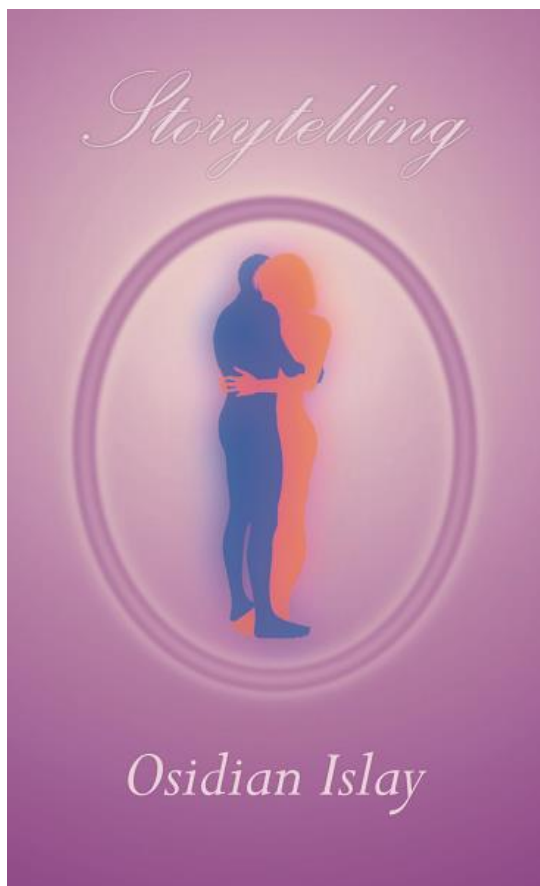




A married couple chooses each other daily as they endure life's challenges.

Storytelling

By Obsidian Islay

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First Edition

Dinner

“Are you ready?” he asks, voice appropriately deep... his togs, sharp, neat, precise, and dark in hue.

“Yes.” I reply with delay. Voice low, head matching as I clutch the glass of red wine a bit tighter. He studies me for a moment.

“A pre-dinner drink?” He asks plainly. “Yes.” I reply with the same intensity as before.

He towers over my seated frame for a moment, then reaches for the glass, extracting it from the relentless hand with gentle pressure. The crimson has been set aside with his hand now finding the nape of my neck, encouraging me to rise. The pressure is sweet; the gaze, sweeter. I execute my ascension with standard poise.

“We don’t have to do this.” A pause, then he continues. “We don’t have to do anything that causes your voice to break, your spirit to recede.” He appears concerned, I try to

disregard the emotion, but success is escaping me. “Are you happy?” He waits patiently for reply. I place a hand in his, interlocking the fingers, adding delightful pressure. I step around him while sustaining the connection; he follows.

We are now at our destination, seated, drink orders received, sipping as we study the menu. “How was your day?” He asks. I nearly cringe at the ask. Not because I do not appreciate, but because it is not our way, it is not our standard approach. I release a smile, not wanting to appear disengaged, disappointed. I am neither.

“How was my day.” I repeat. I sit, very much aligned, wine glass nearby but not in hand yet. “I made an egregious error... my blueprints lacked a newel at the base of the balustrade.” I take a sip, he continues to gaze with intensity and interest, and then, I continue.

"I corrected the mishap." A very brief pause. "I do not prefer to make errors, even if they're corrected, I should be more attuned." I share this information directly, no sorrow, only facts.

"You've been behaving like you're still working. Stop working." He states with aggressive calm; his method relaxes me. He's now holding my free hand, fingers interlocked.

"This is a rare evening for us." His eyes arch as he quickly scans the establishment. "No work. Now, tell me about your day. And do not speak to me like I'm a client." His voice low, steady, firm but honeyed.

"I made an error on a blueprint; I quickly corrected it upon discovery. And you... you were in many of my thoughts today." Upon hearing my final words, his posture grows straighter, his eyes nearly seem to beam, and then, he leans in once again.

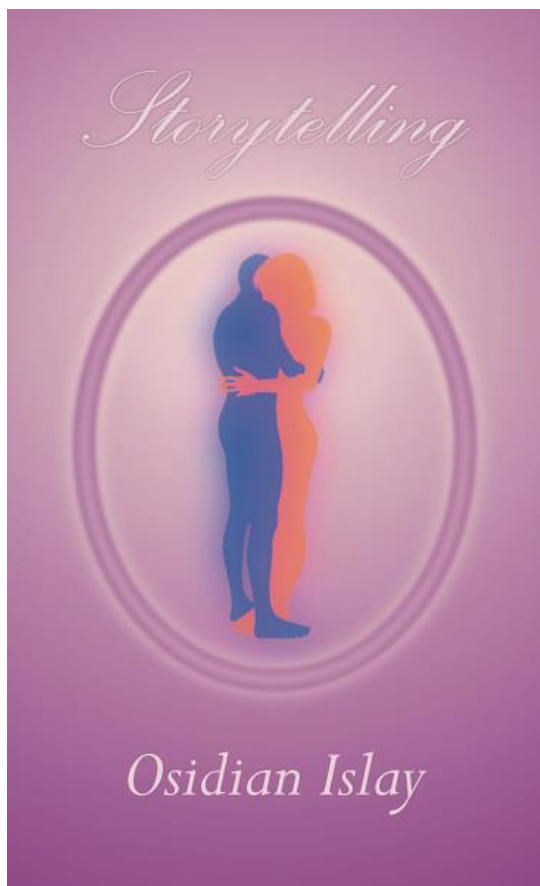
His grip tightening, his body slides closer to mine in the circular velvet-lined booth. His lips are near the lobe of my ear, breath, sweet against my cheek. I hear his inhale as he prepares to speak.

“Are you two ready?” Asks the server. My gaze shifts from the interlocked fingers. He does not return to his original space, only sits a bit straighter. “The rare cut for me, and scallops for the lady.” He leans back into me as the server collects materials and retreats.

“I haven’t lost my place.” His voice sustained, working its usual magic. I release our connection; he doesn’t flinch. He takes the newly freed hand, placing it upon my cheek. I place a hand atop his, our gaze fixed. Then, I am reminded of our milieux. I press his palm deeper into my cheek. “Remember where we are.” I state softly, gently. Not to reprimand, but to remind.

He moves closer, removing the hand from my face, while the other finds its way underneath the cloth. The hand grips my thigh, just above the knee. I am not threatened. I adjust my posture; it is now straighter than before. He does not care; it is quite evident. He shifts the hand, sliding it further from the knee. Still, I am not threatened. I collect my glass and take another sip. I do so with grace, stillness, composure. To an observer, they would only think a man and his wife are having a splendid evening.

I return my gaze to him, steady, direct, feminine. Although I desire him to remove the distraction, I refuse to say so. He is trying to cause unease; I do not want him to succeed. "Here you go." The server says, as the order is placed carefully onto the cloth. As the server works, so does the hand that provokes. It has moved a bit further from the knee, having found its way beneath the dress's fabric.



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