

Remove the Mask

People ask why I forgive.
They believe forgiveness is pretending nothing
happened, returning to places, accepting wounds,
and treating a heart as it exists for convenience.
Forgiveness began when I stopped confusing people
with a mask they inherit.
As a child, I caught her sitting alone.
Anger disappeared from her face,
replaced with a sadness older than us.
She carried a burden without choosing.
I saw tears my mother thought she was shielding.
I heard cries she was taught to silence.
As I grew, I learned pain traveled wearing clothes,
becoming hard, believing hardness was love
because it was the only version it received.
By the time inheritance reached me, it was instinct.
People call it abuse; It's a wound.
The first time I sensed the presence,
I expected a monster.
It passed from one generation to the next.
Each person believing it is skin.
The more I focus, the more I see.
Beauty, in ways most overlook.
They believed in my voice before I did,
saw possibilities I didn't, laughed easily,
dreamed without embarrassment,
and loved with a sincerity
that changed the course of my life.
They also made choices that hurt.
Some of the wounds between us belong to them,
others belong to me.
Loving each other didn't make us
incapable of causing pain.
When I walked away, I didn't stop loving them.
I learned to love myself.
Passion entered my life carrying scars.
People ask what I see.
I see them.

The version performed for the world,
the fear who hides behind pride,
and the being beneath.
They don't recognize love
that asks for nothing in return.
Every relationship before me taught them to expect
abandonment, comparison, competition, and betrayal.
They learned vulnerability is dangerous,
so, they bury it beneath a mask labeled *confidence*.
When I love without asking for performance,
it frightens them.
When I notice the mask, it frightens them more.
Fear hurts me to protect them.
It is convincing that way.
It makes protection distance,
silence strength and control safer than honesty.
People carry inheritance.
They expect me to hate them.
I can't.
I don't see an enemy,
just another person trying to survive a story given
before they were old enough to question.
Taught who belongs by who deserves.
The presence feeds on unconsciousness,
it survives when people accept stories without asking
where they come from,
It whispers through generations until prejudice is
wisdom, fear is protection, and pain is personality.
People are reading a script someone else wrote.
It repeats because they read lines
from the same play.
I inherited scripts.
I don't read them.
I ask where words come from.
Some pages I keep.
Most I let fall.
People tell me to hate those who hurt me.
Hatred is an actor performing a story.
Love is remaining where you are,
it doesn't require silence or ask to abandon yourself.

It allows you to walk away without wishing destruction
on the person you left behind;
to remember what happened
without allowing the wound to become identity.
The universe is beautiful.
We are not born carrying a mask.
Someone places it over our face.
Parents who never removed theirs
place them on children,
communities pass them from neighbor to neighbor
and call it tradition.

REACH UP

REMOVE THE MASK

AND ASK THE QUESTION THAT TERRIFIES THE PRESENCE.

Who am I beneath everything I was taught to be?

Fear fears what recognizes another's wounds,
without mistaking it for a soul,
while saying,

I understand why you became this way,

I choose a different path.

The story ends when you refuse a mask.

As you do this,

The presence watches another script slip from its hands
because someone remembers they are the author.

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