

Doomed Sisters

By Sofia Blueman

She sat in a small room. It was dark and damp, but warm. The air smelled of blood. The girl had grown used to it — the darkness and the metallic tang. A lot of time had passed, probably a couple of days. The shaman would come soon.

Or maybe he won't come. The test wasn't over yet. Perhaps she could still be reborn. The girl hugged her knees. Time slowed down and sped up, but nothing happened. In the complete darkness, all her senses were heightened. But here it was useless. No matter how hard she tried to hear something, there were no sounds around. Only the smell of blood. And fear. It thickened around the girl, took shapes in the darkness, smelled of sweat. Sour, repulsive, sharp. All that was left was to wait. And pray that the Goddess would hear.

“Hear me. Please. I hope for your favour. Choose me, please, choose me. I am strong and healthy. Choose me.”

The girl addressed the Goddess again and again. What else could she do in a tiny room with nothing but walls? Only pray, think, and remember. She remembered the first time she saw the shaman. She had been a little girl. He stood there — heavy, powerful. He smelled the same as this room — blood. The shaman talked about the Goddess and the test, his voice vibrating low under the ceiling of their house.

“Do not be afraid, you all will go through this. The test is an honour. This is the only way you can make a sacrifice to the Goddess. We all live to serve her. Accept your destiny.”

She heard these words many times after, but that first time stuck in her memory. It felt like everyone knew some big adult secret but had been afraid to say it out loud. Until then.

All destinies are predetermined from birth. The villagers, the sisters, and the shaman — they all know this. The Goddess gives them life and purpose. They laboured for her: feeding, protecting, serving. She was the limit of everything and the meaning of life. Or death.

Some resisted. From time to time, someone argued with the shaman, refused their destiny, or tried to escape. All of them were cruelly punished. Even those who simply stopped working. They were caught, brought to the shaman, and sacrificed to the Goddess. No one could argue with destiny.

The girl also accepted her fate. She was not the first one who entered the testing room. And probably not the last. Other sisters had gone there, too. But no one had ever returned. Everyone knew that this was the end. Unless the Goddess decided otherwise. They said she chose those who are capable of being reborn as a new Goddess. And each sister secretly hoped to pass the test. And those whom the Goddess didn't choose were sacrificed.

“You have to be strong. You have to be brave. Only the strongest will survive.”

So the girl still had a chance. Others were less lucky. Half of the sisters died at an early age, never even reaching the room.

“Hear me. I hope for your favour.” The girl began to sway back and forth.

She remembered the first time a sister was taken. It was a long time ago. She and her sisters had been playing in the shared house. Some were jumping on the beds, some were running after each other. There were shouts and laughter all around. The noise suddenly stopped when the shaman entered. He silently looked at all the sisters. Their reddish crowns froze in front of him like a rabbit frozen by the musky scent of a predator. A heavy gaze stretched from one to the other, slowly studying, looking right through them, reaching to their very souls.

Then the gaze stopped. The heavy figure silently approached one of the sisters and took her hand, not painfully, but the girl jerked in surprise as if she had been struck.

"Let's go, child," he said slowly. And he led her away.

And although everyone knew that this would happen, that they would have to go through a test and sacrifice themselves, no one truly believed it. The moment the girl realized they could take her away, too, hit like a falling stone. After that, the house was noisy with voices for days. Someone cried, someone screamed, and someone fell into silent hysteria.

The shaman came many more times. And gradually, the sisters came to terms with it. Sometimes, rarely, he would take two at once, and sometimes he would not appear for a long time. Someone said that there was a second house, and the shaman would take sisters from there, too. But the girl didn't believe it. Anyway, what difference did it make where they took you from, until it was your turn?

“I am strong, I am healthy. Choose me.” The girl concentrated on her words. If you believe, then the Goddess will hear. She will hear.

A creaking sound came from the wall. Someone entered the room.

“It’s her, the Goddess. She heard me, she came for me,” the girl thought.

Excitement ran through her body, she couldn’t get enough air, she wanted to inhale as deeply as possible, like before jumping into deep water. Could it be that she had passed the test and now she could be reborn? The sisters were right. If you prayed hard enough, if you asked, the Goddess would hear.

The girl felt warmth. The Goddess was standing very close. Now she would come and take the girl with her. The Goddess would make her reborn. A new Goddess. It was time. She passed the test. The idea warmed the girl like a spring heated by the sun. The darkness no longer frightened her. But the smell of blood had grown stronger.

“Choose me, I’m ready,” the girl whispered, blissfully.

She moved towards the warmth, stretched out her hands. Her fingers were noticeably shaking, but it was invisible in the darkness. The girl's whole body tensed and leaned forward. She smiled, feeling the presence of the Goddess.

“It's time to go, child,” the shaman's quiet voice called her.

The girl jerked. Her insides instantly contracted.

"It can't be! No, not him," she thought.

The girl pressed her hands to her chest. She stepped back, her legs buckling. The darkness around began to spin.

"No! The Goddess would hear me! Choose me, choose me!" Only one thought was racing through her mind, “Hear me. I’m healthy, I’m ready. Choose me!”

The girl began to pray again. She spoke louder and faster. There wasn’t enough air, she swallowed it with the words. Beads of sweat slid down her sides and back. Like flies crawling on a piece of meat.

“It's time. Let's go. The Goddess will mourn you,” the shaman's voice sounded closer. He was moving towards her.

"No! No, she will still choose me. I still have time. Come on, listen to me! Hear me! Choose me! Choose! I am healthy and strong, I’m everything you want, just choose me. Me!”

The girl screamed and cried until all the words merged into an indistinct "mmmmm-aaaa."

The shaman waited a little, stepped forward, and gently took her by the shoulder. He grabbed her firmly, but not painfully, and led her out of the room.

“Don't worry, child, it will all be over soon.”

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A girl lay curled on the bed, her legs drawn up. She had been sick all day, she didn't want to eat or drink. Her belly twisted, like someone had wrapped her insides around a fist and was squeezing — then loosening, then squeezing again. Like waves, the pain came and went with a short respite, only to overwhelm her again. Her legs twitched with cramps. She felt nauseous. And sad. She even wanted to cry. Every month is the same thing.

But it's okay, a few more days and it will get better. It will all be over soon.

Scientific Statement

This story uses metaphor to explore menstruation and the physiological processes of the menstrual cycle, personifying endometrial cells as villagers undergoing ritual sacrifice. The girl, the egg (oocyte), is placed in the “testing room,” which symbolizes the fallopian tube (oviduct) environment where the egg waits. Her prayers to the Goddess reflect the biological drive for survival, hope for selection, and the possibility of becoming fertilized.

Each month, multiple follicles begin to grow, but usually only one becomes dominant and capable of ovulation. This selection is orchestrated by the body's internal regulators: hormones such as follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinising hormone (LH), oestrogen, and progesterone, along with local growth factors and immune signals. These act like the “shaman” in the story, continually influencing reproductive cells and tissues. Just as the shaman chooses which sisters may live and which must be sacrificed, the hormonal and immune systems determine which follicle survives, and eliminate damaged or nonviable cells to maintain balance.

The ceremony or test in the allegory corresponds to the menstrual cycle itself. If the egg is not fertilized, hormone levels fall, triggering menstruation: the shedding of the uterine lining along with the unfertilized egg. The body then resets for the next cycle.

The blood-scented room, the darkness, and the cycles of fear and prayer all reference the physical and emotional experiences of menstruation. The closing parallel scene (where a girl

experiences menstrual pain) grounds the allegory back into lived female experience, linking the mythic imagery with everyday physiology.

Bibliography

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