

TESS OF THE ÜBER VILES

BEHIND THE MASK OF BEAUTY
A GENIUS IS BORN



This opening section is offered freely.

Read it slowly.

If it resonates,

the rest of the book continues the conversation....

TESS
of the
ÜBER VILES

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Preface

Before form can exist,
there must be a language capable of assembling it.
Before any function can operate,
there must be principles guiding its behaviour.

That language is not abstract.
It is written physically as DNA.

DNA is the material language—
through which life is formed, maintained, and repaired.

It does not invent its own governing principles.
It operates within them.

At the core of that language are **precision and restraint**.

Alchemy governs what type of building blocks can be created.
It operates on reactions—chemical, biological, transformative.
Reactions change states, produce form, and sustain life.

Mathematics is a secondary language—
a descriptive system abstracted from observation.
It measures outcomes.
It does not generate them.

Creation does not occur through calculation.
It occurs through reaction.

Numbers do not initiate reactions.
They have no causal power.
They describe what has already occurred.

When a descriptive language
is mistaken for a generative one,
precision is replaced with control,
and understanding with enforcement.

Life depends on corrosive forces—
acids, reactions, transformations—
but only when they are held within systems
precise enough to contain them.

In alchemical terms,
calm occupies the centre.

At either extreme,
systems behave predictably.

Too acidic,
and structures corrode.
Too alkaline,
and boundaries dissolve.

Both extremes
destroy form
when left unrestrained.

Violence is not creative.
It is not productive.
It is not intelligent.

It is unrestrained activity,
acting outside language,
that makes creation possible.

In other words—it belongs to that language,
but only as what remains
when its principles
are rejected.

This is not a moral claim.
It is a structural one.

Intelligence cannot restrain violence.
It must reason with it.

What follows is not an argument.
It is an observation.

*Genius is not a measure of cognition,
but of how clearly one is aligned with reality.*

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Postlude

Prologue

Before people knew me,
or thought they knew me,
before I learned to fold my brilliance
neatly behind my smile,
before I discovered the quiet power
of being underestimated...
I was simply Tess.

A girl the world looked at
long before it ever listened to.

People often assume beauty is a gift.
They never speak of its shadow.
They never mention the way it blinds others,

how it draws attention to the surface
and away from the soul.

From the outside, you would have thought
I had everything a young girl could want.

But the truth is simpler and much sadder:
I was seen too much and recognised too little.

Everyone had something to say about my face.
But hardly anyone ever asked about my mind.

People looked *at* me,
but almost no one looked *into* me.

Beauty became a clever disguise I never asked for.

A mask the world admired
while the person underneath remained untouched.

It is a strange kind of loneliness
to be constantly observed and never recognised.

Most people fear being ignored.
I feared something worse:
being *visible but unseen*.

Compliments fell on me like petals—
pretty, weightless, forgettable.
Always about my face,
never my thoughts.

I learned very young
that beauty and invisibility
often walk hand in hand.
That admiration
is not the same as understanding.
That being observed
is not the same as being known.

Sometimes I studied my grandmother's face,
searching for the girl she once was.
I wondered whether she had carried the same ache—
to be valued for something ephemeral
while the enduring parts of her
went unnoticed.

To be observed but never seen:
is a fate worse than death.
A quiet dismissal of everything you truly are.

And in the silence that followed
every interrupted thought,
every dismissed insight,
every patronising smile that told me
“beauty is enough, dear,”

I learned something essential:

A girl can be admired
and profoundly invisible.

It turns out invisibility
does something peculiar to the mind.

It sharpens it.
It shelters it.
It forces it inward
until the inner world becomes a sanctuary
far richer than anything on the surface.

While the world waded in the shallows
I retreated into depth. Into thought,
Into the unseen architecture
beneath all appearances.

When the world refuses to see you,
you begin to see everything.

While adults mistook my silence for simplicity,
my stillness for sweetness,
my beauty for my identity—
I was learning the secret language
beneath human behaviour.

When people don't look into your eyes,
they forget you are watching.

I learned how people spoke with their eyes
before they even opened their mouths.

How irritation lived in posture,
How breath shaped words.
How doubt expressed itself,
when nobody was looking.

The things they thought I was too pretty to notice
were the very things I noticed most.

