

September 28, 1929

Savannah, Georgia

A strong wind blew against a large old fashioned house, trees scraping against the roof and windows. From the top of the stone chimney, the wind blew in, threatening to put the fire out. Walking over to the hearth, and picking up the wrought iron fire poker, Sebastian shifted the logs around, just trying to keep himself busy. He placed a few pieces of chopped wood down on the smoldering fire, the flames creeping to the logs.

Sebastian stared into the fire, his eyes searching for an answer to his situation. He gave a forceful thrust of the poker into the wood, splitting one of the logs in half. A chunk of wood hopped out and onto the carpet in front of the fireplace. In quick succession, he kicked the wood back into the fire and stomped on the carpet but it was too late. There was a black hole on it now and he knew his wife, Amara, would kill him for it.

This was her favorite rug, the one they had picked out together while on tour in France just last spring. She told him it reminded him of spring in her home country, Dutchland: warm reds and yellows mixed with cool blues and greens. A collage of the sky meeting the earth on a clear bright spring morning. But now, he has ruined it with his carelessness.

The memories of their vacation were cut off, his wife's screams coming from the other room. He gripped the poker tight, eyes fixed on the door. He wanted to go into the room, hold his wife tight, and tell her that everything would be alright. That she and their baby will live to see another day. But he couldn't, he knew he would just get in the way and he wasn't even sure if that was true. Deep down, he knew the truth: the chances of his Amara surviving this were not good. The only thing he could do was pray to a God he wasn't even sure he believed in.

It felt like time had stopped when one of the midwives timidly stepped out of the room, the shouts from before did not follow her outside.

The midwife had a pensive look on her face, her brow pulled tight, her lips pursed even tighter. Her face was flushed, once neatly tucked away hairs now glued to her forehead and neck. The gown she wore was covered in blood, much more blood than Sebastian thought to be possible from one person. He was already beginning to fear the worst, his gut twisting in knots, he could feel his throat tighten and his mouth dry out. What had become of his beloved wife?

“Amara...” Sebastian finally managed to choke out, the words coming out in a croak. “How...how is she?”

The midwife could only shake her head. She moved to the side, the scared husband rushing in.

The room smelled of many different herbs and flowers, sweet and musky mixing with the iron smell of blood and the pungent smells of midwives' sweat. The room was hazy from the smoke of incense and melting candle wax, the candles being the only light in the small room. In the middle of the room, surrounded by midwives, laid on a mattress, blankets, and fur pelts used in an attempt to keep her comfortable was Amara.

Two of the midwives gently patted Amara's neck and face with damp cloths while another did her best to clean up the blood. The hair that once sat atop Amara's hair now fell in large coils, soaked with sweat and water. Her dark, rich skin had now paled as if the sun that burned inside her had been extinguished. She looked as if she was sleeping, her eyelids drawn, her face unmoving. It could hardly be told that she was still alive; the only indicator being the small naked tanned lump on her chest rising and slowly falling.

Amara opened her eyes, the task feeling impossible for her to do. She tried to raise her head but one of the midwives stopped her. “You must not move right now, sweetheart. Reserve your energy, you have a baby to protect.”

Amara let out a chuckle, her voice weaker than a newborn sheep drying to bleat for the first time. “Protect...what use is holding on to energy when I know what is to come next?” Still, Amara rested her head back down, placing one of her hands on top of her baby's back. She glanced towards the door when her husband stood. “Is that you, Sebastian? Please, come here.”

Wasting no time, the man went to his wife's side, taking her free hand into his. “My wife...my beautiful wife. Is there anything I can do to ease your pain? Anything at all?”

“Beautiful...you fill my head with such wondrous lies, thank you. The only thing I ask of you is to stay by my side.” Amara's voice cracked, and her eyes began to glaze over, a single tear escaping and sliding down her cheek. Sebastian gently wiped it away with his thumb, cupping Amara's face. “I can't thank God enough, for giving me the strength to hold the gift we've created before I take my eternal rest. I want to thank you, for the love and wonder that you've shown me over the years. Please show our daughter the same promises and more.”

Hot tears slowly dragged down Sebastian's face. His hand around Amara's tightened. “I can't let you go, not yet! Please, don't leave me.” His voice shook

and cracked, his heart pounding with fear. Why couldn't she stay? Why did it have to be like this?

"I ask one more thing of you, my husband. Please, take me to the hilltop and watch the sunrise with me one last time. Yes, I think I can make it until then, to have one night and one morning with you and our daughter, that is all I ask for now."

Sebastian turned his gaze over to the midwives who had since made themselves scarce and stood by the door of the room. "Please, will you help us?"

The women began to move, working to make the couple's last wish come true.

