

TOR·COM



A Memory of Wind

a short story by

Rachel Swirsky



with an illustration by

Sam Weber

After Helen and her lover Paris fled to Troy, her husband King Menelaus called his allies to war. Under the leadership of King Agamemnon, the allies met in the harbor at Aulis. They prepared to sail for Troy, but they could not depart, for there was no wind.

Kings Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus consulted with Calchas, a priest of Artemis, who revealed that the angered goddess was balking their departure. The kings asked Calchas how they might convince Artemis to grant them a wind. He answered that she would only relent after King Agamemnon brought his eldest daughter, Iphigenia, to Aulis and sacrificed her to the goddess.

* * *

I began turning into wind the moment that you promised me to Artemis.

Before I woke, I lost the flavor of rancid oil and the shade of green that flushes new leaves. They slipped from me, and became gentle breezes that would later weave themselves into the strength of my gale. Between the first and second beats of my lashes, I also lost the grunt of goats being led to slaughter, and the roughness of wool against calloused fingertips, and the scent of figs simmering in honey wine.

Around me, the other palace girls slept fitfully, tossing and grumbling through the dry summer heat. I stumbled to my feet and fled down the corridor, my footsteps falling

smooth against the cool, painted clay. As I walked, the sensation of the floor blew away from me, too. It was as if I stood on nothing.

I forgot the way to my mother's rooms. I decided to visit Orestes instead. I also forgot how to find him. I paced bright corridors, searching. A male servant saw me, and woke a male slave, who woke a female slave, who roused herself and approached me, bleary-eyed, mumbling. "What's wrong, Lady Iphigenia? What do you require?"

I had no answers.

* * *

I have no answers for you either, father.

I imagine what you did on that night when I paced the palace corridors, my perceptions vanishing like stars winking out of the night sky. You presided over the war council in Aulis. I imagine you standing with the staff of office heavy in your hands—heavy with wood, heavy with burdens.

Calchas, priest of Artemis, bowed before you and the other kings. "I have prayed long and hard," he said. "The goddess is angry with you, Agamemnon. She will not allow the wind to take your ships to Troy until you have made amends."

I imagine that the staff of office began to feel even heavier in your hands. You looked between your brother, Menelaus, and the sly Odysseus. Both watched you with cold, expressionless faces. They wanted war. You had become an obstacle to their desires.

“What have I done?” you asked Calchas. “What does the goddess want?”

The priest smiled.

What would a goddess want? What else but virgin blood on her altar? One daughter’s life for the wind that would allow you to launch a fleet that could kill thousands. A child for a war.

Odysseus and Menelaus fixed you with hungry gazes. Their appetite for battle hollowed the souls from their eyes as starvation will hollow a man’s cheeks. Implicit threats flickered in the torchlight. Do as the priest says, or we’ll take the troops we’ve gathered to battle Troy and march on Mycenae instead. Sacrifice your daughter or sacrifice your kingdom.

Menelaus took an amphora of rich red wine and poured a measure for each of you. A drink; a vow. Menelaus drank rapidly, red droplets spilling like blood through the thicket of his beard. Odysseus savored slow, languorous sips, his canny eyes intent on your face.

You held your golden rhyton at arm’s length, peering into redness as dark as my condemned blood. I can only imagine what you felt. Maybe you began to waver. Maybe you thought of my eyes looking up at you, and of the wedding I would never have, and the children I would never bear. But whatever thoughts I may imagine in your mind, I only know the truth of your actions. You did not dash the staff of office across your knee and hurl away its broken

halves. You did not shout to Menelaus that he had no right to ask you to sacrifice your daughter's life when he would not even sacrifice the pleasure of a faithless harlot who fled his marital bed. You did not laugh at Calchas and tell him to demand something else.

You clutched the staff of office, and you swallowed the wine.

I lost so much. Words. Memories. Perceptions. Only now, in this liminality that might as well be death (if indeed it isn't) have I begun recovering myself.

All by your hand, father. All by your will. You and the goddess have dispersed me, but I will not let you forget.

* * *

Next I knew, mother's hands were on me, firm and insistent. She held her face near mine, her brows drawn with concern.

She and her slaves had found me hunched beside a mural that showed children playing in a courtyard, my hands extended toward the smallest figure which, in my insensibility, I'd mistaken for Orestes. The slaves eyed me strangely and made signs to ward off madness.

"It must have been a dream," I offered to excuse the strangeness which lay slickly on my skin.

"We'll consult a priest," said Clytemnestra. She put her hand on my elbow. "Can you stand? I have news."

I took a ginger step. My foot fell smoothly on the floor I could no longer feel.

“Good,” said mother. “You’ll need your health.” She stroked my cheek, and looked at me with odd sentimentality, her gaze lingering over the planes of my face as if she were trying to paint me in her memory.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I’m sorry. I just wanted to look at you.” She withdrew her fingers. “Your father has summoned us to Aulis. Achilles wants you as his wife!”

The word wife I knew, but Aulis? Achilles?

“Who?” I asked.

“Achilles!” Clytemnestra repeated. “We’ll leave for Aulis this afternoon.”

I looked into the familiar depths of mother’s eyes. Her pupils were dark as unlit water, but her irises were gone. They weren’t colored; they weren’t white. They were nothing.

Green, I remembered briefly, *mother’s eyes are like new green leaves*. But when I tried to chase the thought, I could no longer remember what *green* might be.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“You’re going to be married, my heart,” said mother. “Everything changes all at once, doesn’t it? One day your daughter’s a girl, and the next she’s a woman. One day your family is all together, and the next there’s a war, and everyone’s leaving. But that’s how life is. There’s stasis and then there’s change, and then before you even know what the next stasis is, it’s gone, and all you can do is try to remember it. You’ll understand what I mean. You’re

so young. Then again, you're going to be a wife. So you're not that young, are you?"

"Who is Achilles?" I repeated.

But mother had already released my hands and begun to pace the room. She was split between high spirits and fretting about the upcoming preparations, with no part of her left for me. She gave orders to her attending slaves. Pack this. Take those. Prepare. Clean. Polish. The slaves chattered like a flock of birds, preening under her attention.

I was not quite forgotten; a lone young girl had been assigned to prepare me for the journey. She approached, her hands filled with wedding adornments. "You're going to marry a hero," she said. "Isn't that wonderful?"

I felt a gentle tugging at my scalp. She began braiding something into my hair. I reached up to feel what. She paused for a moment, and let me take one of the decorations.

I held the red and white thing in my palm. It was delicately put together, with soft, curved rows arrayed around a dark center. A sweet, crushed scent filled the air.

"This smells," I said.

"It smells *good*," said the slave, taking the thing gently from my hand. I closed my eyes and searched for the name of the sweet scent as she wound red and white into my bridal wreath.

* * *

Once, when I was still a child with a shaved scalp and a ponytail, you came at night to the room where I slept. Sallow moonlight poured over your face and hands as you bent over my bed, your features wan like shadows beneath the yellowed tint of your boar's tusk helmet. Torchlight glinted off of the boiled leather of your cuirass and skirt.

As a child, I'd watched from time to time from the upper story balconies as you led your troops, but I'd never before been so close while you wore leather and bronze. Here stood my father the hero, my father the king, the part of you that seemed so distant from the man who sat exhausted at meals eating nothing while mother tried to tempt you with cubes of cheese and mutton, as if you were any hard-worn laborer. Here you stood, transformed into the figure I knew from rumors and daydreams. It seemed impossible that you could be close enough for me to smell olives on your breath and hear the clank of your sword against your thigh.

