i bleed red



R. S. H.



As I wash my hands in Iridescent Fountain—the pool holding a place of honour in the very heart of the city—I am reminded of my brief incarceration in the public education system. We read a play by a long dead writer, which at the time I did not understand.

"*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red*."

Now those words are as clear to me as the Fountain used to be.



The angry red brand on the back of my neck feels almost as hot as it did this morning when they burned it onto my skin. The sweltering afternoon sun has sweat running down my back in a torrent as I prune the iridescent roses of the capitol building. The roses, like the fountain in the centre of the square, are symbols of the Iridescent's supremacy, the reason they can brand Reds like me and make us work menial jobs for just enough credits not to starve to death. It's my first day among the branded workforce and it shows in the number of cuts on my hands from the thorns. My red blood drips down onto one of the oil-spill coloured blossoms. I scoff at the irony of red blood watering iridescent blooms.

It is said the Iridescent were once human, but I—as much as they—have forgotten their humanity. They are more machine than flesh now, which is why they bleed oil. It was our undoing, relying on machines, because as the rich became them and lost their emotions practices that had been outlawed for hundreds of years were born again.

"You don't want to let them see you bleed," a rough voice says to my right. Its owner is a man whose withered face hides his youthful blue eyes. He can't be more than thirty years old, but we Reds age fast. "It angers them to see red." He glances at the Iridescent guard watching the group of us, large vaporizing gun held proudly in his arms. The man ducks his head as the guard's gaze passes over us, but I look the Iridescent directly in his mechanized eyes in my own brief moment of rebellion. Try as they might I won't let them stamp out the spark in me.

With his attention on me, the guard does not notice the little girl in a frilly sheen dress climb over the barrier separating the square from the busy street. The magnetic suspension of the vehicles driving by could crush her even at this slow speed and as much as I want to see the Iridescent pay for the suffering they cause, I can't let a child die. I abandon my patch of roses and sprint towards her, vaulting over the barrier and picking her up before she can be smashed to bits by the extreme force of the passing cars. The girl looks at me with wide, whirring eyes as I lift her out of harms way and into the arms of a woman dressed in a white suit.

"Oh, my baby!" the woman cries, hugging the girl tight to her chest. The uncharacteristic outburst of emotion is what prevents me from recognizing the woman immediately. She's President Selma Kain. Her face is plastered everywhere in the Iridescent sector of the city. Her face is everywhere in the Red sector too, though there is some difference in style and representation. I lock eyes with the President of the Iridescent State, not wavering under her intense stare. "Thank you for saving my daughter, Red...22BDH," she says, most definitely scanning my identity with her all-seeing robot eyes.

With this new nugget of information, I almost wish I hadn't saved the child. It would have been worth it to see the President suffer like my parents and my older siblings have at the loss of a child. That's why I've vowed never to have my own; I won't give them another way to hurt and control me.

"It is my duty as a Red to safeguard the future of our society, Madam President," I say, bowing my head slightly as I am expected to. I have learned that there are times to let my spark show and times to pretend it doesn't exist. This is one of those times.

"As a reward I gift you the rest of the day off and 100 credits," she says, putting her daughter down but not releasing her hand. I hear a ping as the credits are transferred to the storage band on my wrist. Her part done, the President turns on her heal and walks away, dragging her offspring behind her.

As I watch the pair disappear up the capitol building steps I notice my crimson handprint on the back of the young Iridescent's dress, the blood still wet from when I shredded my hand on the thorns of those cursed flowers.

*It angers them to see red*, I think to myself. *Good thing that's all that I am.*



 The morning after my day off, the Red sector seems to hum with the presence of so many vaporizing guns and with them Iridescent guards. Whispers and hushed debate in the mess hall overtake the sound of cutlery as people are too concerned with the increase in security to actually eat the tasteless mush they pass off as food here. I slide into a free seat beside a heavily pregnant woman.

 “What’s going on?” I ask her.

 She grips her distended middle tightly before answering. “There was a murder in the Iridescent sector,” she says, almost too quickly for me to understand, as if the words alone will kill her too.

