



The knife fresh in his back, I knew – Ælfthryth's Tale by Anne Philpott

Even as his warm fresh blood began to fall in steady rivulets across the flanks of his horse, mixing his beautiful noble blood with sweat of his beast. I knew.

Even as my beloved's warm blood pooled on my beloved Corf Stone, the knife fresh in his back, his face all youth and innocence. I knew.

Even with his death mask a confused look to me his protector to explain. I knew.

His face asked as I ran to him as he fell to hard stone floor. The Thegn's hand still on the dagger in his back. He looked directly at me for explanation, to ease his confusion, as he had done many times before.

As the void of grief whipped the edges of me.

I knew I would be blamed. For my beloved son's death.

I knew all their eyes would look on me, Dowager Queen Ælfthryth, and see a maternal murderer, a witch, a killer, a hag, a powerful woman. This my punishment for being the first Queen of England, for uniting England for ten good years. Punished for my far reported beauty that captivated Edgar but also Æthelwald.

Only men can imagine a mother could kill her child. What do they know of the bond of the mother showing a child the night stars in the Gap of Corf, preparing him for the cruelty of rule. What do they know of my soothing of the arguments between him and his true brother Æthelred.

When his other mother the beautiful clear 'white duck' Eneda died, I took him in, as if grown in me. Eneda's voice guiding me. My love no different whether by pure blood or pure love. But these Thegns know only to seek power through me. With ridiculous notions of rightful birth or legitimate union.

Blood pooled at my feet, and I screamed. How could they, did they not know a mother's love? Its joy now backed by it's reverse – the cold grip of grief.

They believed I would be pleased, with their murderous secret plot. But what power is worth this, the death of my child. They secretly plotted for their power, forcing me as their ignorant figurehead.

Power is overrated. I have lived ten full lives already. I was ready for dowager hood, with nunneries to protect. I have lived...from Wessex to Worcester...sat on Royal Throne as first queen of England...advocated as Forespeca for women. Like Edith, who turned down the throne, I have no need for power. Only Thegns could imagine I would be unhappy with less.

Let history punish me. This our burden as woman. My grief stands higher than five Corf Castles and diminishes all else. Who cares for reputation when you have lost a child.

I have no spirit to defend myself, I only want death to take me not him. My wide eyed, impulsive, naïve, coltish, stupid child, the king of England.

Let my blood fall now onto these stones at Corf and take me with him.

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Author's viewpoint

Listen to Anne chatting about her Tale on Alfred FM: <https://on.soundcloud.com/DQJXeKKZfTwfSUC5A>