

In Every Life

In a world which was carefully crafted with delicate hands and clay, each coil laid on top of the last was structured and sculpted against their very existence. The very hands that made Selenis the wrong body made it a crime for him to look at his reflection in the mirror and point out the misshapen mistakes littered into his very form.

Though Selenis knew that he was a “girl”, a voice within could only cry each time he contorted himself into what all expected came with the label of a “girl”. A deep yearn planted itself in his heart, one that wished for him to be himself, call himself his own name, not the one assigned to him at the birth. The only solstice he could find was in Erin, his lover, who shared the same yearn to be someone else. However, both of them knew there was no chance they could ever live the life they so strongly despaired for. The world in which they were born and the structure they were forced to live would always pry them apart, and nothing either of them could do would ever set it right.

So, Selenis could only parade himself around as what the world expected him to be. A docile, sweet lady, who hung laundry from the basket held at “her” hips, who cooked and cleaned, smiled kindly at the all kinds of comments “she” had to listen to. Each night, “she” sat at her vanity, staring back at the woman “she” was, not the man he wished he could be. The same voice that cried for salvation timidly hid, buried under makeup and frilly dresses. However, no amount of foundation was able to hide the simple truth- his feelings would always be sin.

Erin did not find much salvation either. He too was forced into a life of avoiding the question of *"When will you find a nice lady to marry and start a family with?"*. He could only brush it off with a fit of uncomfortable laughter. In truth, there was only one who could ever have his heart, and that one was unattainable, someone who he would never be allowed to love as himself.

"I would rather be condemned than continue to live this lie," Selenis admitted, the emotion cracking the perfect eyeliner he had perfectly applied.

"Then, we can be condemned together."

Loud voices screeched and clawed, all a repetition of the same word-

Sin!

To neither Erin nor Selenis it did not matter if the mark of sin was etched above their heads. The hurled rocks could never hurt as much as the pain of repressed freedom. The restricting walls of society were only held back by time and hate. Maybe, in the next life, the rocks of hate wouldn't be their demise.

As his life slipped from his desperate hands, Selenis begged, though silently, that he could hold his lover in public, just as all the others did in the films where the boy gets the girl and they live happily ever after, or that he could meticulously craft a masculine

appearance without it being a political debate or some sort of act of bravery. He didn't want to have to be brave. He wanted to be free.

In the first life, his mind was fogged, confused even. Again, he was a "girl", yet, he was completely unable to pin the feeling of uncertainty that had plagued him, a sort of deja vu that consumed him. But, seeing the same brown curious eyes and unkept black hair, his heart, or perhaps even his soul, could feel it. It was him. The same Erin he had fell in love with, though in a past life he could hardly remember. And again, they could not be together as they wished. Fate seemed to work in cruel ways, and yet, they ignored it.

"I will be with you, no matter how many lives I must live." They had whispered to each other in a fleeting moment where they believed that no hateful ears could hear.

By the sixth life, they had already both developed their own routine. They would always meet as children, grow up together holding hands under the false pretense of safely crossing the road, and they would always fall in love. Selenis would always have the false persona of a "tomboy", never a "boy". He grew sick of seeing himself in the mirror, a girl staring back at him when a boy was standing in front of it.

"Do you not grow tired of me each time?" Selenis had once asked.

"Why would I ever?" Erin had replied not even a heartbeat later.

Maybe it was the hundred-thousandth time, maybe it was the two hundred-thousandth time, he already lost count of how many first steps he had taken or how many tenth birthdays he had celebrated. Thousands of secret first kisses and thousands of quiet gentle words full of love blended together. No matter how many times they had lived the same life together in yet another world, they could find small amounts of joy they concealed within each other.

Is there a world where our love is allowed?

Sometimes, Selenis wanted to contort into the monstrous beast they all said he would be. He wanted to grow the horns of a devil, he would endure the glares of hate, all just for a chance to be a slither of himself. He wished, in a sort of sick and twisted way, that his grave for once would say *his* name, and not the dead self that dug its claws into his back always.

Is there a world where I am allowed?

If he was already forced to live in a constant loop of life and death, living the same yet different life, he at the very least, wanted to have the peace of mind that he was not a sin. There were times where Selenis wondered if he should just give up. The world would never tolerate him or Erin, so why even try? But every time, seeing the worry in his lover's eyes, he could not do it. He could not let him live alone in a world

that wanted him gone. So, all he could do was cry and beg, that one day, the pain would go away.

“I will always stay with you,” He choked through tears.

“And so will I.”

The world changed, shifting in ways that they could have never imagined. Slowly, the stoneware cracked, its hard-set glaze shining light through for the first time. The hope that he had cradled in his weak arms clung onto him, desperate for salvation and peace, and he could only quietly reassure it that he wanted the same.

How much longer must I break?

He had lost count of how many lives he already lived. But, this one was different. Staring down at the document in his shaking hands, his eyes could just barely make out the words. It said his name. No, it said *his* name, next to Erin's.

And so, though Selenis had lost count of how many times their love had to survive a world filled to the brim with hate, he could now look at Erin, and not see his secret sin, but rather, his loving husband. They could hold each other in the sight of others, like in the films where the boy gets the girl, with his meticulously crafted masculine appearance, and they could be free.

“How will you love me now, after all that we have endured, after all the fragmented pieces of myself that now I must put back together to even resemble the self I once was? How will I ever enjoy this peace knowing what I had to endure to hold it in my now weak hands?”

“I will love you and cradle your broken weak form in every world, every universe, because the misshapen mistakes they all despise will always be the part of you I will lovingly kiss. I will put the pieces back together, no matter how many times you may break, for you are my light, my universe, my love in every life.”