

Women are stained with blood.

She'd been taught this by her mother.

Women are born to bleed. They are created with pain already a part of them, waiting to rise to the surface and tear them apart.

Women bleed in cycles, their pain running through their family trees. Mothers to daughters, the suffering is hereditary.

But, it isn't just the monthly cycle that causes women to bleed. It is the cycle of violence inflicted by men.

Yes, she was first taught about men drawing blood from women by her mother. Leda had lost drops of both blood and tears on that night, when her innocence was ripped from her grasp as Zeus, a regal and ruthless swan, had loomed over her and pinned her down, ignoring her pleas and cries. Zeus saw the raven tresses, the soft curves, the creamy skin. He did not see the tears streaming down those rosy cheeks, the scarlet blood painting those smooth thighs, the pure terror in those beautiful eyes. Leda was simply another pretty object to the king of the gods.

According to Leda, her mother, she had been conceived by violence. By blood. By pain. By rape.

Was that the reason for it all?

If violence was, in fact, her very origin, was her life always destined to happen in the way that it did?

Was she abused by a man even before her birth?

Was that why her own daughter had the fate that she did?

Was it all her fault?

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She'd been taught this by her husband and her infant son.

For it isn't always the woman herself who bleeds. Sometimes, it is the blood of her loved ones that coats her skin and drips from her fingertips.

It wasn't the blood that fazed her, because why would a woman ever be fazed by blood?

It was staring at her beloved husband, Tantalus, sprawled, dead, on the ground before her.

It was cradling her child, who had been so viciously ripped from her breast and dashed against some rocks, in an evil and merciless act.

It was seeing him. It was feeling him drag her from where she knelt, drag her from her state of mourning for those she loved.

It was watching him methodically wipe his weapons clean of the blood of her family. It was searching fruitlessly for some trace of remorse, of guilt, of sympathy, in his face.

She glared at him from her position on the ground, paralysed with grief and yet trembling with fear, her eyes burning with salt and her throat choking down the sobs.

The screams.

Of pain, of loss, of anger, of violence.

She was a shell of herself; a piece of her very soul had been torn from her. She was a lioness without her cub. She was lost.

This was the second act of brutality inflicted upon her family by a man.

Was it all her fault?

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She'd been taught this by her daughter.

Oh, her daughter. Her dear Iphigenia, who had received her mother's pain, as all daughters do. She could not escape what was coming to her. No woman can, not really. They are simply trapped in gilded cages, there for men to torture and abuse as they please.

That defenceless and deceived young girl, her darling daughter, had become a pawn in the wars of men, a payment for her father's mistakes, nothing but collateral damage.

And who spoke out on her behalf? Who tried to save her, to let her see the long life that lay ahead of her?

"You'll be married to the great Achilles." they had told her. Liars, all of them.

Iphigenia had expected to arrive to a wedding altar and a suitor, but was instead met with a sacrificial altar and a murderer.

The dagger and the robes were ready and waiting.

She didn't even get to see Iphigenia's body, treated with as much respect as an animal being given as an offering to the gods, but she could imagine the blood, drops of ruby running down the sides of the stone table and being presented to the heavens.

The blood of another innocent young woman, spilled by a sadistic and careless man.

The blood of her daughter, who had inherited her suffering.

Was it all her fault?

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She'd been taught this by her second husband and his lover.

This time, it was different. This time, she, the woman, was the one wielding the axe. This time, she didn't feel any pain.

Remorse for Cassandra, perhaps. She was innocent, had faced plenty of abuse at the hands of men in her life. The poor thing, cursed eternally for rejecting the advances of an insecure god. She hadn't had an easy time. If anything, her death was mercy. Better to be dead than to spend a life with him.

As for him? Oh, how she relished swinging that blade. The sight of the beacons, lighting up his long-awaited return, had filled her with an exhilaration she had not felt for so long. Ten years she'd spent raging, grieving, plotting. She had grown progressively more parched with a thirst for vengeance, counting down the days until she would be able to see it through. Never before had she craved the sight of blood.

As she had the servants lay down those beautiful purple fabrics on the floor, all she could imagine was the sight of his slaughtered body upon them, his blood a wine-coloured painting on the violet canvas. The wrath that burned deep within her soul made it difficult to feel any sort of trepidation.

And the moment that she saw his face made it impossible.

When she watched him anxiously walk across those tapestries, when she wrapped her hands around the polished, wooden handle of the axe, when she struck again and again and again...all she saw was Iphigenia. And Tantalus. And her son.

Why should she feel remorse? He had it coming. Nobody else was going to avenge her family. Nobody but her. There is no fury like that of a mother with a stolen child.

The blood on her hands was an achievement. So rarely do women have the glorious satisfaction of revenge. The abuse that they receive builds up inside them, burning an eternal wildfire, but that wildfire is never able to spread beyond the prison of the female mind.

Sometimes, when women are stained with blood, it is beautiful.

But...Cassandra. The slight flaw in her sweet vengeance.

In a way, the deaths of both him and Cassandra were caused by the mistakes of men. It is, after all, an endless cycle.

But had she become an instrument of violence towards other women within this cycle?

Had she caused the needless suffering of innocent, troubled Cassandra?

Was it all her fault?

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She'd been taught this by herself.

As she looked down at the dark stain spreading rapidly across her breast, she learned that this had always been her fate. Conceived by violence, killed by violence.

Her suffering at the hands of men continued even at her death, as her son, Orestes, watched her die with an expression of accomplishment on his face. Revenge, he'd claimed, for his father's murder. How little he understood. How quickly he'd turned into another of those ruthless men.

She felt no resentment towards Electra. After all, she was just a girl. She, too, would be tortured by a man at some point in her life. It was inevitable that she would inherit her mother's luck.

And so, as she bled for the final time, she remembered why women bleed. For fertility, yes. But also for men. For their anger, their cruelty, their abuse.

She had spent her life suffering because of men, as her mother had, as her daughter had.

She had always been blamed, because she was a woman.

Clytemnestra died, and she understood that it had never been her fault.