To an intelligent girl, beauty is not a gift,
It is a filter.
A veil.
A tinted lens the world insists on wearing
whenever it looks your way.

They saw softness where there was rock,
naivety where there was depth,
amenability where there was fire.

And so I let them underestimate me.
In their ignorance, I found freedom.
Freedom to think without interruption.
To observe without interference.
To learn without expectation.

While they discussed me like a delicate ornament,
I was studying them like a Mantis studies fruit flies.

Beauty kept me hidden.
While intuition grew in the shadows.
Invisibility it seemed—
was a strange, aching condition—
that would one day become a most powerful ally.

Nobody would ever see me coming.

Every time a teacher praised my face,
my mind sharpened.
Every time my insight was ignored,
my perception refined itself.
Every time I was dismissed,
my intellect deepened out of sheer curiosity.

The world taught me nothing by listening.
It taught me everything by refusing to.

And so the people who overlooked me
created the very thing they were too superficial to recognise:
a mind that could see right through them.

Invisibility can break a girl.
But sometimes, in rare cases, it can shape her.

I didn't shatter under the weight of being invisible.
I folded inward, like light through a prism,
and found colours inside myself
no one else could see.

Silence became my teacher.
Solitude, the room where I learned to listen.

I began keeping notebooks,
because thoughts felt safer on paper
than in the hands of people
who only valued appearances.

On those pages,
I met myself—not the girl they praised,
but the girl I actually was.

The observer.
The analyst.
The quiet seer of things
others had forgotten how to notice.
And somewhere in that hidden world,
I began to understand something extraordinary:

People behave in patterns.

All behaviour—
even the worst of it—
is communication in disguise.

I didn't have the words then,
but I had the instinct.

The knowing that behind every outburst
was a wound.
Behind every rebellion
a need.
Behind every silence
a story.

My invisibility became my illumination.

And so the girl they failed to see
became the young woman
people could not fail to notice.

My story begins:
the day the world finally looked up
and realised I had been here the whole time.

Part I

The Foundation of a Seer

The strange thing about beauty
 is that it is beguiling.
 It has a peculiar, almost magnetic power—
 the kind that pulls people toward it.

Everyone knows it's rude to stare.
 Almost everyone does it anyway.

Tess had learned this early.

She had also learned that people who stared
 rarely noticed they were doing it—
 and never liked getting caught.

She'd grown used to being looked at.
 What she hadn't grown used to
 was how little people actually *saw*.

They saw the outline of her life—
 never the contents.

Sometimes she wondered
 if she should start wearing a sign that read:

HelloOo
There's a person in here.

What an intriguing idea, she thought—to be seen,
 yet completely invisible at the same time.

It was the first glaring inconsistency she uncovered.
 Many more would follow,
 arriving slowly,
 like drops from a leaking tap.

You don't notice them at first,
 until you have to put on
 a life jacket
 to avoid drowning.

Tess couldn't remember the first time
someone called her beautiful.

What she remembered
was the way adults' faces softened in her presence.
The way their eyes warmed,
the way their voices shifted into that strange register
reserved for delicate things.

People spoke *at* her,
but rarely *with* her.

She learned this difference
before she learned to tie her shoes.

At four years old, the moment she entered a room,
the air changed.

Women paused mid-conversation.
Men straightened their posture.
Older ladies cooed over her golden-brown hair
and wide grey-blue eyes
as though she were a painting hung on a wall.

"Isn't she just the most gorgeous thing,"
they would say,
while Tess stood very still,
her small hands folding into one another.

"She has the face of an angel."

Tess didn't know what to do with those words.

They felt too heavy—
like winter coats draped over her shoulders,
meant for someone bigger,
someone older,
someone who knew how to wear them.

Bright minds don't always ask how,
they ask why.
That can be infuriating sometimes,
particularly if the answer is elusive.

Tess always had questions.
What she lacked,
were answers that added up.

Why did adults talk to each other differently
than they talked to her?
Why did they lower their voices
as though beauty meant fragility?
Why did strangers feel entitled to touch her hair?
Why did their eyes flicker with surprise
whenever she spoke her own mind?

The inconsistencies were obvious to her.

But at four,
you don't yet have the tools
to translate discomfort into language.

