

THE MYTHOLOGICAL CASSANDRA

Cassandra, the chaste and beautiful daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, is gifted in prophecy, foretelling the future and in comprehending languages. She is Apollo's priestess. Apollo, god of light, music, poetry and prophecy, propositions her, she refuses him, and her refusal so angers Apollo that out of spite the spurned god spits in her mouth this curse: For every truth you utter, none will be believed!

Cassandra's truth-saying cuts through the veils that buffer everyday life. Her refusal is an act of brave integrity, and as such she is often seen as the quintessential victim, one who is blamed and then punished for saying no to a powerful god's commands. Veiled and unveiled, through Cassandra, we see how death carves out a deeper truth, a starker beauty borne of our own mortality. She speaks the future plain, but no one believes her.

After the fall of Troy, Cassandra arrives at the house of Atreus as the war-prize concubine of victorious King Agamemnon. He is falling into a trap! she cries out, catching the scent of what will come—and still, no one believes her.

CASSANDRA :

No longer my prophecies like some young girl new-married glance from under veils, but bright and strong as winds blow into morning and the sun's uprise shall wax along the swell like some great wave, to burst at last upon the shining of this agony. Now I will tell you plainly and from no cryptic speech; bear me then witness, running at my heels upon the scent of these old brutal things done long ago. There is a choir that sings as one, that shall not again leave this house ever: the song thereof breaks harsh with menace.

Agamemnon by Aeschylus tr: Richard Lattimore

KASSANDRA :

Okay. No longer. No longer out from veils like some first blush bride shall my oracle glance but as brightness blows the rising sun open it will rush my oceans forward onto light—a wave of woes far worse than these.

No more riddles. I know that smell.

Agamemnon by Aiskhylos tr: Anne Carson