The Tale of

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The messenger whispered. "Two blind men waited at the end of an era, contemplating beauty. They sat atop the world’s highest cliff, overlooking the land and seeing nothing.” “Huh?” She looked to him. “‘Can beauty be taken from a man?’ the first asked the second. ”'It was taken from me,’ the second replied. ‘For I cannot remember it.’ This man was blinded in a childhood accident. 'I pray to the God Beyond each night to restore my sight, so that I can find beauty again.’ “'Is beauty something one must see then?’ the first asked. ”'Of course. That is it’s nature. How can you appreciate a work of art without seeing it?’ “'I can hear a work of music,’ the first said. ”'Very well, you can hear some kinds of beauty - but you cannot know full beauty without sight. You can know only a small portion of beauty.’ “'A sculpture,’ the first said. 'Can I not feel its curves and slopes, the touch of the chisel that transformed common rock into uncommon wonder?’ ”'I suppose,’ said the second, 'that you can know the beauty of a sculpture.’ “'And what of the beauty of food? Is it not a work of art when a chef crafts a masterpiece to delight the tastes?’ ”'I suppose,’ said the second, 'that you can know the beauty of a chef’s art.’ “'And what of the beauty of a woman,’ the first said. 'Can I not know her beauty in the softness of her caress, the kindness of her voice, the keenness of her mind as she reads philosophy to me? Can I not know this beauty? Can I not know most kinds of beauty, even without seeing it?’ ”'Very well,’ said the second. 'But what if your ears were removed, your hearing taken away? Your tongue taken out, your mouth forced shut, your sense of smell destroyed? What if your skin were burned so that you could no longer feel? What if all that remained to you was pain? You could not know beauty then. It can be taken from a man.’“ The messenger stopped, cocking his head to Shallan. “What?” she asked. “What think you? Can beauty be taken from a man? If he could not touch, taste, smell, hear, see … what if all he knew was pain? Has that man had beauty taken away from him?” “I…” What did this have to do with anything? “Does the pain change day by day?” “Let us say it does,” the messenger said. “Then beauty, to that person, would be the times when the pain lessens. Why are you telling me this story?” The messenger smiled. “To be human is to seek beauty, Shallan. Do not despair, do not end the hunt because thorns grow in your way. Tell me, what is the most beautiful thing you can imagine?

-Words of Radiance