"I had a sudden desire to see my daughter," you said, not bothering to whisper.

The other girls woke at the sound of your voice, mumbling sleepily as they shifted to watch us. I felt vain. I wanted them to see you, see me, see us together. It reminded me that I was Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, niece of Helen, descendent of gods and heroes.

How easy it is to be a thing but not feel it. Greatness slips into the mundanity of weaving, of pitting olives, of sitting cooped up in the megaron during storms and listening to the patter of rain on stone.

“Get up,” you said. “I want to show you something.”

I belted my garment and followed you out of my chamber and down the echoing stairs to the bottom story. Flickers of firelight rumbled through the doors that led to the megaron. The servants who attended the fire through the night gossiped, their laughter rushing like the hiss and gutter of the flames.

You led the way outside. I hung back at the threshold. I rarely left the palace walls, and I never left at night. Yet you stepped outside without so much as turning back to be certain I'd follow. Did it ever occur to you that a daughter might hesitate to accede to her father's whims? Did you ever think a girl might, from time to time, have desires that outweighed her sense of duty?

But you were right. I followed you onto the portico where you stood, tall and solemn, in your armor.

We descended stone steps and emerged at last beneath the raw sky. A bright, eerie moon hung over the cliff's rocky landscape, painting it in pale light. Fragile dandelion moons blossomed here and there between the limestone juts, reflecting the larger moon above. The air smelled of damp and night-blooming plants. An eagle cried. From elsewhere came a vixen's answering call.

The smell of your sweat drifted on the night breeze, mixing with horsehair and manure. The combined scents were both foul

and tantalizing. When you visited the women's quarters, it was always after events had ended, when the sweat was stale or washed away. Suddenly, things were fresh and new. You had brought me into the middle of things.

We reached the place where the river cuts through the rocks. You began running. Ahead of us, voices drifted from a copse of trees, accompanied by the clang of metal on metal. I raced behind you, stumbling over the stones that studded the grass. We veered toward the trees. A low fog gathered over the ground, illuminated from above by shifting white streams of moonlight. Needled cedar branches poked through the veil.

I fell behind, gasping with increasingly ragged breath. Your footsteps crunched onto leaves as you crossed into the copse. I trailed after, one hand pressed against the urgent pain in my side.

You turned when I was mere paces behind you. "If you were out of breath, why didn't you tell me?" you asked while I struggled the last few steps.

I leaned against a cedar to take the weight off of my trembling legs.

Ahead of us, your men stood in the thick foliage, enveloped by the fog. They wore bronze breastplates and thick felt greaves that loomed darkly out of the haze like tree trunks. Their swords emerged from the obscuring whiteness as they swung, metal clanging against metal as blades found each other. The soldiers seemed a ghostly rank of dismembered limbs and armor that appeared with the glint of moonbeams and then vanished into nothing.

The blunt of a sword crashed against a man's breastplate with a sound like thunder. I cringed. Tears of fright welled in my eyes. I felt exposed beneath the vastness of a sky nothing like the ceilings I'd lived below for most of my life.

You were watching me, your eyes focused on my face instead of on the wonder before us. "I told my hequetai to lead the men in exercises. The fog came up, and look! I had to show someone."

I tried to give you what you wanted. "It's marvelous." My voice quivered with fear that sounded like delight.

"I have an idea," you said, a wicked smile nestled in your beard.

You scavenged through the leaf fall with rustle and crunch until you prized out a branch the length of my forearm. You tested its weight against your palm and gave it an experimental swing.

"Try this," you said, presenting me with the branch.

Tentatively, I placed my palm against the bark.

"Go on." You pointed impatiently at your men battling through the fog. "Pretend you're a warrior."

I waved the branch back and forth, the way I thought they wielded their swords. It rattled in my hand.

"Stop," you commanded. You plucked a dandelion from the ground and laid it across a fallen log. "Here, swing at this. One strong, smooth motion."

The dandelion was a fragile silver moon. I swung the branch up and out. Its weight dragged me forward. I stumbled across a stone.

You took the branch away. "No. Like this."

How I loved the smooth motion of your arm as it moved through the air: the strength of your shoulders, the creak of boiled leather moving with your body. I strove to memorize your arcs and footfalls, but when you returned the branch to me, my fingers felt numb and strange around the bark. I flailed at the leaves and your shins until an accidental swing carried me off balance. My foot came down on the tiny moon of the dandelion. It died with a wet noise.

Wounded petals lay crushed against the wood, releasing the scent of moist soil. You took the branch from me and threw it aside.

“It’s a good thing you were born a girl,” you said, tugging playfully at my ponytail.

It was, you know. I’ve never been sorry about that. What I regret most is the children I never bore. I imagined them before you promised me to Artemis: strong boys and dark-haired girls with eyes blue enough to make Zeus lustful. One after the other, each thought-born child disappeared into forgetfulness after you bartered me for wind.

* * *

Do you remember that? Perhaps you do. My memories are still strange and partial, like a blanket that has been cut into pieces and then sewn up again. Stitches obscure old connections. The sense of continuity is gone. I no longer remember what it is like to have a normal recollection.

But I'm not speaking solely for your benefit. I need this too. I cannot articulate the joy of reaching for memories and discovering them present to be touched, and brought forth, and described. I need my memories to transcend the ephemera of thought. I need them to be tangible for the brief moment when they exist as gale winds shrieking in your ear.

I remembered that night when you brought me to see your soldiers for a long time. It was one of the last things Artemis took from me. I've pondered it, and polished it, and fretted about it, as if it were a faceted jewel I could turn in my hand and study from many different angles.

Why did you fetch me when you wanted to share that marvel? Why not my mother? Why weren't you content to share the moment with your men, with whom you've shared so many of your days and nights?

Did you really fail to understand why I ran until I staggered rather than ask you to slow down? You seemed confused then, but you've never stopped expecting me to stumble after you. You've never hesitated to see if I will obey your commands, no matter how wild and cruel, any more than you hesitated that night to see if I would follow you past the palace threshold to a place I'd never been.

Maybe it wasn't ignorance that made me fear your men in the fog. Maybe it was prescience: things have never ended well for me when you've led me out of the world of women and into the world of men.

* * *

Clytemnestra completed preparations to leave the palace by noon. She packed me in the wagon with the clothing and the yarn and the dried fruit. I was one more item of baggage to bring to Aulis: a bride for Achilles.

Mother placed Orestes in my lap to hold while she supervised the loading. If she noticed my stillness and silence, she must have believed they were part of a bride's normal reticence.

The wagon set off under a full day's sun. Our wheels churned dust into the stifling air. It swirled through gaps in our canopy. Choking grains worked their way into our eyes and mouths. I braved more dust to peek through the curtains; beyond our car, the air hung heavy and motionless.

Orestes jounced on my lap as the wagon tumbled over dirt and rocks. He twisted up to look at me, enormous eyes blinking against the dust. He grabbed a lock of my hair in his fists and put it in his mouth, chewing contemplatively.

"Stop that," said mother, tugging my hair out of his mouth. She inspected the ragged, chewed ends and sighed.

I was content to allow Orestes to chew my hair. During his two short years of life, we'd always communicated by gestures. I understood what he meant by taking an expendable part of me into himself.

Oh, Orestes, so steady and sincere. He never rushed into anything, least of all trivial matters like speech. He took his first steps

long after his age-mates were already toddling around the palace, getting into mischief. When he did begin to walk, it was with slow, arduous caution, as if he were always gauging whether independence was worth the risk of falling.