 “Do they know who did it?” I ask in the same hushed tone.

 “I don’t understand how anyone could do something like that. I’ve heard her entrails were torn apart and her blood sprayed on the wall. What kind of a person could do that to a little girl?” The woman looks ill at the thought, clutching her unborn child like her arms will protect it from the evils of the world. Her efforts are futile as the child will be born with red blood in its veins, painting a bright red target on its back for the real evils to shoot at.

 “They think it was a Red, don’t they,” I say, looking around at the guards. “They think it was one of us.” The woman nods, confirming my suspicion.

 I see a flash of white in the field of faded garments of the Red and the pristine black uniforms of the guards and realize that the President herself is here to address us. She and her entourage of yet more guards plow their way through the crowd to a raised platform made for just this purpose. They don’t even need to silence the crowd as the Red cower in fear at her very presence.

 “Yesterday evening,” President Kain says, “a savage Red invaded the capitol building and viciously murdered my daughter, Evelyne.” The eyes of freighted Red meet but no words are said. “All Reds have been accounted for and eliminated as suspects—” voices break out at this, the Reds finally realizing the injustice of them accusing us when all of us are accounted for.

 “If all are accounted for why blame us!” I yell, standing up from my seat. Several shouts of agreements follow my outburst. The President locks eyes with me.

 “All Reds have been accounted for,” she says again, “but one.” She holds my gaze and every Red turns to look at me as well. I’m sure the look on the pregnant woman’s face is one of horror, but I keep my eyes on Kain.

 I don’t fight as they take me, binding my hands and legs in cold metal restaints. The drive through the city to the capitol building is likely to be my last, but I do not care; this place is not my home. No place where my people suffer will ever be my home.

 I am locked in an icy room with a mirror along one wall for what feels like a small eternity before someone enters to accuse me of the cold-blooded murder of a child. This person, however, lacks the lustrous skin and dead eyes that would make them Iridescent.

 “You’re Red,” I say, genuinely surprised.

 “Yes,” agrees the Red woman, siting down across for me at the table I am bound to, “and so are you.” She opens a file folder on the table. “Your name is Jericho, or at least it was before you were apprehended. You have been known to associate with rebels against the state, specifically the militant RED HUNT, and are thus a strong suspect for a political assassination.”

 “Why are you doing their bidding? They really can’t do their own dirty work, can they,” I spit at the Red woman. She starts tapping her pen on the table in what can be interpreted as a nervous tick.

 “You’re Red, how do your emotions allow you to kill?” she asks, still taping the pen. It finally starts to click in my mind.

 “Having emotions does not mean Reds can’t kill, it means we have the morals not to kill without reason, like the Iridescent do,” I say. “Like you do.” In a burst of speed, I grab the pen from her fist and as she reaches to snatch it back I plunge it through her hand and into the table, uncapping the flow of oil from her veins.



 For the duration of my short stay in the capitol building I am housed in the cleanest room I have ever set foot in. It is a cube in dimension with a toilet and a small bed in the corner. When they brought me here following my altercation in the interrogation room I saw a whole hallway of doors just like the one I am currently locked behind, telling me the Iridescent are used to putting Reds on trail for one infraction or another. My mind wavers as I am left with nothing to do but stare at the sterilized walls of my cell, but it is the thought of other Reds receiving unjustified punishment at the hands of these barbarians that solidifies my decision.

 It’s too late to back out anyway as the same Iridescent that attempted to masquerade as a Red arrives to summon me to my trial. Her hand is flawless once again, but now her eyes hold a certain hatred for me. I smile at her in greeting to irk her even more. She and several guards escort me through the halls and I make sure to shuffle as slowly as I can in my uncanny amount of restraints.

 Arriving in front of the large, white double doors I feel like a lamb about to enter the slaughterhouse. My instinct is proved correct as when the doors open the Iridescent council waits. The twelve members sit on a raised platform in a semicircle around a small wooden chair, each looking as emotionless as the next save for the President who sits in the largest chair at the apex of the circle. She looks like she’s out for blood, my blood. Iridescent of less importance sit behind me, some with cameras to capture this victory for the Iridescent forever on film.

