

The Language of Light

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Carefully lighting the diya, tilting the small brass lamp so the flame stays steady, the air fills with scents of cardamom and oil. The wick takes, then hesitates, then steadies, small and alive. Their home smells faintly of dishwater and the citrus soap he insists on buying, the kind that lingers on skin long after the hands are dry. Light bends the room around it, softening corners and quieting everything that isn't this.

It makes the air feel older, like it remembers other evenings, other hands. Candle reflection flickers against the glass between them and scatters itself into trembling gold. The diya sits like a heartbeat on the table. Like something that has always belonged here, even when the world outside insists otherwise.

She watches it until it stops feeling fragile.

Across from her, he watches in silence.

Not the kind of silence that is empty, but the kind that holds itself carefully, like it could break something without meaning to. His eyes do not leave the flame. He looks as though he is waiting to be told where to place his hands, how to enter the moment without disturbing it. As though he understands that there are things you don't touch directly.

Silence can mean so many things. Silence can mean distance. Silence can mean reverence. Silence can mean fear.

She sees his silence and mistakes it for

disinterest.

He sees her certainty and mistakes it for pride.

The diya does not correct them. It does not explain itself. It simply burns, soft and unwavering, as if it has no doubt in the world.

Sometimes she envies that.

She was raised to believe that love is seva: service freely given. That devotion lives in repetition, in the unnoticed act, in the offering no one applauds. Love as something embodied. Love as something you do with your hands until it becomes part of your body. A folded cloth. A prepared dish. A light kept lit long after everyone had stopped looking at it.

He was raised to believe love is a covenant: a deliberate vow. A promise made through language. He learned that what is sacred can be named, defined, protected by being spoken aloud. He trusts what can be articulated—trusts it the way you trust a railing in the dark.

Sometimes she thinks that is what makes him brave—his willingness to say what he means.

Sometimes she thinks it is what makes him dangerous—his need to reduce everything into words.

He thinks about something he read that morning, a sentence he underlined without expecting it to follow him home: *We defend the little rituals that soothe us, mistaking comfort for truth.* The words sit in his mind like a stone in water; there, but moving everything around it.

He looks at the diya and feels the edges of himself go strangely quiet.

He doesn't want to be careless with her belief. He doesn't want to touch it and find it bruises. He doesn't want to ask the wrong question and watch something sacred turn brittle. He doesn't want to turn her faith into a specimen pinned under glass.

He has never learned how to love something he can't explain.

So he stays silent, as if silence can be a kind of respect. As if watching is the closest thing he can offer without claiming it as his own.

But love has its own hunger. Love reaches.

Understanding feels like love to him.

And her love, to her, has always felt like tending—like choosing the fragile thing and guarding it anyway.

The diya sits between them like a third presence. Like a question neither of them wants to ask directly.

Among others, they wear careful faces, composed and polite. Smiling at the right moments. Passing plates. Speaking softly. In those spaces it is easy to perform love—easy to keep it gentle and public, easy to keep the edges smooth.

But intimacy is not always smooth.

At home, the quiet becomes louder.

At home, the things they don't know how to translate begin to press against the surface.

During arguments, she reaches for repair while he stretches for understanding. This is the pattern they return to without meaning to—their hands grasping for different tools, both sincere, both clumsy. He reaches for clarity. She reaches for closeness. He wants language. She wants warmth. He wants to name it. She wants to hold it.

And sometimes, in the worst moments, their virtues become weapons.

Her softness becomes surrender.

His logic becomes dismissal.

Not because he intends to dismiss, but because he does not know how to stop reaching for certainty.

Not because she intends to surrender, but because she does not know how to stop reaching for peace.

Neither of them is trying to hurt the other.

Still, they do.

One evening after an argument that leaves the diya unlit, the room feels wrong. It is not dramatic. Nothing is thrown. The silence simply stretches so wide it begins to feel like a separate thing—like it has moved in between them and decided to stay.

The diya sits empty, the wick pale and untouched. The oil reflects the light from elsewhere, borrowing brightness without holding any of its own.

She looks at it and feels the small grief of interruption, as if a ritual left incomplete can stain the air. Tonight, the diya feels like a sentence that cannot be finished. A prayer caught in the throat.

He stares at the table like it is a problem set. Like the right answer will appear if he stays still long enough. Like he can solve them back into safety.

She wants to make it right.

He wants to make it make sense.

She sits beside him. Close enough that their shoulders nearly touch. Close enough that distance becomes a choice, not an accident. She doesn't force him to look at her. She simply stays. Her presence is its own kind of offering.

Then she leans toward him and, like a prayer, whispers: I vowed to honor your conscience as I honor my own.

The words do not demand agreement.

They do not require conversion.

They simply open a door.

They are hopeful.

They are pleading.

They are her way of saying: I do not need you to become me. I only need you to stay.

He feels something loosen in his chest—not relief, not exactly, but the soft shock of being trusted. Of being met with devotion instead of defense.

Tenderness rises in him like light does, quietly, without permission. It makes him want to look away. It makes him want to kneel. It makes him want to say something true and unarmed.

He looks at her—really looks—and sees the exhaustion behind her composure. Sees how often she has been brave for both of them. Sees how her faith is not a performance but a way of returning to love again and again, even when she is tired.

He wants to respond correctly. He wants to respond perfectly.

But perfection has never been what she asked of him.

He takes her hand instead. Fingers brushing the warm skin where her bangles rest. A small gesture. A translation. A vow that does not need to be spoken aloud to be real.

And in that touch he says what he cannot seem to speak: I am here. I am trying. I am listening.

The silence shifts. Not gone, but changed. Less like a wall. More like a breath.

They learn, slowly, to teach each other without calling it teaching.

She shows him the gesture of cupping his hands around a flame so it doesn't go out. Not controlling it—protecting it. She teaches him that devotion can look like tending, like patience, like repeating the same act again and again without demanding proof that it worked.

He shows her the gesture of pausing before

speaking, so words don't become blades. He teaches her that questions do not always mean doubt, that curiosity can be reverence when it is gentle, that understanding can be an offering too.

They begin reading each other's sacred texts, not for conversion but for context. Side by side they compare metaphors, traditions, and the ways devotion is shaped by childhood. Slowly the unfamiliar becomes less foreign, and the familiar becomes less assumed.

It is not always graceful. Sometimes it feels like speaking through water.

Sometimes the translation fails.

Sometimes they mispronounce each other's languages.

Sometimes they retreat, frustrated, into the comfort of certainty.

But they return.

They return like light returns, quietly, persistently, without needing applause.

The laughter, the exhaustion, the confusion of trying to communicate love in two different religious languages is where their faiths meet. And in that meeting, something new begins to form, not a compromise, not a loss, but a third language that belongs to them alone.

They bond in the shared light and find something neither faith taught them: that love and worship are simply an act of translation.

They are building their own language.