You only have the feeling—
that peculiar sensation
of something not quite fitting.

So Tess learned to smile politely.

Because that was what beautiful girls
were supposed to do.

Even then, even at that age,
she sensed something unspoken:

Every compliment was a kind of expectation.

Every admiring glance a tiny, unintentional claim.

Tess knew attention was not neutral.
Where it was placed mattered.

Most people, looked without really seeing.
The world had trained them to move quickly,
to consume impressions
rather than form relationships.

Tess noticed how a sentence
sat in the air after it was spoken.
Whether it settled cleanly—
or left a residue.

She paid attention
to the gap between what people said
and what their bodies quietly corrected.

Truth, she was discovering, had a texture.
It didn't shout.
It didn't rush.
It didn't need reinforcement.

Tess was learning that beauty,
no matter how captivating,
could never be an equitable substitute
for the spirit of a child
who truly knows herself.

Beauty could draw attention.
But attention was volatile.
It scattered easily,
attached itself to surfaces,
mistook visibility for value.

It invited the world to look—
but not necessarily to listen.

Beneath all the noise,
the first quiet truth of her life
was beginning to emerge.

Self-awareness was not something
that arrived by accident.
It did not appear because the world
recognised it.

It appeared because someone
had learned how to stay still long enough
to notice what was already there.

It required discipline—
not rigidity,
but the ability to remain present
when distraction offered easier rewards.
To resist the pull of approval
long enough to hear
one's own internal signals.

It required trust—
not blind faith in outcomes,
but confidence in sensation.
The capacity to recognise
when something felt aligned
even before it could be explained.

And it required faith—
not belief borrowed from authority,
but the courage to stand quietly
with one's own perception
when it went unconfirmed.

These were not glamorous qualities.
They did not announce themselves.
They did not demand admiration.

But they endured.

Beauty, Tess was beginning to understand,
could not compensate for their absence.
It faded under pressure.
Collapsed under scrutiny.
Yielded to whoever spoke the loudest.

Discipline endured.
Trust stabilised.
Faith anchored.

They formed something
that could not be rehearsed
or imitated—
only lived.

Long before Tess had language for it,
she sensed that the world
would one day test these qualities.

That attention would be offered—
without understanding.

That visibility would be mistaken—
for value.

That admiration would arrive—
without care.

And that she would be asked—
subtly at first—
to trade what was internal
for what could be seen.

She did not yet know
how often this bargain was made.
Or how costly it could be.

But she knew enough
to feel that something essential
was already forming—
a centre that did not depend
on applause,
permission,
or agreement.

Tess had discipline.
She had trust.
And she had faith.

Not as concepts.
But as lived capacities.

And beneath the surface of her childhood,
quietly, without fanfare,
the shape of a life
was beginning to take form.

Tess learned early that if adults
insisted on mistaking her for something small,
she had no obligation to join them in their miscalculation.

Being underestimated, she discovered,
was surprisingly enjoyable.

People would talk *at her*,
blissfully unaware
that she was mentally dissecting their personalities
with clinical precision.

She watched people carefully—
not the way children usually watch,
but with a quiet, concentrated focus
that slipped beneath their conscious awareness.

She listened to the inflections in their voices,
the hesitations tucked neatly between words,
the microscopic fractures in expression—
tiny tells that revealed more truth
than any lie-detector ever could.

Such perception was rare in children.
Dangerously rare.

But the most remarkable thing—
the thing that would later change everything—
was that no one sensed it.

To the world, Tess was just a pretty child.
Soft.
Innocent.
Pleasant.

No one noticed the depth forming behind her eyes.
No one felt the magnitude of her stillness.

No one suspected the fierce, lucid intelligence
growing quietly in the shadows of her small frame.

And it slowly dawned on her
that being underestimated
was its own kind of armour.

Adults admired the surface
but never once enquired about the soul beneath it.

Tess existed in a strange dual state—
looked at constantly,
yet understood by no one.

And in that paradox,
something powerful began to form:

Invisibility became her shield.
Misunderstanding became her advantage.
Being underestimated
became her secret strength.

Other children absorbed the world as it was presented.
Tess passed everything through a filter—so fine,
it could cleave bone from marrow.

It was here,
in the quiet spaces between words,
that her real education began.