Do you know these things about him? You must. And yet, you never knew me. Why should you know your son?

Really, how could you know him? Even when you were at home, you only saw him at feast evenings, during the chilly twilight hours before we women scooped up the babies and took them back to our spaces. I knew Orestes like my own skin. I worried about the day when he would begin the imperfect translation of his thoughts into speech. I worried that words would obliterate the easy understanding of our hands and faces. This is one fear that your betrayal has made moot. I'll never know what words might have passed between me and my brother.

Orestes began to fuss. I rocked him and sang a ditty about a fleet-footed nymph and the god who loved her. Halfway through the second verse, my memory of the song decayed. Orestes fell asleep anyway, tiny fists still clutching my hair.

I began another song. Mother put her hand over my mouth. "He's already asleep, Iphigenia. Give our ears a rest."

She released me, and I turned to regard her. Through the fog of my dissipating mind, I knew there were things I needed her to tell me.

I couldn't ask the questions I didn't remember so I asked the questions I did remember.

“What is it like to be married? Will I have to live with Achilles’s family while he fights in Troy? Can I go to live with father in the army camp instead? How long will the fighting last? Is Achilles a good man? When Orestes is grown and becomes king of Mycenae, will you come to live with me so that I can take care of you as you’ve cared for me?”

Clytemnestra let me ask questions until my words ran out. The wind had spoiled her elaborate braids, and the dust emphasized the lines of her face, making her look weary. Her eyes were wet and red.

“Every marriage is its own,” she said. “Achilles will decide where you’re to live, and you’ll wait for him there, as I wait for your father. Achilles is a hero, which is a good judge of a man, although a good man is not always a hero. I’ll visit you when I can, but I’ll never be as happy as I was yesterday, with all my children in my house.”

Mother worried her hands as she spoke. Her knotted knuckles had grown larger in the past few years as her arthritis worsened in proportion to her worry over the crisis whirling around her sister Helen and the scoundrel who abducted her to Troy. Mother wouldn’t have sent a pig into battle for her whore of a sister, but the kings had been called to war by their oaths, and all her men would go. She’d always known she’d be left to raise Orestes without you, but until that morning she’d believed that she would have me with her to share both loneliness and companionship. Now I

was supposed to wed a stranger and disappear as completely as if I'd gone to war.

My mother, stern and sentimental, always happiest in that moment after she set things in their designated places: dyes by hue, spices from mild to pungent, children in their proper rooms—easy to assess and admire.

* * *

The first thing my mother told me about Helen was, “She is my sister, but not my sister. Zeus fathered her when he was in the shape of a swan. We share the same mother but she was born in an egg. I was born the normal way. Helen distorts the world around her. Never look at her too closely. You’ll go blind.”

I was young when she told me that, still so young that I stretched up for her hand when I wanted to take an unsteady, toddling step. Nevertheless, I still sensed that she had said something important, even though I didn’t understand what it meant.

When Helen came to Mycenae during my ninth summer, I was old enough to walk on my own, but I still didn’t understand the things my mother said about my famous aunt. Helen seemed glamorous and mysterious and unfathomable—like you.

I wove through the maze of the servants’ feet and legs, trying to catch a glimpse of her. Hushed words of praise drifted down, all uttered in the same awed tones, whether the speaker was a slave, a servant, or a hequetai, a man or a woman. They marveled over

Helen's skin like beaten gold; her deep blue eyes the shade of newly fallen night; the smooth swell of her high, brown-tipped breasts.

You were busy with your brother Menelaus, the two of you clapping each other's shoulders as you exchanged information about recent military encounters. You didn't even glance at your beautiful sister-in-law, or at the way your wife paced uncomfortably, barking at the slaves to carry out orders they were already rushing to fulfill.

Your men retreated to the megaron to drink and discuss. We women went out to the courtyard. Slaves erected a canopy to shelter us from the sun, and set up benches for us to sit on. Clytemnestra walked among them, shouting that the canopy was hung too low, the benches were in the wrong places, bring more food, bring thicker blankets, and don't forget to set aside lamps and oil to set out at dusk.

Helen arrayed herself on a bench near the front of the canopy, where fresh breezes would reach her first. She arranged her garments fetchingly around her form as she lay down. She brushed her hand through her braids, allowing the breeze to blow through her stray hairs so that she looked tousled and intimate and all the more beautiful. I thought she was very vain to pose like that.

A girl my age nearly collided with me as I stood watching Helen. She gave me a glare, and then turned abruptly away as if I wasn't worth her time. "Put my bench there," she directed a slave, pointing to a spot near Helen. I wanted to ask her who she thought

she was, but before I got the chance, my mother caught me by the shoulders.

Her grip was harder than normal, her fingernails digging into my skin. “Come sit down,” she said, guiding me to the bench where she sat near Helen.

I sat at Clytemnestra’s feet while she ruffled my hair, and looked up at my aunt. From below, Helen was just as beautiful, but her features looked sharper. Braids coiled around her face like snakes, bound back by a beribboned brass headband that caught the gold flecks in her eyes.

Mother kept a firm grip on my shoulders as if she could keep my mind from straying by holding my body in place. She began a monologue about housekeeping, a subject that was impersonal, factual, and utterly under her control. “Next month, we’ll begin drying the fruit stores,” she said. “It was too cold this year for the figs. We lost nearly half our crop. But we’ve traded for nuts that will keep us through the winter.”

“You’re an excellent steward, sister mine,” said Helen, not bothering to disguise her boredom.

“Mother,” interjected the awkward girl who had collided with me earlier. “I found you a perfect one.”

She extended her hand in which nestled a cube of goat cheese, its corners unbroken. A bemused smile crossed Helen’s face as she looked down at the morsel.

“Thank you,” she said awkwardly, taking the cheese. She rewarded the girl with an uncertain pat on the head.

The girl lay stretched out on the bench, imitating Helen, but to completely different effect. The languorous pose accentuated her skinny, ungainly limbs. Stray tangles poked out of her braids like thistles.

“You’re Hermione? You’re my *cousin*?” I blurted.

Hermione bristled. Her mother looked down at me with a slow, appraising gaze. “Why, hello,” Helen said. “Are you my niece?”

Clytemnestra’s hand tightened protectively on my shoulder. “This is Iphigenia.”

Helen’s eyes were hot like sunlight on my cheeks. I burned with embarrassment.

“She’ll be a beauty someday,” Helen said to my mother.

Clytemnestra shrugged. “There’s time enough for that.”

Hermione pushed a tray of honeyed figs out of a slave’s hands. It clattered to the ground. “None of those are good enough for my mother!” she shouted.

Helen looked uncertainly at Clytemnestra, and then over at Hermione, and then up at the sky. She gave a sigh. “I don’t know how you do it, Clytemnestra. I was never raised to be a mother. I was only taught to be a wife.”

“Children are just small people, Helen,” mother said. “Albeit, occasionally stupid ones.”

Helen tugged a red ribbon off of her headband and held it out to me. “Here, Iphigenia, would you like this?”

Wordlessly, I accepted. The ribbon was soft and silken and magic with her touch.

“I’d like to talk with you, Iphigenia. Somewhere where other people can’t listen in. Just you and me. If your mother will agree?”

Helen lifted her gaze to Clytemnestra’s face. Mother’s fingers dug into my shoulders.

“Of course,” said mother. “She’s your niece.”

I knew my mother didn’t want me to be alone with Helen. I also knew that I wanted to be near that beauty, that glamour, that heat. I pulled the ribbon taut between my fingers.