One midwife grabbed the newborn and wrapped her carefully in soft fur. Another took off Amara's soiled robes and two more dressed her, the last midwife doing her best to rearrange her hair. Once all was settled, Sebastian picked up his wife, cradling her head in the bend of his elbow, her legs draped over his forearm. The midwife who wrapped the baby, placed her in her mother's arm. Amara let out a soft thank you, placing a soft kiss atop the baby's head.

Before leaving the room, Sebastian turned to the group of midwives. "I know you did all you could, thank you for everything." Sebastian left the house for his journey, holding onto his wife and child dearly.

On the walk to the tallest hill, Sebastian and Amara reminisced about their courting days, remembering the first time they caught each other's eye at the market on that fateful day four years ago. Sebastian confessed how nervous he had been, unsure of himself with such a beautiful woman in his presence. Amara said that she had known instantly that she wanted nothing more than to be with him. That he was the most gracious and loving man she had ever met. Sebastian couldn't help but cry at her words. How could he be all these things if he couldn't even save her?

The sun was beginning its ascend as the trio reached the top of the hill.

"I have already sent a letter to my family, they will retrieve my body in three days but will leave our daughter with you," Amara said once they had settled on top of the hill. Sebastian held her close, trying to fight off the reality of the situation. Time was against them.

"I haven't a clue how to raise a child, let alone a daughter. If she is anything like you, she will be fierce and headstrong, too adventurous for her own good."

Amara laughed. It was the laugh that he had grown so fond of over the years. The kind of laugh that came from deep inside, that was unapologetic and

quelled his restless spirits. A laugh he knew he would never be able to hear again. He clung to this, never wanting to forget anything about the woman in his arms.

“Yes, she will cause you headache but it will be for the betterment of you both. She will bring delight and inspiration to your life, just as you have to me.”

The two sat in silence, watching the sunrise, casting a blanket of sunshine and warmth upon them.

“Amara, wait for me, please.”

“I wouldn’t think of anything different.”

“What will we name her?”

“Agnodice.”

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October 18, 1956

*West Virginia, East of the Appalachian Mountains*

A small farmhouse sits in the middle of an open field. Its outside is painted in a simple light blue, the trimming of the railing and porch banisters a white that compliments it so well. To the left of the door sat two rocking chairs, both brown, one with a worn-out pillow on the seat. The cold night air slowly rocked them both. A windchime on the left of the porch twinkled and twirled, the few wind spinners in front of the yard spinning gently. Southern live oaks stood close by, Spanish moss blowing in the wind, threatening to fall off at any moment. Owls hoot and scream nearby, crickets chirps can be heard from all directions. A canopy of gold and white stars shimmered across the night sky, the moonlight casting its beam over the house and the land. In the distance, thick, dense clouds could be seen, the threat of rain indefinite.

The door to the farmhouse creaked open, a dingy yellow light escaping out onto the porch. Soon after, Agnodice stood in the doorway, pushing the screen door outwards. The door let out a long, rusty screech, the sound being amplified in the quiet of the night. Agnodice stepped out onto the porch, the cold night air stinging her nose and ears. Pulling the front door closed, she went down the short porch steps, letting the screen door slam against its frame.

She adjusted her scarf closer to her head, slowly making her way down the front porch steps. Once at the bottom, she looked both ways before a car to the left of

the house, in the back, nestled between trees and shrubs, flashes its headlights twice. Wasting no time, Agnodice quickly made her way over to the car, her heels the wind picking up around her, pushing her dress and coat around her body. She made her walk against the hard country dirt. She complained to herself as she began to feel tiny grains of sand and dirt find their way into her heels. As she made her way to the car, she could feel drops of water fall onto her cheeks and head. Once she had settled in the backseat of the vehicle, the rain came pouring down as if it had been waiting for her to reach safety.

A man sat in the driver's seat. It was Warren, a man who Agnodice had helped once before. His sister had been pregnant and there had been no time to get to the hospital. Had Agnodice not been there...Warren didn't care to think about that, he was just glad that his sister and nephew had made it out together. He now spent his nights helping Agnodice deliver babies to families in need.

A rhythmic pitter-patter danced on the metal roof of the car, drowning out any other noise. The radio was on low, too low for Agnodice to hear, even if it wasn't raining. She was sure she heard a trumpet so maybe it was jazz. Warren must have thought this was still too loud because he turned the volume dial to the left, almost completely cutting the music off. He then turned in the seat, his elbow hanging over the edge. He watched Agnodice pull her scarf from off her head and smooth out her hair.

"I made it just in time, huh?"

Warren nodded. "How'd it go? Are they okay?" There was stress in his voice, the same stress that he had every time Agnodice returned from a delivery and he wanted to know the results. "Please tell me they're okay."

"I won't lie, Warren, it was touch and go for a while, keeping her blood pressure up was difficult and her babies weren't breathing at first but we did it." Agnodice let out a chuckle when she heard Warren's sigh of relief. "Don't worry, I'm learning fast and getting better."

