those Years (They Were Here First)

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Inhaltsangabe

Too many of them had attempted to change what could not be changed, and they all had failed. Too many of them had dared to dream. Narcissa's hopes and dreams had been blighted when she had been only a girl, in a time when she had just begun to sincerely believe they could come true.

Vorwort

Inhaltsverzeichnis

1. Untitled

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As a girl, Narcissa Black had been certain that she could be anything she wanted, if only she believed it could come true. Sometimes, she'd imagine being free, free like the wind and powerful like her father, capable of changing the whole world with only a stroke of her wand. Perhaps one day, she would be a writer, making her quill her most powerful weapon, or a Mistress of Potions, a Healer, finding cures for every disease in the world. How excited had she been about her future, how happy had she been dreaming of what age would bring her...

But the years had passed, and her illusions faded with every day she grew more into a woman. It was not easy, being a woman in the world she lived in, and she knew if she did not submit to society's cruel rules that society would make her. Soon, she had learned that her future was not up to her, and that her destiny had been decided on by others in the moment of her birth. There was no escape.

Her sisters had both chosen rebellion; Bella fled into war, fought alongside men as if she were one of them, and Andy had run away, immoderately disgracing herself and her family. Narcissa, however, had accepted her fate. She wasn't a fighter, wasn't a rebel, had decided to ban her dreams from her mind long ago, in the awareness that it was easier not to refuse. And it was - hadn't she been lucky, after all? To marry for love, to be happy, happier than she'd ever imagined she would be? Hadn't she been lucky, to give him an heir, even if it had taken several attempts and failed pregnancies?

Yes. Yes, she had been lucky, luckier than any of her sisters, but still she allowed herself to fantasise, to let her mind wander when she was alone, to places that allowed her to forget about rules, about blood and honour, for just a moment. For just a moment she'd close her eyes and see herself fly, crossing endless oceans, discovering whole new worlds, alone and far away from home. For just a moment she'd find herself in a man's shoes, only living for pleasure and relieved from any obligations she did not wish to incur. For just a moment, she'd be anyone but herself. It was odd, she thought, to live a life that did not feel like her own, so different from what she had imagined for it to be. How strange this world seemed to her sometimes... As if it wasn't real, only illusory, as if at any minute she could wake up to find everything having been just a dream.

The wars had come and gone, and soon they all found their last dreams and hopes lost, buried at a place where they would never be able to find them. The man they had believed to be a leader had deceived them all, led them into disaster with his eyes wide open, using them like marionettes. They all had followed him, some in trust, some in desperation, some because they had been too afraid to refuse, too afraid of the consequences had they dared to not go along.

Slowly, fear had assumed control over Narcissa's life and would not let go of her, even in her sleep. She would rather die than to find her family harmed, would sacrifice her own life to save her husband and son, yet she knew that these things were beyond her control, like everything else. Each day they spent alive and well was a gift, and she cherished every single one as if it were the last.

Over the years, Narcissa had found her own way of escape. Repression. She knew that otherwise she would not have been able to cope, not when they had taken her husband from her, not when she found herself alone in the estate, alone in her bed, not when once again she found herself seated within the eerie walls of Azkaban, holding her breath, waiting for the Dementors to bring Lucius, who looked paler and thinner with every week passing. Sometimes, it felt as though as she had lost her mind, and even if it was true, even if she had, she could not care less. Insanity was soothing, gave her the peace she had always longed for during times like these. She had walked on its edge for too long, perhaps too proud, perhaps too afraid to take the final step, but now she had fallen, and finally, for the first time in her entire life, she was free.

She was not ashamed of what she had become — mad, weak, whatever they would call her on the quiet.

She'd seen too much in the wars to care, had grown tired of the constant pursuit of perfection. How ridiculous their values were in truth, how insincere. No longer did she have to keep them. No longer did she need to worry about keeping up appearances her people had lived to keep up for centuries, all in vain. Before, it had seemed like a crime to speak out the truth, a truth they all closed their eyes to, even her. Now, she was no longer forced to watch, to watch her world fall apart, to watch traditions crumble like ancient buildings' walls. Because if she had to watch, she would have seen that where there once had been pleasure, nothing now remained but dust and broken mirrors, as if to hide the shame from those who still pretended to care about honour, even now after they had seen countless people die for nothing in a war that had once meant everything to them.

Perhaps Andromeda had after all been the wisest of them all, to flee before it was too late; perhaps Narcissa should have followed instead of quietly waiting for perdition, trapped like a bird in its golden cage. But in the end, it had been her sister to lose everything, to be punished for her unconditional love that had known no boundaries, while she, once again, had found herself luckier than she believed to deserve as she fell into sweet escape.

For years and years, Narcissa had cried herself to sleep, quietly, in order not to wake her husband, but now all her tears had dried out and it seemed she only knew how to laugh, a dry, hysterical laughter that seemed to resound everywhere in the room, the house, the property. It was so liberating to laugh, unrestrainedly, to hear her own voice raised to its full tone, instead of the quiet, held back whisper she had known over the years. Finally, she understood. Finally, she realised that she had only been puppet; that they all had been nothing but puppets of a broken society, shaped and lead by a cruel, invisible power that would never show mercy at all. No matter how much they had believed it was different, that they were in control of their lives, it had all been a lie. The truth was never told and never consciously thought, yet known all along by them all deep inside.

Too many of them had attempted to change what could not be changed, and they all had failed. Too many of them had dared to dream. Narcissa's hopes and dreams had been blighted when she had been only a girl, in a time when she had just begun to sincerely believe they could come true. The wars had changed her, like it had changed them all. The war had broken her, irreparably, had caused her more pain than she had believed she could ever endure, had made her see things she wished she had never seen. Everything was different, her whole world — always so far away and always so close — had begun to crumble, but still, despite all disappointments, despite all fears, she had found a way to finally live a happy life at her husband's side. And if insanity were the price for that happiness, she would be glad to pay it.