“All right,” I said.

* * *

As I rode to Aulis, I forgot the day when I was eight when my mother plucked my embroidery out of my lap and held it up to the light. I waited for her to tear out my stitches and return it to my lap for me to do over again, as she had done every morning since I could first grip a needle. Instead she stared at my work with a thoughtful expression. “Hmm,” she said. “You’re getting better.”

I lost that day, but I remembered Helen in Mycenae, her searing eyes and her haughty pose and her daughter sitting forlornly nearby, trying to earn a moment’s attention by finding a perfect bite of food.

* * *

The wagon stopped at Aulis with a jolt. Prickling dust settled onto our clothing and skin. I pulled the canopy aside and spat

onto the ground to clear my mouth. Mother reached out to stop me, but as her hand touched my shoulder, she changed her mind. She leaned over beside me and spat onto the ground, too.

A slave helped my mother down onto the soil of Aulis. He was old and bent, his right leg dragging behind his left. I felt a tug of recognition, but I couldn't remember who he was. *Iamas*, my mind suggested, but Artemis had stolen everything else I knew about him.

I accepted his hand to help me down. He looked up at me and startled. His hand jerked away. I stumbled, only barely catching my balance. Orestes began to cry.

"What's the matter?" mother demanded.

The slave whimpered.

"*Iamas*," mother repeated, more softly. "What's the matter?"

Iamas trembled. "King Agamemnon said you might not come."

"Don't be ridiculous," said mother. "How could there be a wedding if we didn't come? Help my daughter down."

Iamas offered his hand again. This time his grip remained steady as I descended. His gaze lingered on the smelly decorations in my hair that I had forgotten were there. I reached up to touch them, and felt their softness, their fragility.

A shudder ran through *Iamas*. He looked away from me, and clutched himself as if he were cold, even though the air was hot and stagnant. I knew that he was sad and uncomfortable and lying about something. I couldn't care much. He was a stranger.

"You could still ride back to Mycenae," he suggested, softly.

“Iamas!” Mother’s voice grew sharp. “What’s wrong with you?”

I remember now what I didn’t then: Iamas, the old slave, who had been with my mother since before I was born. I remember him holding me when I was so small that I understood the world in images. He was younger then, his nose crooked from a healed fracture, his smile gap-toothed and ever-wide. When his work was mobile, he came to sit near me while I played, watching me run around and chatter as toddlers will. When I exhausted myself, he made a place for me to lie beside him, and told me stories through the sleepy afternoon.

He was little more than a shadow to me. I walked past him, toward the harbor where a thousand ships sat motionless on a sea as flat as glass. Wilted sails drooped from their masts, pining for a wind that refused to come. The painted eyes on the ships’ prows stared blankly forward, as if trying to make out the shape of Troy in the distance. Ten thousand oars waited.

“Why are all the ships still moored?” I asked.

Iamas spoke from behind me. “They’re trapped. There’s no wind to send them to Troy.”

“They’re just sitting there?”

“They have no choice.”

I watched the ships bob up and down with the almost imperceptible motion of the water. Seabirds circled silently beneath the brazen sun. Even they seemed to be waiting.

I turned my back to the water and surveyed the camp. It was larger than I’d thought a camp could be, an immense array of men

and equipment. Regiments formed restless circles around banked fires, their strength turned to games of chance played with stones and carved figures.

The soldiers who had grown bored with sitting rubbed wax into their armor with strokes as forceful as blows. Metal shone, bright as children's eyes and new-minted coins. As I stared at the men and their armor, the sun blazed off of the metal until it became impossible to tell warriors from breastplates, skin from gold. Orestes laughed and stretched out his hand toward the shining ranks. They seemed an array of golden men, waiting to stretch their flaming limbs and dazzle into battle like animate rays of sunlight.

Left in the harbor with no one to fight, they were burning up fast. They couldn't survive without wind to stoke them, to blow them onto dry firewood. They needed new things to burn. They needed fuel.

* * *

You came to the tent where Iamas settled us to wait for the wedding. All three of us looked up at your approach. Orestes stretched his arms in the direction of your voice. You called only for Clytemnestra.

Mother slipped out of the tent, leaving Orestes and me to peer out from the shadows. Orestes fussed; I held him close. Mother's garment was bright against the dun ground, her sandaled feet pale and delicate. I heard cloth rustling as she embraced you.

“You’ve arrived.” Your voice splintered with ambivalence.

“Come inside,” mother said. “Iphigenia is wearing her wedding flowers. She’ll want to see you. She looks radiant.”

“I can’t. I have things to attend to.”

“Just come in for a moment. You have to see your Iphigenia one last time while she’s still a maiden.”

“I can’t!” Your shout was sudden, anguished. “I must go. I’ll return later.”

Dust swirled around your retreating footsteps. I inhaled it, ready to choke.

* * *

Do you remember what happened later on that night when you led me out to see the soldiers in the fog? It has only just come back to me, how you took me by the hand and led me, walking this time, back out of the copse of trees and into the palace, up to my chamber where the other girls lay, half-awake, waiting for us to return.

I stared after your retreating form. I felt as if I were waking from a dream into my mundane existence. I wanted to run after you and make the dream last.

So I did.

* * *

Do you feel it now? The sky is darkening. My power grows. I feel the ruffle of waves beneath what has become of my spirit. They churn into tiny crests, surmounted with foam. Boats tremble beneath me. Sails billow with my breath. I tousle the hair of men who have set aside their helmets, and they totter, no longer sure of their footing.

I am still weak, my father. Soon, I will do more than wail in your ear.

* * *

Mother sat at the edge of the tent after you departed, staring out (as I stared after you when you left me to mundanity after showing me marvels). Perhaps she had begun to suspect something from your refusal to see me, from Iamas's shudder as he looked up at my wedding adornments.

Outside: a flash of gold.

Mother squeezed my hand. "That's Achilles's shield," she said. "Stay here. I'll ask your questions for you."

It was not like my stern, proper mother to expose herself to strange men.

I swung Orestes into my lap. I could only see a narrow slice of the camp from where I sat. I saw the arm and chest of the man who must be Achilles, his body rippling with muscles as sharply

delineated as those on a statue. His helmet and breastplate were wrought of fine, detailed gold. His oiled brown skin shone as brightly as his armor.

Mother extended her hand. "Greetings, Achilles! May you and my daughter have the happiest of marriages."

Achilles eyed her fingers. Beneath his helmet, his eyes were dark and chary. (Fog, a branch, a dandelion mirroring the moon.) "Woman, why do you offer your hand to a stranger? You may be beautiful, but that is no excuse."

"Forgive me. I thought you'd recognize me from my description. I'm Agamemnon's wife."

"Are you? I would have thought such a powerful man would have better control of his women."

I could not see my mother's face, but I knew the taut smile she would wear in response to such an affront, the catlike stretch of her lips that would not reach her eyes. (Like the taut smile Helen flashed me in the courtyard, late that night when I had nine summers: "Come walk with me, niece.")

"We'll be related in a few days," said mother. "Just pretend we already are."

"Are you insane?" Achilles's dark eyes examined the length of my mother's body. "No one told me Agamemnon married a madwoman."

Mother's voice became dangerously low. "Young man. I am not mad."

“You must be. I’m the son of Thetis, goddess of the sea. I’ve slain a thousand men. I wear glory like other men wear scent. Why would I marry your daughter just because you tell me to?”

“My husband sent for us,” said Clytemnestra. “He said that you wanted to marry my daughter.”