The first time Tess questioned an adult's assumption,
she was six.

Miss Alder was explaining to a classroom
of bleary-eyed children
why some things floated on water
while others sank straight to the bottom.

“Heavy things sink,” Miss Alder announced,
gesturing to a drawing of a stone at the bottom of a tank
and a small boat floating on the surface.

That wasn't quite it.

The picture bothered Tess.
Not the stone.
The boat.

Her father—in one of his rare, patient moments—
had once told her that you could float an anvil
on a pool of mercury.

Tess had no reason to doubt her father's intelligence.

He had been brilliant.
He had seen too much,
too clearly,
without enough protection from it.

Tess carried the same capacity—
but not the same exposure.

She raised her hand to attract Miss Alder's attention.

Miss Alder blinked.

She wasn't accustomed to children questioning her.
They were meant to absorb,
not analyse.
"Do you need the bathroom?" she asked hopefully.

"If heavy things sink," she asked hesitantly,
"why would an anvil float?"

The room shifted.
A few children turned in their seats.

Miss Alder smiled, assuming a misunderstanding.

"It wouldn't," she said.
"Anvils are very heavy."

Tess nodded.
"I know," she said.
"But my father said you could float one."

Miss Alder hesitated.
"On water?" she asked.

“No,” Tess said.

“On mercury.”

The word landed oddly in the room.
Like something not meant for this lesson.

Miss Alder considered this.

“Mercury is different,” she said at last.

“It’s much denser.

So it behaves differently.”

Tess nodded again.

“It’s still acts as a liquid,” she said.

“So it isn’t about weight.

It’s about relative density.”

Miss Alder paused.

Not because the answer was wrong.

But because it didn’t fit the curriculum.

“That’s getting ahead of ourselves,” she said gently.

“Let’s get on with the lesson.”

Tess lowered her hand.

Mercury unsettled people because it refused to behave politely.

A metal that flowed.

A liquid that weighed more than stone.

For centuries it had been used to make mirrors—

not because it was fully understood,

but because it worked.

Mirrors were trusted because they appeared passive.

They seemed to show the truth without interference.

But a mirror does not reveal what something *is*.

It reveals how that thing behaves

under a very specific set of conditions.

Change the material.
Change the surface.
Change the interaction.

And the reflection changes with it.

Some substances absorb rather than return.
Some scatter rather than comply.
Some behave perfectly well in the world
but refuse to present themselves
to a system built on surface alone.

Alchemy had never trusted mirrors,
because some things
could not be seen in them.

It trusted reactions instead.

Numbers do not exist
without bodies to count.
Words do not exist
without minds to hold them.

They describe.
They name.
They measure
what has already happened.

But only alchemy
governs what can happen.

Every other language
depends on life
to sustain it.

So how could there be
any living language
other than alchemy?

It operates wherever life operates—
in reaction, in transformation,
in decay and renewal.

It does not require belief.
It does not require permission.
It does not even require comprehension.

It proceeds regardless.”

Intelligence, Tess was beginning to realise,
was not the accumulation of knowledge.
It was the ability to recognise patterns
and how they interlink.

To observe reactions
without collapsing into them.
To understand that containment
was not restriction,
but what made transformation possible.

Tess had learned what she needed to know.
Not about mercury.
Not about buoyancy.
Not about density.

About how truth was rationed.

Teachers, were not necessarily wrong—
they were often required
to stop asking questions
long before the answers ran out.

The other children nodded,
accepting the explanation as fact.

But Tess felt it—
that sharp pang of contradiction in her stomach,
the unmistakable signal that something was wrong.

The more Tess observed the world around her,
the more a troubling pattern emerged.

The education system did not appear designed
to refine perception,
but to *dismantle trust in it*.

Children were taught, subtly but persistently,
that their own senses were unreliable.
That intuition was naïve.
That direct observation was dangerous without permission.

In its place, confidence was transferred—not inward,
but outward.

Into syllabuses.
Authorities.
Approved answers.

Answers that often contradicted lived experience,
yet were defended with remarkable certainty.

A system that asked you to doubt what you could see,
while trusting what you were told,
even when the two did not align.

If this was accidental,
it suggested extraordinary incompetence.
If it was deliberate,
it revealed something far worse.

