

People often say that the dead look as if they are only asleep. Looking at the dead body of her mother Selene had to disagree. If her mother were only asleep then her skin, usually dusky colored and warm, would not be grayish and cold. Her lips would be rosy, not pale and bloodless. Her chest would rise and fall softly with the breath of sleep, not lay still and lifeless. Selene wished her mother were only sleeping because then there would be hope of her waking up and ending this nightmare.

When the scouts that had found the queen's body told her the news, she was frozen by her disbelief. How could she be dead? The strong and bright queen of the amazons who had fought in so many battles and ruled with such strength and grace, dead? There was no reason for her to be dead. Except for the gaping hole in her chest where the knife that ended her life was found. The encampment had erupted into chaos as amazons raced to search the woods for the culprit but nothing was found except for that damned knife, small and poorly made, something a poor farmer would use in his day to day work. A simple farmer could not have killed the queen of the amazons. At least that is what Selene kept telling herself. She was stroking her mother's head and humming an old Amazon lullaby that had been sung to her as a child when a voice called to her.

"You need to get some rest. You've been doing that since they found her." Selene turned to the opening of the tent and saw her twin sister, Sabeer, enter dirt covered and tired. She entered the tent carrying the scent of trees and sweat.

**Commented [CS1]:** This seems like an odd turn of phrase rather than "her mother's body" which makes me think this girl is distant from what is happening/seeing her mother's body as an object not worthy of emotion?

Yes, I'm reading WAY too much into this, but hey, something to look at.

**Commented [CS2]:** Maybe just me! But "dusky" is a word I've only heard used to describe skin when a person is not getting enough oxygen?

The death looking like sleep vs the reality of death thing is a nice contrast and definitely true, too, so I'm on board, 100%.

**Commented [CS3]:** Here's the emotion!

**Commented [CS4]:** who

**Commented [CS5]:** consolidation of detail?

“I will, I only wanted to be sure that she was ready for the ceremony tonight... did you see that they had cut off some of her hair?” Said Selene pulling a woven cloth over their mother’s body. She stood up and walked over to Sabeer, who was removing her armor and weapons.

**Commented [CS6]:** Who?

“Yes, a few of the others who went out with me found chunks of her hair spread across the clearing. Whoever did this really wanted to humiliate her.” Sabeers face clouded over as she recalled the sight. She sighed heavily and turned to her sister.

**Commented [CS7]:** Not sure how these two sentences connect?

**Commented [CS8]:** I’m assuming this is close third from Selene’s POV—if that is the case, then this is a head jump into Sabeer’s POV. If you are doing omniscient, just make sure it’s consistent throughout?

“ Could you get that last tie? I can’t reach it.” Sabeer was stretching her arm across her back trying and failing to reach the tie of her leather armor. Selene took the ties and set to undoing the knot. Sabeer always knotted her ties when she dressed quickly and Selene was the only one with enough patience to undo them.

**Commented [CS9]:** ...this looks like a new person speaking. But’s still Sabeer, right?

“Were you able to find any trace of the killer?” She asked hopefully as she finished with the stubborn knot.

“No, nothing. The bastard knew what he was doing, covered his tracks well. I did find this, so it wasn't a total waste of time. It must have come off in the fight.” Sabeer reached into a pouch at her hip and pulled out a long silver chain with a large blood red ruby dangling at the end. The necklace caught the light and Selene saw that the silver chain links were crusted with blood.

**Commented [CS10]:** This is mentioned earlier. Why does she think something changed?

“Mother’s necklace!” Exclaimed Selene, reaching for the stone. Sabeer snatched it away and quickly replaced the necklace back in the pouch at her side.

**Commented [CS11]:** Delayed reaction? We get the description from Selene’s POV before she reacts so it feels like she looks at it, then after a few moments grabs for it.

“The queen’s necklace.” She said correcting her younger sister. Sabeer turned and walked over to a large basin of water and began to wash her face and arms.

**Commented [CS12]:** Another jump?

“I know it’s the queen’s necklace, I am just used to seeing it on mother.” Said Selene annoyed. She’d only wanted to hold the necklace that had been her mother’s.

“Don't be mad little sister. I just didn't want you to try and burn it with her. You already have her in her best armor. Good armor that still has a lot of use in it.” Said Sabeer matter of factly.

Selene rolled her eyes. Was that really what was important right now? She hated that at times her sister could be so cold, even towards her, even when she needed her.