“Why would I tell him that? I’ve never even seen her.”

For a long moment, mother fell silent. (My head, ringing with emptiness, the sound of forgotten memories.)

“You’ll forgive me if I sound skeptical,” she said at last, “but either you are mistaken, or my husband is lying. What should a loyal wife believe?”

Achilles’s eyes hardened like metal.

Before Achilles could speak, the slave Iamas pushed himself between the two of them. He turned toward Clytemnestra, panting, his face red with exertion.

Mother snapped, “What do you want?”

* * *

Iamas told them your plans. He revealed how the armies had delayed in the harbor, waiting for a wind. He told of how the goddess had demanded a sacrifice, and how the wedding was a ruse designed to lure us to my death.

All around us, the air was as still and expectant as a held breath. (Me, in my bed, forgetting green and figs and wool.)

“Tomorrow,” Iamas said, “They will do it tomorrow at dawn.”

* * *

My imagination caught on the moment when you forged your plan with Menelaus, Odysseus, and Calchas. My mind had become a scatter of half-forgotten fragments. Tatters of old memories hung in the places of things I could not recall. I couldn't remember Menelaus's face, so I saw my mother's instead, wearing the beard you had when I was younger, black through and through. A restless Achilles paced as Odysseus, sandals of gold kicking up dust as he paced the fog-filled copse. Calchas wore a thin linen robe instead of priestly raiment. He turned to you, and it was Helen's mouth sneering around his demands, her indigo eyes filled with visions of my blood.

Will you sacrifice your daughter?

I will.

Was your voice loud and resonant? Did mother-Menelaus clap you on the back? Achilles-Odysseus would have spoken with grudging respect, a flicker of admiration in his chary eyes. "You're a callous son of a bitch," he'd have said, "but you do what must be done."

Did you sink your head and whisper? Did Helen-Calchas crane her shapely neck to hear you, the red ribbons on her headband fluttering over her ear?

* * *

“Tomorrow,” Iamas said. “They will do it tomorrow at dawn.”

He knelt before Clytemnestra.

“I wasn’t sure whether I should tell you. A slave owes his loyalty to his master, but he owes his loyalty to his mistress, too. I came to Mycenae with your dowry. I was a young man then. I’ve always been yours.”

“Why didn’t you tell us before?” mother pleaded. “We could have ridden back to Mycenae. Agamemnon would never have known.”

“I tried to,” said Iamas. “I am a coward.”

* * *

If it was necessary that you kill me, did you have to use a wedding as your ruse? Do you see how cruel it was to promise me all the treasures of womanhood that I would never possess?

Perhaps you thought you were marrying me off, after all, one way or another. As I if were Persephone, spending my youth on the arm of Hades. But there will be no spring for me.

* * *

Orestes struggled and cried in my arms. He could hear his mother. He reached for her voice. The sounds of Clytemnestra’s weeping carried on the air, tiny pitiful sobs.

As for me, I felt airy, as if I were standing on the top of the limestone cliffs that surround Aulis harbor like the broken half of a bowl. Betrayal forced all our hearts to skip a beat, but mother and Orestes could still cry.

Parts of me were already gone. I knew there was no turning back.

* * *

“Tomorrow,” Iamas said. “They will do it tomorrow at dawn.”

* * *

Mother’s grip was painful on my arm. “Come on,” she said, dragging me out of the tent. Orestes screamed as we went. It was the sound I would have made if I could have.

Achilles saw my unprotected face. He shielded his eyes (dark and chary, above a beard like adolescent scrub) with his sword arm. “Does the girl have to be here?”

“My husband has made fools of us all,” said Clytemnestra. “He tricked me and used your name to do it. People will think you find it amusing to lure young girls to their deaths.”

Achilles paced angrily. Iamas flinched each time Achilles’s sword clanked against his armor. “He had no right to use my name.”

“You could make them stop this. They will listen to you. You’re a hero. If you tell them to stop, they’ll have to take heed.”

Achilles halted. "You want me to tell Agamemnon to stop the sacrifice?"

"For the sake of your reputation!"

"But how will we get to Troy?"

Mother approached him. At once, the stern and proper woman I had known all my life vanished (Helen arraying herself on the bench, the folds of her garment decorating her languorous body). She became a softer, reticent figure, her eyes averted, her hands gentle and hesitant as they lifted her hem to show her plump calves. Her fingers fastened on the laces of Achilles's breastplate. Her lips moved near his neck, so close that her breath stirred the fine golden hair on his nape.

"You'll find a way," she murmured in his ear.

Achilles stayed silent. Mother lowered herself to her knees. She stared up at him, coy and alluring, through lowered lashes. Soft brown curls escaped from her braids to soften the angles of her face. Her breasts rose and fell with her breath.

"Do you want me to beg?" she asked. "My daughter and I are helpless. We have no choice but to implore you. Help us."

Achilles stepped back, repelled by her need. Mother held out her hands, her wrists upturned in supplication. ("My sister was born from an egg. I was born the normal way.")

"Do you want my daughter to beg instead? She will! She's always been virtuous, but what good will her honor do when they send her virgin to her grave?"

There was desire in Achilles's eyes. It was not for nothing that my mother was Helen's sister. But Achilles's gaze was hard and disdainful, too. For my mother was Helen's sister, and Helen was the whore who ran from Menelaus.

"Your daughter need not debase herself on my account. I will settle the matter of my honor with Agamemnon—"

Mother clasped her hands in gratitude. Achilles held out his hand to silence her.

"I will settle the matter of my honor with Agamemnon. And then *we will sail to Troy.*"

For the first time, Achilles's gaze came to rest on me. His eyes searched my face. I wondered what he saw there. I knew that I was not ugly. I thought, perhaps, in different circumstances he might have chosen to save a helpless woman with my youthful complexion and night-dark eyes. But to stir him that day, I would have had to be even more beautiful than Helen. Her beauty had gathered a thousand ships in the harbor. It would take something even greater to convince them to sail home without their war.

* * *

Mother took me back to the tent. She tucked me beneath a blanket as if I were a child. She pulled the wedding adornments from my hair, and stroked my tresses until they lay smooth and shining across my shoulders. Orestes laid beside me. He curled to-

ward my warmth like a sleeping cat, and wrapped his fists around my hair.

“Stay here,” mother said. “Rest. Keep out of sight. Keep yourself pure. It will be harder for them to justify what they’re doing if they know that you are innocent and obedient.”

She ran her fingers across my cheek.

“Don’t worry. They aren’t monsters. They won’t do this terrible thing.”

* * *

My memories were tipping out of me more and more rapidly. My mind went dark with only a few memories lit up, like lamps casting small orbs of light along a corridor.

I wandered into a lamp of memory: I was trailing you as you left my room, down the steps and across the portico. I walked quietly behind so that you would not hear me. We emerged into the forest. The fog was dissipating from the copse, revealing men among the trees, their shouts and sword-clashes harsh in the cold, dim air. You were far ahead of me, already meeting with your hequetai, exchanging shouts and strategy.

Hands tightened on my shoulders. I looked up into their faces: two young men with patchy, adolescent beards. Their breath smelled of rotting fish. One stood in his nightclothes. The other wore a helmet and a breastplate but nothing else. Beneath the helmet’s shadow, his eyes were dark and chary.

They spoke. Their voices were rapid, unintelligible, drowned out by the pounding of blood in my ears. Their eyes were enormous and sinister, large and white like the dandelion before I crushed it underneath my foot.