Either way, Tess concluded,
any structure that teaches a child
to abandon their own perception
in favour of sanctioned belief
was not educating at all.

It was conditioning.
And conditioning, she knew,
was the most efficient way
to ensure that lies
could survive indefinitely.

Children aren't blunt because they're rude.
They're blunt because truth feels natural.

And Tess, even at six, felt truth instinctively.
She wasn't corrected for being wrong.
She was corrected for questioning the *official* story.

Why would anyone silence their own perception
just to keep someone else comfortable?

“I must trust what my senses tell me—
even if it means standing alone.”
She said to herself.

“Because abandoning truth
is the same as abandoning myself.”

Deep inside,
something ancient and steady awakened—
a knowing that would shape
every decision she ever made:

*The world may lie with confidence.
But your senses never will.
All you have to do is trust them.*

That seemed simple enough.
Tess possessed a sense of self-worth
more advanced than children twice her age.

Yet somehow—or so it appeared—
no one saw that except her.

She was already learning to trust herself
so completely
that not even the most convincing lie
could shake the pillar of integrity
she was quietly building her world upon.

And that pillar—
would become the foundation
of everything she later became.

By the time Tess turned eight,
she had come to the quiet conclusion
that the world was being managed
by people who preferred neat stories
to awkward facts.

They always seemed so very confident.
And so very well prepared.

It felt like being Alice—
only instead of Wonderland,
she'd wandered into a place
where pretending everything was normal
was part of the rules.

Whether by fault or by design,
Tess had developed an instinct
most children never needed—
the ability to sense when someone's attention
came from the wrong place.

It happened in the local supermarket
on a rainy Tuesday afternoon.

Her mother was planning to make Eton Mess for dessert—
one of Tess's favourites.

A deceptively simple mixture
of broken meringues, thick cream,
and strawberries.

She always saved the best berries for last—
the ripest, juiciest ones—
to place on top as decoration.

A small attempt at restoring order
to something intentionally chaotic.

It always struck Tess as a strange name
for something so innocent.

Eton.

A school where boys dressed like penguins—
Black tailcoats, starched white shirts,
waistcoats buttoned to the throat,
collage stiff enough to train the neck
into permanent compliance with height and angle.

It wasn't clothing so much as a signal.

A declaration of membership to a club that did not advertise,
did not recruit,
and did not need to explain itself.

Eton was a place
where sweetness was presented on top,
while something far messier
churned underneath.

Oh—so that was why they called it *Eton mess*.

She chuckled silently,
pleased she had decoded
another hidden layer of reality.

Tess didn't have the language for it yet,
but she sensed the parallel even then:

The world had a habit of turning people into decorations—
pretty things to be admired,
or worse,
consumed.

She wouldn't understand the full meaning
until a few moments later.

While her mother was preoccupied,
Tess breathed on the cold window,
fogging the glass into a perfect canvas.

She drew a long, curved U,
then touched the glass twice with her forefinger
to make two eyes above it.

For a moment, her own reflection overlapped with the drawing—
two little fogged circles
floating exactly where her real eyes would be,
as though the window were holding
a double image of her:
the child in front of it,
and the deeper self watching quietly from within.

It made her smile.
A tiny private moment of happiness,
drawn in breath and condensation.

As she admired the little face she'd created,
a shadow moved across the glass.

Before she could process the unease blooming in her chest,
the automatic doors hissed open behind her,
the cold air swept in hurriedly—
wiping the little face from the glass.

Tess turned.

The man stepped inside.

Not heading for a trolley.
Not scanning the aisle.
Not looking for anything
except *her*.

And just like that—
the feeling shifted.
The lightness evaporated.
Happy turned to alert.
Innocence to instinct.
Safety to something she didn't yet have a name for.

The man walked straight toward the fruit section.
As if strawberries were the only thing on his mind.

Tess's fingers curled against the trolley handle,
the last breath of warmth fading from the glass behind her.

Her mother was still comparing strawberries,
lifting punnets one by one
with the quiet concentration of someone
looking for perfection.

The man reached the display and stood beside her.
He was pretending to study the berries
with a thoughtful frown that didn't touch his eyes.

"Bit pricey, aren't they," he said casually,
glancing at her mother
as though making polite conversation.

