

The Books of Torin

Torin had rehearsed it for weeks.
When the moment came,
the words arrived in the wrong order anyway.

"I can't do this," he said to her.

"I'm sorry. I just — can't."

She looked at him for a long moment.
Then she picked up her coat and left without speaking.
The door closed quietly,
which was worse than if she had slammed it.
He reached toward the door.
Then didn't.

She walked for a long time.
Through the market quarter, past the fountain,
out along the river road where no one knew her face.
By the time she stopped walking,
she was somewhere she had never been.

She found a room above a cobbler's shop.
She paid a month in advance and asked no questions.
Neither did he.

For weeks she barely left.
She slept long, irregular hours.
She ate when she remembered.
She cried without sound,
the way people cry when they have learned not to disturb anyone.

Then one morning she rose before dawn
and sat at the small table by the window.
She did not know why.
She simply sat.

By midmorning she had written three pages.
By evening, seven.
She did not know what they were yet.
Only that they were hers in a way nothing had been before.

Years later, people would read what she wrote
and feel less alone in their own silences.
They would not know where it came from.
She would not tell them.
But sometimes, signing her name,
she would think of a door closing quietly

and feel something she could not quite call gratitude —
though it was close.

Meanwhile, Torin stood in the silence she had just left behind.
It had weight, that silence.
More than he expected.

On the table beside him lay a book he had not placed there.
Its title was simply:

The Book of Torin II

His own face looked back at him from the cover.
He picked it up and began reading:



The Book of Torin II

Chapter 1

Torin had rehearsed it for weeks.
When the moment came,
the words arrived in the wrong order anyway.

"I can't do this," he said to her.
"I'm sorry. I just — can't."

She looked at him for a long moment.
Then she picked up her coat and left without speaking.
The door closed quietly,
which was worse than if she had slammed it.
He reached toward the door.
Then didn't.

She did not walk.
She stood outside the door for a moment,
then went directly to her sister's house.

Her sister opened the door, took one look, and said nothing.
She simply stepped aside.

For three days she did not speak of it.
On the fourth day, over tea gone cold, she said:
"He couldn't do it."

Her sister nodded.

"I think I knew," she said.
"I think I was waiting for him to know."

Her sister refilled the cup.

The fury came later —
not at him, but at herself,
for having made herself small enough to fit
inside someone else's hesitation.

That fury had an edge to it.
She learned to use the edge.

She went back to school.
She finished what she had abandoned.
She became — in time, and not without cost —
someone who did not wait to be chosen.

She thought of him rarely.
When she did, it was without heat.
Only a mild curiosity:
whether he had ever learned
to stay.

Meanwhile, Torin stood in the silence she had just left behind.
It had weight, that silence.
More than he expected.

On the table beside him lay a book he had not placed there.
Its title was simply:

The Book of Torin III

His own face looked back at him from the cover.
He picked it up and began reading:



The Book of Torin III

Chapter 1

Torin had rehearsed it for weeks.
When the moment came,
the words arrived in the wrong order anyway.

"I can't do this," he said to her.
"I'm sorry. I just — can't."

She looked at him for a long moment.
Then she picked up her coat and left without speaking.
The door closed quietly,
which was worse than if she had slammed it.
He reached toward the door.
Then didn't.

She walked to the end of the street
and sat on the low stone wall where they had once sat together
eating figs from a paper bag.

She sat there until the light changed.

Then she did something that surprised her:
she laughed.
Not bitterly.
Just — laughed.
A short, exhausted sound,
like something being set down after a long carry.

She had known.
Not consciously, not in words,
but somewhere beneath words
she had known for months
that he was building toward this.
Part of her had been waiting,
the way you wait for rain
when the air has had that quality all day.

She was sad.
She would be sad for a while.
But underneath the sadness
was something she hadn't expected:
relief.

Not because she hadn't loved him.
But because she had been loving him
at the cost of something she couldn't name —
some direction in herself
that his hesitation had made impossible to follow.

Now it was possible.

She sat on the wall a little longer.
Then she stood, put her hands in her pockets,
and walked — not away from anything,
but toward something
she was only beginning to see.

She did not look back.
Not because she was angry.
Because she was already
somewhere else.

Meanwhile, Torin stood in the silence she had just left behind.
It had weight, that silence.
More than he expected.

On the table beside him lay a book he had not placed there.
Its title was simply:

The Book of Torin IV

His own face looked back at him from the cover.
He picked it up and began reading:



The Book of Torin IV

Chapter 1

Torin had rehearsed it for weeks.
When the moment came,
the words arrived in the wrong order anyway....

— *William Zeitler*
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