Smells: blood, musk, new sweat. A short, blunt limb—like the branch that you gave me to use as a sword—emerged from obscuring whiteness. It pushed blindly against my leg. “Stop,” one boy commanded the other. “Here, swing at this. One strong, smooth motion.” The breastplate clattered against my flesh with a sound like thunder. My belly, rotting like the stench of rotting fish, welling with tears of fright. (Helen in the courtyard: “Come walk with me, niece.” Her daughter Hermione looking on, jealous and ignored.)

Rotting fish and sweat. The moon dwindling like a crushed dandelion. The branch swinging. The thin high wail that a girl makes when someone swings at her with a sword that is a branch that is neither thing at all.

“You’re hopeless,” said one boy to the other. “It’s too bad you weren’t born a girl.”

Then another face, a hequetai in a tufted cloak, shouting like the clash of swords. “What’s wrong with you two? Are you stupid? Don’t you know who this is?”

The reek of shit and piss. The man’s hand on my arm, tighter than the boys’ had been.

“What are you doing here? Your father would kill you if he knew. He’d kill all of us. Be grateful I’m sending you back without shoving your slatternly face in the muck in front of him. Do you

have any modesty at all? Your mother and her people. Brazen the lot of you. Walking into men's camps like common whores. You may be beautiful, but that is no excuse. Go! Get out of here! Get back where you came from! Go!"

My feet, pounding on the path back home. The copse of trees; the grass; the empty mouth of the megaron where exhausted slaves tended the coals to keep them warm until morning.

The pounding of my heart as I lay down in bed for the third time that night. Memories of moons and fog and branches. Love for my father: flat like a branch, round like a dandelion, silver like the moon, welling up and out of me into a rush like the wind, but without the power to move a thousand ships.

* * *

Indigo shaded the sky to evening. Helen smiled a taut smile that I'd seen on my mother's face, one that did not reach her eyes.

She reached for my hand. "Come walk with me, niece."

Hermione watched us. Jealousy darkened her features. "Mother!" she exclaimed. "I have something to show you."

Helen did not look over at her daughter. "Later." She bent closer to me. "Iphigenia?"

I twisted the ribbon from Helen's headband around my fingers. I stepped toward her, but I didn't take her hand.

Hermione upturned the bench she'd been sitting on, and began to cry.

Helen led me past the canopy that sheltered the benches, and toward the black scratchings of the olive trees that stood, lonely, in the chilly air. Helen arrayed herself beneath one, her garment spreading around her in delicate, shadowed folds.

I heard footsteps behind us and turned to see Hermione peering from the shadows, hoping to overhear what her mother had to say to another girl. She was clutching something in her hand. I wondered what delicacy she'd brought to bribe her mother with this time. A honeyed fig? A flask of sweet wine?

I looked back to Helen. Her eyes changed hue with the setting sun, taking on a lighter shade like the grey of water beneath a cloudy sky. Firelight from the lamps near the benches cast flickers across her cheekbones, highlighting an undertone in her skin like bronze. She watched my gaze as it trailed over her features, and gave a little sigh of boredom.

"You'll be beautiful one day, too," she said patronizingly.

"Not as beautiful as you," I demurred.

"No one is as beautiful as I." Her voice was flat, but full of pride.

The night smelled of burning oil and women's bodies. A dandelion hung high in the sky, casting its light down on us. Helen's motives were obscured behind blankness, like soldiers' bodies disappearing into fog.

Helen distorts the world around her. Never look at her too closely. You'll go blind.

"I saw you holding your father's hand today," said Helen. "Do you feel safe with your father?"

I made a moue. I couldn't speak to my beautiful aunt without my mother beside me.

"What was that?"

"Yes," I mumbled.

Helen shifted. The folds of her garment rearranged themselves into new shimmers and shadows.

"There's something I think I should tell you, Iphigenia. About your father. Did your mother ever tell you that she was married before?"

I shook my head. Around and around, the ribbon wove through my fingers.

"She had a husband named Tantalus who was the king of Mycenae before your father came. They had a child together. A son."

Helen paused, scrutinizing my reaction. I didn't know what to do. I looked to the right and the left. There was no one nearby.

"I know this is hard to hear, Iphigenia," said Helen, "but your father came to Mycenae and murdered Tantalus and then he—" She raised her sleeve over her mouth, and looked away. "He took the baby from your mother's arms and he dashed it to the stones and smashed it to pieces. My nephew."

With a quick glance over my shoulder, I saw that the servants were clearing out the benches and the canopy. Iamas helped a young girl douse the lamps. Behind me, there was safety, there was familiarity. I stepped back. Helen caught my hand.

"He was a round, happy baby. I only saw him once before—" She broke off. "After your father killed Tantalus, he forced Cly-

temnestra to marry him, and became king of Mycenae. I see him holding your hand and I worry. My sister doesn't want you to know, but you need to be warned. Your father isn't what he seems. He's the kind of man who would kill a baby."

I broke away and fled toward the bustling servants. My feet pounded past Hermione who glared at me, and then turned toward Helen, her expression aching with desire for her mother's attention.

Jealous woman. Vain woman. Boastful woman. I never believed her. I never believed you would kill a child.

* * *

After mother fell asleep, I took Orestes in my arms and crept out of the tent. We made our way to the shore where the night sea looked like obsidian, reflecting the glow of the dandelion overhead.

I broke off a piece of branch the length of Orestes's arm and gave it to him, but I couldn't remember why. He stared at me with puzzled eyes until I took it away again and threw it toward the boats.

"Why don't you speak?" I asked him. "You're old enough."

Orestes stretched out his chubby hands. He snuggled his face against my chin and throat, warm as a cat. He liked to snuggle when I was distressed. It made him feel powerful that he, too, could give comfort.

"I am dissolving into pieces," I told him. "I need you to remember me for me. Will you do that? Please?"

He stared up at me with sincere, sober eyes.

“I am your sister,” I said. “My name is Iphigenia. I love our father very much. I am going to be murdered by our father, but you must not be angry with him for that. To be angry with our father is to be angry with everything. It’s to be angry with wind and war and gods. Don’t be angry with him.

“I was born on an autumn day when the rain fell, scented with the crisp aroma of falling leaves. I was born with the sound of thunder, but I was terrified of it anyway. When the palace rattled with strike and clash, I would run to hide behind mother’s loom. She would glare at me and tell me to find something useful to do, but when I lay down beside her and stuck my thumb in my mouth, she would lean down to stroke my hair.

“I love music, but I can’t sing. Our mother forever tells me to hush. I sang to you often anyway. When I sang, you laughed and clapped your hands. I taught you songs, but I don’t remember them anymore. I want you to remember the things I taught you, whatever they were.

“Our grandmother was raped by Zeus when he turned into a swan, and our mother’s sister was born out of an egg. Gods are our aunts and cousins, but we are only mortal. I am particularly mortal. I am weak and not very brave and I will die quickly, like those things they put in my hair for my wedding that never happened.

“I am afraid to die. I am afraid of losing simple things. Things like . . .” My memory cast a net through dark waters, coming up empty. I drew from what I saw. “Things like the smell of salt near

a dark sea, and how warm your hand is, and how much you make me feel without ever speaking.

“I’ve lost so much already. I don’t want to lose any more.

“Should I be glad that I’ll never see the sun again so that Helen can be led like an errant child back to the marriage bed she desecrated? Should I rejoice that my death will enable my father to slaughter Trojans over a vixen that ran into the hills when she went into heat? Should my life dower the frigid air that passes between my uncle and his whore?”

