and the sky is clear

by am_fae

Summary

Helena - her aunt's words still ringing in her ears - sometimes isn't sure how someone like Jan could love her. Skrzetuski does his best to convince her otherwise.

(or, my attempt to prove that, despite how much he's changed and everything he's done, Skrzetuski is still the same hopelessly passionate soldier who fell for Helena at the beginning of the book)

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Skrzetuski, hand still clasping hers, paused, just a fraction of a second, and Helena panicked. Feeling her grip tighten on Skrzetuski’s hand, she tried to explain, words stumbling over themselves: “I didn’t mean to doubt you – I could never doubt you, not even if I tried: it’s just… it’s still hard to believe?” Jan was getting more and more still (warning signs, clear as daylight, warning signs) and Helena spoke faster, willing her thoughts to voice themselves before she inevitably fell into silence. “Not that I don’t believe! I have never doubted you, Jan, I could never doubt you – it’s just, well, still. There’s you and then there’s me…”

Skrzetuski startled a little. Then, for the first time in their acquaintance, he looked down, away from her eyes instead of up towards them. His gaze, amber-dark, seemed to rest rather on his calloused hands where they lay, utterly motionless, in his lap.
“I’m sorry,” Helena said wretchedly, “I…”

And just as suddenly, Jan was gazing at her face again, the strange moment of silence forgotten, shock – and – was that relief, overwhelming relief? – glowing again in his eyes. He gripped her hands impulsively and pressed them to his lips. “Helena,” he said against her knuckles, “Helena, my love, queen of my heart, Helena, you are so much more than me. Don’t look at me like that, it’s true. I’m impossibly blessed to have the luck to ever stand in your presence – let alone touch you –”

Helena could no longer bear to meet Skrzetuski’s eyes. Her lashes swept downwards; she felt now-familiar heat rush to her cheeks.

“Whatever you were told in Rozłogi,” Jan said emphatically, “Or Bar or wherever else – whatever put that look on your face – it’s a lie.” His fingers interlaced with hers. “You are good and worthy and you matter so, so much.” He squeezed her hands. “And beautiful… so incredibly beautiful. When I look at you, I feel like I’m caught in a ray of summer sunlight.”

“After all this time then,” Helena breathed, just to say it out loud, like an incantation, until the blurred picture came into focus. “You still – you’re certain you still – love –”

Barely a startled “oh!” escaped Helena’s lips before Skrzetuski kissed her. Her eyes closed as if of their own accord, blocking out the world: the rest of the world except Jan’s fingers carding through the softness of her hair, still barely below her shoulders, one hand cradling her head, and chapped lips against her mouth, at once tender and forceful. Helena reached out instinctively, feeling the smooth lines of Skrzetuski’s waist and chest pressed to her body, and not for the last time felt herself lost in some inestimable bounty, some unlooked-for abundance which she had neither planned for nor expected.

The brief kiss was as chaste as it was unchaste. Jan broke away first, looking almost irrepressibly pleased with Helena’s flushed reaction (her heart still beat, shuddering, against the confines of her chest.)

“Does that answer your question?” Skrzetuski said pleasantly. His voice was low, scarcely a murmur. It reverberated in his throat like a cat’s purr.

Helena found it was easier than expected to regain her composure when such were the stakes. Breath still heaving, blood coursing through her veins, she leaned back against the wall of the carriage, just enough to widen the gap between them. She met Jan’s darkened eyes and fought down a smile. “I don’t know, I’m not completely clear on it. Can you tell me again?”

End Notes

- "When I look at you, I feel like I’m caught in a ray of summer sunlight": just kind of a reversal of Sienkiewicz’s “the glory of the husband falls on the wife like the light of the sun on the earth.”
- Title taken from the song ‘Fear and Loathing’ by Marina & the Diamonds
- this is trash

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