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Man's Fragility

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One Woman's Story

N.R.

Even with her mother's eyes (her eyes) and her father's mouth (her mouth) reflected back at her, Mari found herself imagining. Daydreaming that she was someone fascinating and mysterious. That one day she would skyrocket to the top of the world and be Someone New. Princess. Sleeper agent. Whatever. Someone decidedly Not Ordinary.

It would be lonely on top of the world. But it's not like she would forget them. How could she forget, with her mother's eyes (her eyes) and her father's mouth (her mouth)?

Mari thought of all the things she could buy. Cars. Houses. Her own line of hotels, even.

She thought of all the things she couldn't buy.

She slept.

...

He had a nice smile, with slightly crooked teeth and a mouth that seemed a little rushed. It slanted up slightly; it was the first thing she noticed. He was just as quiet as she was, a kindred spirit of sorts.

She did like the boy, but...

Usha was not sure if she wanted to marry him. They had spoken for two hours, maybe two and a half at the most. As a friend, she would love to see him again. But to see him for their (auspiciously fixed, quickly fixed) wedding, no. Her grandmother had told her that, in just one hour, she had known. But Usha had felt nothing but nervousness.

But she had liked him, and she had said so. And now how could she take those words back? Disappoint her parents when she was almost thirty already? She could hear the words in her head, imagine speaking them, but they stuck in her throat. They twisted her mouth into a shaky smile.



He would be here tomorrow, and she would go to her new family. How the wedding had crept up on her

Lovely in dark red. A vision. Usha closed her eyes, and prayed for the best.


...
Sitting on the porch together, side by side in white rocking chairs. Overlooking a wooden fence with flowers blooming red yellow purple in between the cracks, managing to see each other clearly, as they had years ago, through the haze.

That had been the plan.

He had wanted one kid, she had wanted three. Three little girls and a cat named Blanca, after her cat from Long Ago. Jessica, Emma, and Anna. Simple. Easy. A pink nursery with plush dolls.

That had been the plan.

Two kids. Two boys. Off to college. Bigger and Better Things.



Esther touched the cross at her neck. She thought of her husband: where was he? Letters struggled to unite, form words. Exhausted, they dissipated, leaving her mind emptier than her home. Memories that used to be vivid blurred around the edges. Unexpectedly, she saw herself at twenty-six, with her husband (what had he looked like? why were there sunken eyes and yellowing teeth? this was not her husband) at the altar. Their vows, crumpled and torn and stained, in their nervous clutches.

White rocking chairs on the porch, watching the sun dip under the dark horizon. Flowers breaking through at dawn. God's blessings. A happy marriage free of smoke.

That had been the plan.

Esther leaned back in her chair and squinted at the sun, the sky on fire. She saw her husband's face, then, with the sharp lines and bright eyes that she remembered.

She took his hand, with the thin fingers and dry palms, with the wedding band they had both chosen, with the smattering of brown freckles.

To be together – that had been the plan.

"Man's Fragility," Danielle Bimston