**Commented [CS13]:** This is an interesting conflict.

Says a lot about the situation the kingdom is in if they need to conserve armor? Or, perhaps, practicality as a culture? Or the particular coldness of the sister...though I'm not sure which it's supposed to be based on Selene's reaction. Is she disgusted with her sister for wanting to take their dead mother's armor? Embarrassed for being so sentimental?

“The queen’s necklace is a relic that has been passed down from queen to queen since the first queen, Illah. I know our history just as well as you. Besides, what would you even do with her armor? It’s too big for you.” Selene looked over at their mother’s body, a whole foot taller than both of them. Sabeer looked over as well, she sighed and went back to work washing the dirt from her face.

**Commented [CS14]:** This is a great opportunity for a show don't tell moment!

**Commented [CS15]:** Awkward placement after her last line of dialogue?

“I know, I wish I had her height. She really looked like a queen... Help me do this, I can’t see if I’ve gotten it all.” She says holding out the cloth to Selene. Selene took it and began wiping away dirt from her sister's face.

**Commented [CS16]:** ...is that what she was doing? With what?

**Commented [CS17]:** The above blocking should be attached to the dialogue it belongs to? (Sabeer's here)

“You could just use a mirror.” She said, resenting her sisters commanding tone. Anyone listening would think Sabeer was addressing a servant.

“That’s what I have you for dear sister.” She patted Selene's cheek. " Although, I don’t want to look anything like you right now. Have you been crying all night?”

Sabeer knew that she had. **As always she just wanted to point out Selene’s weaknesses, even with their mother dead.** Selene didn’t answer her, she just focused on wiping away all the dirt she could find. Slowly, she uncovered the familiar face that her and her sister shared. Dark brown, almost black, eyes. Their stern nose and strong chin. They were twins, Sabeer born only minutes before her. There were few in the camp that could tell them apart without speaking to them first. She put down the cloth and looked at her sister. Even though her face was clean there was dirt in her long black hair that would have to be washed out. Looking at the face that was a perfect match of her own she wondered if Sabeer had ever shed a tear in her life. She tossed the cloth in the water basin and sat by the fire.

“Our mother was murdered. I am allowed to feel her death and cry over her loss.” The fire crackled and popped as she stared into it. There was silence as the two of them looked into the flames but never across them and into each other’s eyes.

“I have been out since before dawn. I am going to get some sleep, I want to be rested for tonight.” **Said Sabeer, stretching her arms over her head and then laying down in her bed. She laid with her back turned on Selene and her** grief.

**Commented [CS18]:** Maybe another moment to show instead of tell?

**Commented [CS19]:** The back turned on Selene and her grief is nice!

I’m wondering about this tent though. I didn’t realize it was their tent—like they all share together with beds etc. Why is their mother’s body in there with them? A queen being attended only by her one daughter?

Selene knew that Sabeer didn't mean to dismiss her pain. She was dealing with their mother's death the best way she knew how. Neither of them expected her to die so soon, leaving Sabeer to become their queen at 18 years old. Selene knew that she was nervous at the idea. She could feel it in everything that Sabeer did and said.

Commented [CS20]: Show?

While Sabeer was nervous, Selene was relieved that it wasn't her. She had no desire to be queen and shoulder the weight of a war that the elders say they have been fighting for hundreds of years.

Commented [CS21]: Tense?

The war with the kingdom of Durin had filled her childhood with fear and worry. She remembered as a child asking her mother why they kept fighting a war that was started by ancestors that have been dead for so long. If it hadn't been for the amazons superior strength, magic, and constant moving of their camps, they would have been wiped out by Durin's larger numbers. Sabeer was inheriting a war and the responsibility of bringing her people through it alive. Selene did not envy her sister in the least, she thanked the goddess for the gift that was being the second born.

Commented [CS22]: ...show?

She shook herself out of her thoughts and stood to follow her sister's example and try to sleep before the long night ahead. As she reached her bed and pulled up the furs she heard a voice coming from the tent opening.

"Sabeer, Selene, I need to speak with you." From the sound of it the voice belonged to Telmare, the council elder. Selene looked over to Sabeer, who had always been able to sleep the moment her head touched the pillow. She sighed and walked over to the tent entrance and pulled the flap up.

“Sabeer is sleeping, she needs her rest before the queen's trial. Can this wait?” The old woman's face was serious as usual but just now it also held a look of urgency that she didn't usually see.

“What have you seen?” She asked. Selene had always been curious about the seers in their tribe.

They were mages who also had the ability to see into the future although that particular gift varied from amazon to amazon. Some could see big events, some could see only minutes into the future, and others could answer specific inquiries that were asked of them if the right circumstances were met, but those were rare.

