

## A Woman Scorned

Blood drips, pours, from my cupped hands. He is a limp chalice spilling crimson wine, thick and hot to the touch. I am trying to clean the spill, but I succeed only in spreading it across the floor, onto the other boy, everywhere. And, within moments, the deed is done. Brother lies by brother in stony sleep and their killer watches, dutifully. Lovingly. A wave of bile rises in her throat and she fights to keep it down, succeeding after a moment of uncertainty. It is unclear to the both of us whether the sickness is from fury or shame.

I want to stay with them, to drink in the moment like clean gulps of fresh air before it fills with the stench of rot and animosity, but she starts to move before I can protest. I watch as she lifts the straw-haired doll, his wine-stained skin, with tender care and takes him to the chariot that awaits us outside. Then it is time for the smaller one, more frail, with his father's unfortunate brown hair. We take him together and lay him next to his older brother to keep him safe. Husks, the both of them lacking in names, souls, ousia, they sit gently and peacefully side by side as my heart tears in two. I, their mother; her, their killer; we stroke our son's forehead and I am in a state of shock. My mouth is dry and as the blood crusts on my skin I find I cannot blink.

There is a dog inside me that wants to tear through everything and rotten and bitter, restless and fearful of warmth. All the warmth that it has been shown, of hearth and heart, has burned in due time. Alas, the flames that envelop this chariot do not speak of the warmth of hospitality. They speak of the white hot fury of a cornered mutt, snarling and vicious. For is that not what you want me to be, my beloved? Your savage, tribal, bitch? Exotic and mysterious, a trophy you can hold at weddings and parties and feasts, waving away my frail emotional outbursts with a hand of "She's not from around here," or "It's a foreign thing" as you jokingly butcher the name of my homeland, my culture, my birthright, my mother and her mother and the life you will never understand.

No, you do not get to tell me to calm down any more.

There is a dog inside me that craves the dripping heat of flesh wet with your blood. It bares its teeth at any memory of you. It wants to sink its bloodied fangs into something and with each passing second that it cannot indulge in that sweet passion it grows fuller, stronger, hungrier.

I do not feel any guilt for what I did to the flesh of your flesh, my flesh, our flesh, for sharing my flesh with you was something I will always regret. You could never even understand a mother's love, you in your dispassionate judgement cast over your kin, your boys, with their skin a shade of mine and their tongue drawling and exotic like my father's. You never loved them like I did, and you have no right to mourn them. None at all. This way, they died a swift death, with more love than their father ever cared to give. This way, at least nobody shall take my sons from me, and transform them into he-lions and hateful things, products of their time. Boys will be boys, but not my boys, they will be mine and only mine. And now they are forever mine. This way, nobody can take them from me.

But for the first time, you will see me as I am and not as you wish me to be, and part of me relishes it. I hold the lifeless hands of my children together as the chariot begins to move. A mother's love; life in death. In a way, I am glad for it. I am glad that this way, their blood does not grace your hand. This way you will never be able to look upon any aspect of me with love. Such is the lot you have drawn for yourself. I would open my arms and let the life flow freely from them like slaughtered meat hung out to dry if I thought it would hurt you. Your trophy, your foreign conquered land, like a cow to be given as a gift, I have finally broken free of you. I have spared my children from your pathological self obsession, I have saved them from death at the hands of a corrupt tyrant and I have given them an end that was as caring as it was quick. I have spared myself from a life spent in captivity - for no matter how ornate the cage, the bird inside sings the same song. Oh, how I was forced to learn that lesson until the singing simmered, then boiled, under the surface, driving me to murderous vitriol.

I see you approaching the gate now, man-shaped-thing.

And there is a dog inside me that is held back only by a leash, taut and unyielding. Its teeth are made to ravage your ragdoll corpse with wild abandon, tearing into your supple self as carelessly as one would devour a pomegranate, juices dripping from its mouth as it mangles your flesh.

Tirelessly it strains at its leash, and I let it. For whilst the sight of you is enough to cloud my vision with red mist, I have already hurt you more than I ever could by harming you directly. You have no children. No birthright but grief, no legacy but treachery. Misery will warm your bed and you will die heartbroken and pitiful.

You call for me to face you, cruel, commanding, fearful.

Instead, the chariot lifts, and you are left with nothing.

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