

Vengeance Wrapped in a Sari

Only one person knew the truth. And I was doing my best to remedy that.

It was my fault; I should not have been practicing in the open. Magic had been banned for half a decade, and the king had spies hidden throughout the kingdom, lurking in every crooked crevice. It was no longer safe for those born with the song of magic in their veins. There had not been many to begin with, for magic only favoured few. Those who could bend the elements of nature to their will had started disappearing rapidly. It was a silent extermination decreed by the king, who himself possessed no magic ability.

I followed the spy who had spotted me. The man shot furtive glances over his shoulder, as though he knew he was being watched. I clenched my jaw, trying to hold tight to the darkness that I continuously wove like a cloak around me. The magic moved with me, making me shadow-like and invisible. I quietly sprinted after him, guessing that he would follow protocol and find reinforcements. Nobody was to apprehend a suspect magician on their own; we were too dangerous. The spy was probably running towards the king's soldiers, who were no doubt swaggering through the streets. And I would have to kill him before he could.

The weight of what I would have to do settled heavily on my chest making it hard to breathe. I knew what the king's orders were, what he wanted done to anyone suspected of magic. Nobody was spared; not women or children, nor the elderly. Every man, woman, and child was executed. I could still hear the screams of the victims, of my people. Righteous anger blossomed in my chest and found purchase in my fists that were aching for a fight.

I caught the man by the back of his tunic and pushed him down. He rolled over and unsheathed a dagger. Moonlight trickled through the clouds and dimly lit the forest around us. My illusion of darkness melted as the moon heaved its light on my face. The spy visibly paled, his dark eyes brimmed with apprehensiveness and turmoil. It was obvious he hadn't recognized me from afar, but he did now.

"You," he whispered with uneasiness. The wind carried away his hesitation. His eyes hardened as he lunged and my magic lashed out in response. His neck snapped with a sound that seemed to echo into the empty night. I could taste the saltiness of my tears as I forced myself to look at the man's glassy eyes, the first man I had ever killed. With trembling fingers, I closed his eyes, and said sent a quick prayer to the gods.

I ran home knowing that it came down to either his life or mine, that I didn't have a choice. But my soul felt tainted nonetheless.

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The next morning I dressed in a beautiful sari the colour of vermilion and marigolds. Taking deep breaths, I tried to work up the nerve to walk into the king's court. I donned a poker face while following the servant into the throne room. The king looked calculating, regal, and entirely in his element. A scimitar with a bejewelled handle was strapped to his waist. I knew from experience that he could wield it well.

He saw me enter and his gaze pinned me to where I was standing. I hoped the mask I wore gave away nothing underneath his prying stare. I prayed he didn't know about my magic. He grinned charmingly, but I saw it for what it was, a challenge.

“Good morning little sister,” the king drawled. I withheld a sneer and sauntered up the steps to where he sat. I stood in front of him and pressed my palms together and bowed. He raised his right hand in blessing; his eyes glinted in wicked amusement.

Anyone could note how closely we resembled each other; the same smile, cinnamon hued colouring, and midnight locks. But we differed in every other way. My brother was rash, arrogant, and infamously ill-tempered. I was like a tiger, patient and lying in wait for the opportune moment. Bowing to him, I made a quick promise that I would be his reckoning. I would make him reap for all his sins. My eyes flickered to the intricately carved throne my brother lounged on, and I offered him a smile in return. A smile that rivalled a knife’s edge.

“Good morning brother,” I said pleasantly.