**Commented [CS23]:** Is it a huge tribe so she wouldn't have had much contact with them? Are they secluded?

“No, this is about your mother and it has to be discussed before tonight.” The old woman stepped closer to the entrance and Selene relented, stepping back to let her in. Telmare hurries to seat herself by the fire and nods toward Sabeer's sleeping form. Selene rolled her eyes. The least the old seer could do was wake Sabeer up herself. Sabeer hated to be woken up. Selene walked over to her sister and gently shook her shoulder then quickly jumped back.

**Commented [CS24]:** tense

**Commented [CS25]:** this seems like a sort of childish reaction... I could see it if maybe it were lampshaded earlier? Or if that's what you're going for then cool.

“What!” Yelled Sabeer swinging her arm out at the air where Selene had been standing.

“Telmare wants a word.” She said gesturing to where the seer sat calmly observing the two.

There was a look on her face that sent a shiver of anticipation through her spine.

“Oh, can't this wait? I'm sure we will have plenty of time after queen's trial to discuss whatever it is.” Sabeer rolled back under her covers, Selene cringed. Telmare's face was tightly pinched, as if she were trying to keep from insulting her future queen. Their mother would never have

**Commented [CS26]:** This is, essentially, the conversation Selene just had with her (though with a slightly different tone.) so it's the same information twice.

spoken to the elder that way. *Not the best way to start your reign, sister.* Selene thought to herself as she smiled apologetically at Telmare. The old woman's face remained pinched, then she took in a breath, and her features relaxed.

“If it could wait, I would not be here now. As it is we are running out of time and there are many things to discuss. So I will just tell you; your mother came to the council some weeks ago and told us that in the event of her death she wanted Selene to succeed her as queen.”

Sabeer sat up. She looked at the old woman with disbelieving eyes and the old woman looked back, clearly pleased with her reaction. Selene, opposite to her sister, sat down, she suddenly felt very heavy. There was silence as Telmare let this news sink into the minds of the two astonished girls. Finally Sabeer broke the silence with her voice like a razor.

Commented [CS27]: Show?

Commented [CS28]: nice

Commented [CS29]: head hop?

“What do you mean? She never said anything to me about this.” Sabeer stood and took slow measured steps toward Telmare, her fists clenched.

“She was the queen, she didn’t have to tell you anything. However, she did say that she would discuss it with you both. Obviously, she never had the opportunity.” Said the old woman.

Telmare made no effort to her pleasure at Sabeer’s anger. The two had never gotten along well.

“But Sabeer is first born.” Selene said in a shaky voice. “The council would never have agreed to that.” Selene looked at her sister who nodded and looked to Telmare.

“They did, the queen made very convincing arguments.” Answered Telmare.

“Arguments that I want to hear from the whole council instead of you, **hag!**” Spat Sabeer.

**Commented [CS30]:** Wow—I didn’t realize she was like this?

“You will, they wanted to tell you both of your mothers decision but I convinced them to let me do it alone. I thought I would spare you the embarrassment of sharing this reaction with the entire council. If you are ready we can go now.” Telmare stood and walked out of the tent. Sabeer made to follow her but Selene took her arm before she could.

“Wait, Sabeer. Try to keep calm, we have to listen to...” Selene began.

“Keep calm?” cut in Sabeer. “You’re about to **be handed my birthright** and you want me to be calm?” Sabeer’s voice was hot as her temper climbed. She pulled her arm out of Selene’s grip and stepped back glaring at her.

**Commented [CS31]:** Isn’t there a trial?

“I am only saying that we should try to keep our heads until we know what is happening. We don’t have a lot of time to think of a solution **so don’t waste it by throwing tantrums.**” Selene was hurt by the anger she was getting from her sister. **She didn’t understand where it was coming from.** After all it wasn’t her idea that she be made the queen. Sabeer looked her in the eye and for a moment she calmed. Then she looked behind Selene at the shrouded body of their mother. Suddenly Sabeer’s face was swallowed by her anger.

**Commented [CS32]:** I’m struggling to figure out the dynamic between these two.

**Commented [CS33]:** I mean...She wasn’t surprised at the outburst a moment ago. Is that normal, or is that new and surprising?



"She is handing it to you, something I was trained for my whole life. What have you ever done to deserve it?" With one last glare for Selene and their mother Sabeer turned and followed after Telmare. Stunned and offended by her words Selene watched as her sister walked away. It was clear that Selene would be considered the one at fault in all of this.

