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THE WEIGHT OF BEING BELIEVED

They ask me if I'm innocent,
as though the truth were black and white,
as though a man were black and white,
as though a man could lose his name
and never lose his right
to stand before the world and say,
"You've heard their side, but hear me too,
before you decide what I became,
ask what you really know is true."

They ask me if I'm telling truth,
if every word is what it seems.
But truth can wear a thousand faces,
and silence can conceal our dreams.
A page can hold a thousand facts,
yet leave the heart of one untold.
And sometimes what the world calls justice
is a story bought and sold.

They ask me why I choose to write,
why I put my thoughts in ink.
Perhaps it's just to make them pause,
perhaps to make them think.
Perhaps I write because a voice
should not be buried by a wall,
because a man is more than one mistake,
and one mistake is not his all.

So read my words, but question them.
Don't let my answer make you blind.
Look beyond the lines I've written;
look for what you cannot find.
For I don't ask you to believe me
just because my name is here.
I ask you to consider carefully
what is false, what true, what fear.

And if you reach the final line
still uncertain what to say,
then perhaps my words have done their work
in a more important way.

For truth is not a prize we win
by choosing sides before we start.
Sometimes truth begins the moment
we make room for another heart.

So judge the words, examine facts,
let evidence illuminate the way.
But never let the need to judge
take your humanity away.

Because innocence is more than a verdict,
and guilt is more than a name.
A human being is a human being
before, during, and after blame.

And if you wonder why I wrote this,
why these words were worth the fight,
I wrote because a voice can matter
even when it has no might.

I wrote so you would ask the questions.
I wrote so you would look again.
I wrote because behind each story
there is a human being.

And maybe that's the lesson
these pages leave with you:

Don't just ask whether I am guilty.
Ask how you know what's true.