“I used to learn things, but now I forget them. I think I liked learning things. I need you to learn things for me now. Learn how to love someone, and how to survive a tragedy. Learn how to swing a sword, and how to convince an opponent when you have no argument but justice. Learn how to polish your armor until you become a glowing golden man, and then learn to be a flame that fuels itself. Learn to be your own wind. Will you? Will you please?”

I felt my tears falling into Orestes’s hair. He hugged me tighter. I breathed in his smell.

“When warm air rises, seeking the sun, cool air rushes in to replace it. That’s the way of the world. Joy and youth and love flow ever upward. What they leave behind is the cold consolation of the wind.”

Orestes pulled away from me. I studied his solemn face. His mouth opened. For a long second I thought he would speak, but no words came. For once, I found him inscrutable.

* * *

I feel the sea beneath me. I inhale and it waits. I exhale and it tumbles. Can you feel the pressure of my anger as it blows fiercely across your skin? I am the sand in your eyes, and the reek of the camp's midden heap blowing toward the sea. I am the force that rocks you back on your heels so that you flail and stagger. My hatred whistles through the cliffs. It screeches across the rough timber of your boats.

I grow stronger with every moment. I will be wild. I will be brutal. I will encircle you and conquer you. I will be more powerful than your boats and your swords and your blood lust. I will be inevitable.

* * *

I brought Orestes back to the tent, and we laid down beside Clytemnestra. I stared, sleeplessly, into the dark.

Possible paths stretched before me. I could go to Achilles's tent and plead my case as a whore instead of a virgin. I imagined what Helen would have done in my place, how she would color her cheeks and set her hair. She would arrange herself to look like a dandelion, easily crushed, and easily conquered. Unlike my mother, she would not have halted her fingers at the laces of Achilles's breastplate. Unlike my mother, she would have let her lips do more than hover hotly by his ear. Unlike my mother, she would have convinced him.

I could plead my case to Menelaus as his niece and an innocent. Or if he did not care for virtue, I could venture a suit to replace his lost Helen. Such methods might work on Odysseus, too. Only I was not a practiced seductress. My clumsy attempts might only succeed in doing as my mother said they would, and make the monsters feel justified when they gave me to Calchas's knife.

I could have sought you out, in the hope that the eye of night would grant you mercy. But I already knew what you would do if you found me wandering alone through a camp of soldiers.

One path seemed best: I would run out into the cold and wake the first soldier I found. "Take me to Calchas," I would tell him, and march resolutely to my fate. It would give me a fast, honorable end. And there might be a chance, just a small one, that I could be killed without seeing your face and knowing how it changed after you betrayed me.

But Orestes whimpered and tossed beneath his little blanket. Sweat damped his brow. I'd kept him up too late, overwhelmed him with disturbing confidences. I stayed to soothe him until dawn neared and I was too tired to chase my death.

I was not brave. I was only a girl.

* * *

You came to fetch me. You didn't know we knew. You pretended to be overjoyed at the prospect of the wedding that would never

happen. You took my hand and whirled me in a circle. “Oh, Iphigenia! You look so beautiful!”

I looked up into your eyes and saw that you were crying. Your smile felt as false as mother’s. Your tears washed over the place where I’d once kept the day when Orestes was born.

“Stop this,” said mother. She pulled me away from you and pushed me toward the other end of the tent. Orestes sat on the cushions beside me, a wooden toy in his hand, watching.

Mother turned to confront you. “I have heard a terrible thing. Tell me if it’s true. Are you planning to kill our daughter?”

Your eyes went blank. “How can you accuse me of such a thing?”

“I’ll ask again. Answer me plainly this time. Are you planning to kill our daughter?”

You had no answer. You gripped the hilt of your branch, and set your jaw. Tears remained immobile on your cheeks.

“Don’t do this.” Mother grasped at your shoulder. You wrenched away. “I’ve been a model wife. I’ve done everything you’ve asked of me. I ran your home and raised your children. I’ve been chaste and loyal and honorable. How can you repay me by killing my daughter?”

She snatched Orestes from the cushions and held him toward you. He began to cry and kick.

“Look at your son. How do you think he’ll react when you murder Iphigenia? He’ll shy away from you. He’ll fear you.” She turned the baby toward her. “Orestes, do you hear me? Do you want your father to take your sister away?”

You tried to grab my brother. Mother held him tight. Orestes screamed in pain and fear.

“He’ll hate you or he’ll imitate you,” mother shouted over his wails. “You’ll teach your son to be a murderer! Is that what you want?”

You pushed Orestes into his mother’s arms and stormed away from her. You stopped a short distance from me and reached for my arm. I flinched away.

“Are you happy, Clytemnestra?” you asked. “You’ve scared the girl. She could have gone thinking that she was going to be married. Now she’s going to be terrified.”

You leaned close to touch my hair. (Tugging my ponytail: “It’s a good thing you were born a girl.”) You dropped a kiss on my brow. (“I know this is hard to hear,” said Helen, “but your father is the kind of man who would kill a baby.”) I wrenched backward.

“What do you want?” I asked. “Do you want me to take your hand, blithe and trusting as any goat that follows its master back to the camp to see men fighting in the fog? I’m not a little girl anymore.”

I looked into your angry, sneering face.

“Or do I have it wrong?” I asked. “Do you want me to kick and scream? Do you want me to have a tantrum like Orestes so that later you can think back on my wailing and berate yourself about the terrible things you’ve done?”

You tossed your head like a disquieted horse. “You’re acting mad.”

I laughed. “So I’m right, am I? You’re already beginning to make me into an idea. A difficult decision rendered by a great

man. Well, stop now. This is only difficult because you make it so. All you have to do is break your vow and spare my life.”

“Menelaus and Odysseus would take the armies and bring them to march against Mycenae. Don’t you see? I have no choice.”

“Don’t *you* see? It should never have been your choice at all. My life isn’t yours to barter. The choice should have been mine.”

“You don’t understand.”

“I understand that you want me to pity you for my death.”

Wind whistled through my brain. The edges of the tent rustled. Sand stirred. Strands of mother’s hair blew out from her braids.

“You know, I never believed what Helen told me. Did he look like Orestes, father? Did my elder half-brother look like Orestes when you dashed him to the rocks?”

You glowered at my defiance. “This is how you beg me to save your life?”

“Is it sufficient?” I asked, but I already knew the answer. I inhaled deeply. “Don’t kill me.”

I had forgotten how to beg.

* * *

With almost nothing of myself remaining, I found myself re-considering my conversation with Helen. Without my ego to distract me, I concentrated on different details, imagined different motivations behind her words. Did I think Helen was arrogant

because that was what everyone said about her? Was she boastful or simply honest?

As Helen sat beneath the olive tree, watching me admire her face, she sighed. I'd always believed it was a sigh of pride. Perhaps it was weariness instead. Perhaps she was exhausted from always having to negotiate jealousy and desire when she wanted to do something as simple as holding her niece's hand.

"You'll be beautiful one day, too." Was she trying to reassure me?

"Not as beautiful as you," I demurred.

"No one is as beautiful as I."

Her voice was flat. How must it have felt, always being reduced to that single superlative?

After she told me the terrible things about my father, I fled into the crowd to search for my mother. I found her holding a stern conversation with one of Helen's women. She wouldn't budge when I tried to drag her away. She dabbed my tears and told me to find Iamas so he could calm me down.

It wasn't until I crumpled at her feet, distraught and wailing, that she realized I was suffering from more than a scrape.