His tone was harmless.
His words were harmless.
But something about his presence was not.

Her mother glanced up briefly.

"They are cheaper down at the farm," she replied,
ever polite,
unaware she was being used as cover.

The man nodded,
picking up a punnet he didn't even look at.
But his eyes kept sliding sideways.
Back to Tess.

A flicker.
A check.
A silent calculation.

Tess felt it like a cold thread
winding around her ribs.

He wasn't interested in fruit.
He wasn't making conversation.
He was mapping the space.

Mapping—her distance from him,
her distance from her mother;
the exits,
the angles.

He asked another question—
something meaningless about the weather.
Her mother answered politely again,
oblivious to the undercurrent.

Tess wasn't oblivious.
She felt herself shrinking inward,
the way small animals freeze
when the wind carries the scent of a nearby hunter.

The man smiled faintly at her mother,
but when his gaze drifted back to Tess,
the smile vanished—
replaced by something flat,
cold,
and assessing.

Her mother finally noticed Tess's silence
and glanced down.

Tess's face looked paler than usual,
her shoulders drawn in ever so slightly.
It was a small shift—
but mothers are trained to recognise meaning
in the quietest signals.

"Are you okay, Tess?" she asked gently,
not yet sensing danger, only discomfort.

"I'm fine," Tess replied.

But it wasn't her normal *I'm fine*.
It was the clipped, small version
that meant the opposite.

Her mother recognised it instantly.
Her expression sharpened—
a subtle but unmistakable transition
from relaxed parent to alert protector.

She turned toward the stranger.
And in that simple movement—
the air around them changed.

It only takes a moment of awareness
to assess a situation with perfect clarity.

Without a word,
she placed a hand on Tess's shoulder
with quiet firmness,
took the punnet she was holding,
placed it in the trolley,
and steered them toward the checkout.

"Well... have a good afternoon," the man said unconvincingly.

Only when they were outside
did she kneel slightly,
bringing her face level with Tess's.

"You okay, sweetheart?"

Tess nodded.

Without drama and without tears—
Tess understood something essential about the world:

Beauty didn't only attract admiration.
It also attracted an element of danger.
And recognising the difference
would become a survival skill
most children her age
would never need to develop.

From that day on,
Tess learned to observe the world quietly,
carefully,
and with a wisdom
far beyond her years.

There is an unwritten rule among women,
rarely spoken
and never formally taught.

It is learned instead
through glances, silences,
and the subtle shift in a room
when beauty enters it.

Beauty attracts and repels
in the very same breath.

It draws people in
and pushes them away.
It inspires admiration
and provokes resentment.
It creates alliances
and fractures them.

Tess was the kind of beautiful
that unsettled that delicate balance.

Perfect symmetry,
clear eyes,
an athletic build,
and an aura of brightness that felt effortless.

People spoke of beauty
as though it were decorative—
something to admire, to possess,
to compliment from a safe distance.

But Tess sensed something else at work.
Beauty exerted a pull.

It bent attention toward itself
the way gravity bends light.
It altered behaviour
without ever needing to raise its voice.

Both magnetic poles hide within the same form,
indistinguishable to the human eye.

Nobody could tell which end pulls
and which end pushes
simply by looking.

It takes another magnet in close proximity
to reveal the truth about polarity.

Tess learned the unspoken physics of this early.
Her beauty was one object—
but its effects were two opposing fields.

Girls orbit beauty
according to their own desires,
their own insecurities,
their own unspoken longing.

Some girls were drawn toward her instantly—
seeking warmth,
belonging,
protection,
a reflected glow.

Other girls felt something entirely different:
a quiet fear of being diminished,
as though standing beside a bright star
might eclipse their own light
in the delicate constellation of girlhood.

It wasn't her fault.
It wasn't her doing.
It was simply the invisible force she carried,
shaping the behaviours of others
long before she even knew why.

God, it seemed,
had been more than generous
when apportioning beauty.

Intelligence, on the other hand,
had been tucked away
less conspicuously.

Tess happened to be well supplied
on both counts—
although she was still blissfully unaware
of just how far ahead
her reasoning abilities were.

Nobody truly knows
how beauty is apportioned—
how one child receives
a face that the world softens for
while another must fight to be seen.