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"I don't understand this, it's insanity!" Sabeer was pacing the floor of the council tent shouting obscenities and interrupting everyone who spoke. They had been there for nearly an hour and still Selene felt that nothing had been properly explained. **She understood Sabeer's anger, it even** made sense that she would be angry. The true insanity was that she wouldn't listen and she wouldn't let anyone speak. Selene's patience was nearly gone. Sabeer was ignoring that this also changed her life in ways that she hadn't wanted or expected. **Instead of listening she was throwing a tantrum like a child.** Normally, Selene would stand and leave when Sabeer got this way, considering the circumstances, she knew that would no longer be an option for her. She felt trapped. She looked at the faces of the six women sitting in front of her and was surprised to see them looking back at her, expectant. Telmare most of all. The old woman's eyes moved to Sabeer and back, one of her eyebrows arched as if to say *'It's not up to us to stop this'* Selene glanced over to Sabeer who was frantically waving her arms in the air, yelling, and then back to the Council. She took a deep breath and knew what had to be done next.

**Commented [CS34]:** A few paragraphs ago she didn't. What changed?

**Commented [CS35]:** Same thing said a few paragraphs ago?

"Enough, Sabeer. We are getting nowhere with you screaming like a child every time someone says something that you don't like." said Selene standing and facing her sister. She could feel her stomach tense as she said the words but she went on.

"We need to hear what the council has to say and once we have then we can decide what, if anything can be done." Sabeer stared at her with her mouth open as if looking for a response but was too surprised to find one. It was not that Selene had ever lost an argument with her sister, she had just avoided being in one as much as possible. Sabeer did not like to lose at anything and she hated being wrong. If you were foolish enough to have been caught in an argument with her, it could last for hours. She would yell, call you names, and in the end if you happened to be right she would smile smugly as if you're brain had somehow been damaged and repeat how wrong

**Commented [CS36]:** I do like that she has a personality—she's softer but not easy to roll over.

**Commented [CS37]:** Isn't this still Selene speaking? It's attached to Sabeer blocking.

**Commented [CS38]:** I'd love to have this shown! If we know her and what she's capable of before we get to the inciting incident then her behavior will only further confirm what we've been shown rather than having to stop every few sentences to explain?

#### Things we like:

- The breaking point in sibling relationships is always so interesting, and I loved seeing it here! Agreed, I absolutely adore sister stories and it's fun to watch them crash and burn. Agreed!
- Sabeer's view on "good armour" tells a lot about her.
- I like the implied political interplay between council and monarch, that the queen can't just do whatever without consequence
- I like that this world has seers/I'm excited for the sort of plot points that can come about from that worldbuilding detail.
- I like that Selene has a personality--so often I feel like the "chosen one", especially if they're unseating a particularly violent/angry type tends to be a little too innocent, untrained, and sweet. I like that Selene calls her sister on how she's acting because it shows they have an actual relationship and it feels much more realistic to how sisters are.
- I like that we have an inciting incident!

#### Things that might need a second look:

- Emotional connections! I feel like we're in a very distant third POV and I would understand the situation better if we had a more visceral, emotional reaction from Selene more often. For instance, in the first few pages when she mentions that the queen's hair has been cut because "someone really wanted to humiliate her," it would be great to mention there how Selene feels about that. Really get in her head. Same with when Selene is told that she is actually in line to be queen next. We get a lot of emotional

reaction from Sabeer, but not from Selene, and we're supposed to be in Selene's head here.

- Watch your tenses! This is largely in past tense but every now and then some present sneaks in and it's a little jarring.
- I might reconsider having the enemy kingdom be called Durin, unless you want to punch up at Tolkien.
- Can Selene not abdicate? Sabere wants the throne, Selene doesn't. I like the lampshading that the former queen had to convince the council to allow the heir switching, but all Selene has to do is threaten to not queen good. You do a good job of showing a number of traits that would make Sabere a questionable monarch, but Selene doesn't appear to care about that.
- I would LOVE some showing here--there's so much information packed in her that's GREAT but so much of it is told right after something happens in the story to give context. A line of dialogue or a reaction or something, then a few sentences to explain why it is or is not what is normal for the character we're watching. If we know people before they're put under pressure, then we're afraid along with the main character or annoyed or whatever else rather than having to stop the narrative to say how we should feel about what we're seeing.
- Might just be me but I struggled to understand the dynamic between the sisters--this might be related to my above comment--I wasn't sure how close they were. They seem to still have a relationship, or maybe Selene is trying to have a relationship but Sabeer is only interested in being queen? What surprises Selene vs what doesn't in the way Sabeer reacts--is it more of the same and she's about to give up? Is it all new and markers of their relationship falling apart?