She slipped her arms around me and helped me to stand, her embrace warm and comforting. She brought me to her rooms and asked what was wrong.

I repeated Helen's words. "It isn't true!" I cried. "She's mean and vain. Why would she lie about something like that? Tell me she's lying."

“Of course she is,” said mother, patting me vaguely on the head. “No one would be monstrous enough to do that.”

She pulled the blanket to my chin and sat beside me and stroked my hair (oh, mother, did you never learn another way to comfort a child?). I fell asleep, head tilted toward her touch.

Later, I woke to the sound of voices in the corridor. They drifted in, too quiet to hear. I tiptoed to the door and listened.

“I’m sorry,” said Helen, her voice raw as if she’d been crying. “I didn’t mean to scare her.”

“Well, you did. She’s inconsolable. She thinks her father kills babies.”

“But Clytemnestra—”

“Stories like that have no place in this house. I don’t understand what was going on in your head!”

“He’s a killer. How can you stand to see him with that sweet little girl? I think of my nephew every time I look at her. He’s a monster. He’d kill her in a moment if it suited him. How can you let him near her?”

“He won’t hurt her. He’s her father.”

“Clytemnestra, she had to know.”

“It wasn’t your decision.”

“It had to be someone’s! You can’t protect her from a little sadness now, and let him lead her into danger later. Someone had to keep your daughter safe.”

Mother's voice dipped so low that it was barely more than a whisper. "Or maybe you couldn't stand to see that I can actually make my daughter happy."

Helen made a small, pained noise. I heard the rustling of her garment, her footsteps echoing down the painted clay corridor. I fled back to mother's blanket and tried to sleep, but I kept imagining your hands as you threw a baby down to his death on the stones. I imagined your fingers covered in blood, your palms blue from the cold in your heart. It couldn't be true.

* * *

You called two men to escort me to Calchas. One wore his nightclothes, the other a breastplate and nothing else. Patchy adolescent beards covered their chins.

Mother wept.

You stood beside me. "I have to do this."

"Do you?" I asked.

The soldiers approached. In a low voice, you asked them to be gentle.

My emotions lifted from me, one by one, like steam evaporating from a campfire.

Fear disappeared.

"Don't worry, mother," I said. "I will go with them willingly. It is only death."

Sadness departed.

“Don’t grieve for me. Don’t cut your hair. Don’t let the women of the house cut their hair either. Try not to mourn for me at all. Crush dandelions. Run by the river. Wind ribbons around your fingers.”

Empathy bled away.

“Father, I want you to think of all the suffering I’ve felt, and magnify it a thousand times. When you reach the shores of Troy, unleash it all on their women. Let my blood be the harbinger of their pain. Spear them. Savage them. Let their mother’s throats be raw with screaming. Let their elder brothers be dashed like infants on the rocks.”

Love vanished. I turned on my mother.

“Why did you bring me here? You saw him kill your son, and still you let me hold his hand! Why didn’t you remember what he is?”

I pushed my mother to the ground. Orestes tumbled from her arms. Bloody fingers on blue hands flashed past my vision in the instant before mother twisted herself to cushion his fall.

I forgot resignation.

“Why did you write that letter? Am I worth less to you than the hunk of wood they used to make your staff of office? Would it have been so bad to be the man who stayed home instead of fighting? Let Menelaus lead. Let him appease Artemis with Hermione’s blood. If a girl must die to dower Helen, why shouldn’t it be her own daughter?”

“Did you raise me only so that you could trade me in for the best offer you could get? A wealthy husband? Influential children? A wind to push you across the sea?”

“Mother, why didn’t you take me to the hills? Helen went! Helen ran away! Why didn’t we follow Helen?”

You uttered a command. The soldiers took my elbow. I forgot how to speak.

* * *

Your soldiers escorted me through the camp to the temple. Achilles found me on the way. “You’re as beautiful as your aunt,” he said.

The wind of my forgetfulness battered against him. Effortlessly, Achilles buffeted against its strength.

“I’ve changed my mind,” he said. “It takes courage to walk calmly to your death. I wouldn’t mind marrying you. Talk to me. I only need a little persuasion. Tell me why I should save your life.”

Voiceless, I marched onward.

* * *

I forgot you.

They washed and perfumed me and decked me with the things that smell sweet. You came before me.

“My sweet Iphigenia,” you said. “If there was anything I could do to stop it, I would, but I can’t. Don’t you see?”

You brushed your fingers along my cheek. I watched them, no longer certain what they were.

“Iphigenia, I have no right, but I’ve come to ask for your pardon. Can you forgive me for what I’ve done?”

I stared at you with empty eyes, my brows furrowed, my body cleansed and prepared. *Who are you?* asked my flesh.

* * *

They led me into Artemis’s sacred space. Wild things clustered, lush and pungent, around the courtyard. The leaves tossed as I passed them, shuddering in my wind. Sunlight glinted off of the armor of a dozen men who were gathered to see the beginning of their war. Iamas was there, too, weeping as he watched.

Calchas pushed his way toward me as if he were approaching through a gale, his garment billowing around him. I recognized the red ribbons on his headband, his indigo eyes, his taut and joyless smile.

“You would have been beautiful one day, too,” she said.

Not as beautiful as you.

“No one is as beautiful as I.”

His breath stank with rotting fish, unless that was other men, another time. He held a jeweled twig in his hand—but I knew it

would be your hand that killed me. Calchas was only an instrument, like Helen, like the twig.

He lifted the jeweled twig to catch the sun. I didn't move. He drew it across my throat.

* * *

My body forgot to be a body. I disappeared.

* * *

Artemis held me like a child holds a dandelion. With a single breath, she blew the wind in my body out of my girl's shape.

I died.

* * *

Feel me now. I tumble through your camp, upturning tents as a child knocks over his toys. Beneath me, the sea rumbles. Enormous waves whip across the water, powerful enough to drown you all.

"Too strong!" shouts Menelaus.

Achilles claps him on the back. "It'll be a son of a bitch, but it'll get us there faster!"

Mother lies by the remnants of the tent and refuses to move. Iamas tugs on her garment, trying to stir her. She cries and cries, and I taste her tears. They become salt on my wind.

Orestes wails for mother's attention. He puts his mouth to her breasts, but she cannot give him the comfort of suckling. I ruffle his hair and blow a chill embrace around him. His eyes grow big and frightened. I love him, but I can only hug him harder, for I am a wind.

Achilles stands at the prow of one of the ships, boasting of what he'll do to the citizens of Troy. Menelaus jabs his sword into my breeze and laughs. "I'll ram Paris like he's done to Helen," he brags. Odysseus laughs.

I see you now, my father, standing away from the others, your face turned toward Troy. I blow and scream and whisper.

You smile at first, and turn to Calchas. "It's my daughter!"

The priest looks up from cleaning his bloody dagger. "What did you say?"

I whip cold fury between your ears. Your face goes pale, and you clap your hands to the sides of your head, but my voice is the sound of the wind. It is undeniable.

Do you still want forgiveness, father?

"Set sail!" you shout. "It's time to get out of this harbor!"

I am vast and undeniable. I will crush you all with my strength and whirl your boats to the bottom of the sea. I'll spin your corpses through the air and dash them against the cliffs.

But no, I am helpless again, always and ever a hostage to someone else's desires. With ease, Artemis imposes her will on

my wild fury. I feel the tension of her hands drawing me back like a bowstring. With one strong, smooth motion, she aims me at your fleet. Fiercely, implacably, I blow you to Troy.



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