Whatever the reason,
none of it was Tess's doing.

She simply arrived in the world
with a face people responded to.

She had to learn—
quietly,
instinctively—
how to navigate a world
where beauty matters far more
than anyone is willing to admit.

Adults were easy.
She had long since learned
how their voices changed,
how their eyes warmed,
how their reactions followed predictable patterns.

But other girls?
Other girls were not so easy to decipher.

Their smiles were layered.
Their admiration was duplicitous.
Their glances often obscured their true feelings.

It would take time—
and experience—
for her to understand,
that beauty is a double edged sword.

Some people moved closer without knowing why.
Others felt compelled to diminish it,
to question it,
to discipline it into something manageable.

Both reactions came from the same place.

Tess never asked to be placed
at the top of anything.
She simply existed—
and her existence alone
was enough to provoke those she came into contact with.

Most children build their sense of self
from the outside in.
Tess built hers from the inside out.

While other girls gathered in groups,
Tess felt most at ease in her own company.

While others sought approval,
she listened to the quiet certainty
of her soul's intuition.

Every attempt to define her
using standard metrics—
popularity, prettiness, conformity, likability—
slid off her like water from freshly waxed glass.

She didn't resist because she was rebellious.
She resisted because none of those labels
matched the truth she felt inside herself.

Where other girls borrowed identity
from the outside world,
Tess drew hers from a deeper, quieter place—
untouched by comparison or expectation.

And this, more than anything,
unsettled people the most:

They could not predict her.
They could not influence her.
They could not control her.

Tess watched their attempts to define her
with a detached curiosity
and a playful sense of humour.

She didn't hate them.
She didn't envy them.
She didn't resent them.

They were simply following the path
the world had handed them.

Tess could feel
she was heading somewhere different.

Not out of rebellion—
but because her inner compass
was pointing toward coordinates
only she could sense.

There was no map,
no language for it,
only a faint outline shimmering on the horizon.
And that was enough to chart a course.

Every time she put her foot down in faith,
the next step revealed itself—
but only to her.

Nobody else could articulate
where she was heading.
How could they?

They were following borrowed maps.
Tess was following an inner guidance system
that only she could read.

She was living in the gap
between admiration and exclusion,
a terrain no child is equipped to navigate.

Some people meet their destiny
on the path they take to avoid it.
Tess, seemed to be walking straight into hers—
unwavering, unflinching,
like a modern-day Joan of Arc.

No school teaches that kind of geography.
And yet, somehow,
Tess always knew where to step.

She wasn't trying to be brave.
She simply refused
to abandon the truth inside her—
and truth, once followed,
has a way of leading its adherents
directly into the centre of their purpose.

Despite everything rallying against her—
the envy,
the projections,
the attempts to define or diminish her—
Tess was making quiet progress.

The kind of progress
only a person aligned with themselves
is capable of making.

Beauty, she was learning,
was not an advantage, it was a catalyst.

And catalysts,
left unacknowledged,
tended to trigger reactions
no one claimed responsibility for.

There are few things more dangerous
than beauty coupled with intelligence.

While observers struggled to process Tess's looks,
she was already assessing their personalities—
calmly, methodically,
with the quiet curiosity
of someone capable of forming a clinical diagnosis
without ever raising suspicion.

Tess never set out to see through people.
Her mind simply worked that way.
It did not rush toward conclusions.
It wandered.

Not aimlessly—but with the quiet confidence
of someone who trusted
that understanding would arrive
when it was ready.

While others hurried to name,
to categorise,
to defend a position
as though certainty were armour,
Tess lingered.

She liked questions better than answers.
Not because answers frightened her,
but because most answers
felt unfinished.

Her thoughts did not line up obediently.
They returned later
with new information
and asked to be reconsidered.

This was often mistaken for hesitation.

In truth, it was discernment.

Tess understood instinctively—
that speed was rarely a measure of intelligence.
More often, it was a sign of discomfort
with not knowing.

She could sit inside uncertainty
without flinching.
Let it stretch.
Let it rearrange itself.

And when clarity finally surfaced,
it did so gently.
Almost shyly.

Hence the smile.

Not the kind meant to charm or persuade,
but the subtle softening
that appeared
when something internally aligned.