 “Please be seated, Jericho—22BDH,” she says with malice dripping from her voice. It is clear that she is my judge, jury, and likely executioner as the rest of the council hangs on her every word. I am shackled to the tiny wooden chair and forced to look up into the face of my oppressor. “You are a member of the militant rebel group known as the RED HUNT, are you not? Please answer only ‘yes’ or ‘no.’”

 “Yes,” I say proudly.

 “And does the RED HUNT wish to over throw the Iridescent ruling class?”

 “We wish only to free our people.”

 “By killing innocent Iridescents?”

 “Innocent Iridescents born from the labour and death of Reds? It is unfortunate that you have had to feel the suffering you inflict on my people, is it not?” I mock her.

 President Kain stands up and leans over the barrier separating us. “You do not have a people!” she screeches. “We own all of you filthy Reds!” Her face twists into a hideous snarl, reflecting the monster she is inside. She turns to her fellow council members. “This primitive beast has killed my daughter—the future of our society! Its *red* *blood* was found on her corpse! I demand justice! I demand punishment of the highest degree!” A ragged breath leaves her petite frame. “All in favour!” Her hand shoots up, followed without hesitation by eleven more.

 I smile, knowing that by the evening the footage taken of the past few moments will be aired for all the world to see thanks to the rebels hidden in the crowd of cameras. I smile at the shattering of the emotionless façade of Iridescent objectivity. I smile at the thought of anger rising up in the husks of Reds who have suffered at the hands of the Iridescent, their sparks rekindled into burning fires. I smile at the uprising forged by the very hands of those who need rising against, as is always the case.



The fake Red woman arrives the next day to guide me to my death. Today she is identifiably Iridescent in a dress very similar to the murdered daughter of President Kain on her last day of life. Her apparel is clearly meant to get a rise from me but today I take a page from the Iridescent handbook and school my emotions into oblivion. In the maze of the capitol building my shackles hinder my movements, but upon entering the coliseum behind it they are removed, officially making me free for the first time in my life.

 The haggard faces of my fellow Red fill the upper stories of the coliseum, all having been given the day off to watch me be made an example of. There are varying expressions ranging from sorrow to anger. My people seem to have gotten the message. I smile, knowing I am making a difference by becoming their martyr.

The whole of the Iridescent council and many more spectators line the bottom stories, their faces largely blank save for President Kain who grins demonically. It must be painful considering how underused the synthetic muscles of her face are. The irony of the Kain herself being more the cause of the upcoming revolution than I am makes me smile brighter. It was decided when society was rebuilt that the class not clouded by emotions would rule and Kain is undermining this decision.

An electronic projection flickers to life above me, broadcasting the short life of the deceased infantile oppressor above my head. The lights cascade on Kain’s face, making the sharp angles of her face almost hollow and skeletal. I did not think the Iridescent capable of mourning the death of their young. I am sorely mistaken as Kain seems to intimately feel the loss of her child. The projection fades with on the image of three words written in Iridescent blood on a wall and I gaze into Kain’s sad eyes.

“Kill the monster that murdered my child,” she says, her voice wavering under the weight of her emotions. I was wrong about her being my executioner; her hands would not be able to hold the gun with the way tremble.

I have not lived long enough to culminate very many regrets and I am not planning on starting now, so I push down the regret of not giving the Iridescent the chance to change. President Kain’s eyes brim with tears and my expression turns stony as my executioner steps out onto the packed red sand, his footsteps slow and deliberate.

I thought I wouldn’t be afraid to face my death, but now, looking him dead in the eyes, I am afraid. Thousands of people, my kin and otherwise, hold their breath as the executioner levels his gun at my heart. The whole city—the whole world—has ground to a halt to watch me die.

All because I bleed red.

The resounding crack of the gun assails my ears, but I don't waver as the penny sized piece of metal tears me open. I smile as my thick, red blood wets the dry earth under my feet. Thunder rumbles in the distance and I know, in the near future, it will be pouring.