A smile that said:
Yes. That fits.

This was the beauty of her mind.
Not brilliance on display,
but coherence quietly achieved.

It was also why people found her
unexpectedly disarming.

There was no performance to react against.
No sharpness to resist.
Just a presence that invited honesty
by refusing to demand it.

The smile, Tess would later realise,
was not an expression at all.

It was a signal—that understanding had arrived
without force.

Patterns that others missed
seemed obvious to her.

Every contradiction glowed
like a Belisha beacon at a zebra crossing—
bright, pulsing, and impossible to ignore.

She often wondered why nobody else could see them.

How could anyone take people seriously
when their inner contradictions were so loud,
so exposed,
so painfully obvious?

People thought they could hide these things—
but to Tess, it all felt like a hopeless charade.

You could spend lifetimes exploring
the exquisite architecture of her mind,
and never *once* grow listless, or bored.

In contrast—the shallowness of some
meant you could discover everything about them—
in one afternoon,
and still be back in time for tea.

The danger of a beautiful mind
is the sheer expansiveness of it.

It is so easy to get lost inside
and disappear forever.

Her inner world was a place of awe and wonder—
a realm made of insight, intuition,
and the quiet brilliance of someone
who can see through the fabric of infinity.

It was a world so deep,
so rich,
so luminous,
that anyone who wandered too far inside it
risked losing themselves completely.

Of course people would fall in love with her looks.
That part was inevitable.

But Tess longed for something far rarer:
someone who would fall in love with her *mind*.

Someone who could explore her inner world
without trying to own her.
Someone who could inhabit it
without attempting to take up
permanent residence.

Someone who understood
that true intimacy begins,
when the mind feels safe.

Tess wanted conversations
that did not skim the surface
like stones thrown for sport.

She wanted moments
where words became bridges—
bridges into another domain.

Not a financial currency,
lavishly spent in one sitting,
but something that could be built
slowly,
patiently,
from nothing.

She had noticed how easily words were spent.
How quickly they were traded
for approval,
advantage,
or the brief relief of being noticed.

People spoke to fill silence,
not to enter it.

They used language
the way coins were dropped into machines—
hoping something pleasing
might tumble out the other side.

Tess found this strangely exhausting.

She wanted words that *held*.
Words that stayed present
after the sound had faded.

Words that carried weight
because they were chosen,
not because they were plentiful.

It seemed to her
that most conversations ended
exactly where they had begun—no one changed,
nothing crossed over,
nothing was built.

Just noise
endlessly rearranging itself
like croutons in a bowl of soup
after it had been stirred.

People spoke,
but rarely revealed
anything of substance.
They listened,
but mostly for their own chance to speak.

Everything felt provisional.
Disposable.
As though meaning itself
were something to be rationed.

It wasn't that people lacked intelligence.

It was that they seemed to fear
what intelligence might uncover
if allowed to wander too far.

Depth made people feel uneasy.
It made too many demands.
Asked too many questions.
Took too much time.
Attention.
Presence.

So they stayed shallow—
not because they were incapable of depth,
but because depth required
something they were unwilling to offer.

Honesty.

Tess felt this absence keenly.

She could sense when someone was near her
but not *with* her.
When admiration replaced curiosity.

These encounters left her strangely lonely—
not for lack of company,
but for lack of communion.

She learned early
that proximity was not connection,
and that intimacy could not be rushed
without collapsing into imitation.

What she longed for
was the kind of meeting
where two inner worlds
recognised each other
without explanation.

A shared stillness.
A mutual willingness
to remain—long after the novelty wore off.

This was what she was searching for.
Not brilliance.
Not admiration.
But equanimity.

And until that happened,
she was content to wait
on her side of the bridge,
trusting that anything worth building
would take time
to arrive.

She also knew,
that if she were to pour herself
into every shallow vessel she met,
it would only leave her empty
and unsatisfied.

So she conserved her attention.
Her curiosity.
Her warmth.

And when she smiled—
that soft, private smile—
it was not because she had found
what she was looking for.

It was because she knew,
with calm certainty,
that she would not settle
for anything less.

Some minds offer compatibility.
Hers offered **infinity**.

And infinity,
in the hands of the unprepared,
can be fatal.

Part II

The Awakening of the Inner world

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