"Babies?"

Agnodice smiled. "Yes, she had twins."

"Twins! Did she know?"

Agnodice shook her head, her tight curls bouncing around her face. "We just thought her baby was bigger than most. Now, no more chatter, Warren! We still have one more house to get to and I don't want to keep them waiting."

"Yes, right!" Warren put the car into drive and started down the sandy road.

"Where to?"

“Into town, I’ll guide you from here. And turn the radio up please.”

Warren did as he was asked, turning the car volume up, slow calming jazz filling the small space of the car. Agnodice leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. The car rocked gently back and forth on the dented dirt road. The dulled pitter-patter of rain mixed with Warren’s humming, and Agnodice could feel her eyelids grow heavy. With her adrenaline running prior, she was only now realizing how tired she had become. Her arms and legs were tight, her back felt like she had been pushing a boulder up a hill for hours on end. Helping women give birth almost all day, every day was beginning to take its toll on her body. But she couldn’t stop, not now.

She finally let her eyes close, going over the birthing steps in her head until she fell asleep.

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The sun had completely risen, past its highest point when Agnodice finally woke up. The bright sunlight pushed its way through her thin curtains, the light landing on the half of her face that was exposed. Her exposed eye fluttered open and immediately squinted from the yellow light. Groaning, Agnodice slowly brings her arms to chest level. All her joints tensing and screaming in protest but she manages to push herself up, using one arm to hold herself up, her free hand to try and wipe the sleep from her eyes.

She looked down at her clothes. She still wore her birth outfit from the night before, only managing to take her shoes off before falling into bed. Reaching over to the nightstand, she picked up the small bell clock. The time read 2:43. She placed the clock back down with a harsh thud and flopped backward onto the bed, the pillows fluffing up around her.

“These late nights will be the end of me,” she said out loud, her voice was dry and a horse, probably from snoring. She had been told once that she snored like an old man who had known nothing but work his whole life. God knows her body felt like it.

While she lay in bed thinking over the events of the night before, there was a light knock on the door. It was her father, Sebastian. “Are you awake now?”

“Yes, daddy. I’m still dressed.”

Agnodice didn’t move as her father opened the door, a slow but familiar creak tagging along. Sebastian held a glass bottle of cola in one hand and a plate of hot food in the other. The smell of the food made Agnodice immediately sit up. She took the plate eagerly, looking down at the food. A pile of steamed cooked green beans, peppered and salted to perfection, butter melting on top, sat next to a

load of mashed potatoes, small bits of potato chunks poking through the brown seasoned gravy. A thick slice of meat loaf separated the two sides, also covered with gravy. Mixed in the meat were bright green peppers and sweet onions, just how Agnodice liked it. And sitting in the last free space were two buttermilk biscuits topped with butter and honey.

Sebastian took a fork from his pocket and handed it over to Agnodice who wanted no time to start eating.

“Oh geez, who made this? She went all out!”

“Mrs. Edwards did. I wasn’t going to wake you up for about another hour or so but she brought it hot and I figured you wouldn’t want a cold meal.” The father took a seat in the armchair that sat across from his daughter's bed. “She also brought over a cake. I think she said it’s a silver cake. Something about a new recipe she’s trying. Smells delicious.”

“Well save me some please,” Agnodice swallowed her third helping of potatoes. “I know how you get around sweets. And I know how much you like Mrs. Edwards cooking. Speaking of, you should ask her out to the movies or something. I think you spend too much time inside all day, it’s bad for your health, you know.”

“First, Mrs. Edwards is a fine woman but I will not be doing that. She has her daughter and grandson to think about right now, I don’t think another mouth to feed is on her table.

Second, I get outside just enough-”

Agnodice cut him off. “One, she’s been a widow for some time now, I think it’s safe to talk to her. Two, Tending to the farm and the animals does not count. I’m talking about going into town and not just to get supplies or whatever. The farm can wait.”

“And so can your patients.”

The two stared at each other, Agnodice mouth filled with meatloaf and green beans.

“Truce?” Sebastian held out his pinky to Agnodice who locked it with hers.

“Truce.”

“So, any deliveries tonight?”

“No, just going to do some check-ups and then I can rest. I won’t have another delivery for at least two weeks.”



“That’s what I like to hear...” Sebastian took a deep breath. “I worry that you’re doing too much. You have so much going on and don’t have any time for yourself. You’re always looking tired, I wish I could do more to help.”

Agnodice simply smiled. “You worry too much, daddy. But thank you.”

“Oh, there’s something else.” Sebastian scratched at his chin, a thoughtful and worried look on his face. “I ran into Dr. Hill while in town today...he did not have favorable things to say.”

There was a risk that both of them hadn’t really realized was there when Agnodice started practicing childbirth in her town: misogyny. She got laughed at by every doctor in town when she went to apply. The only thing she could do was to be a midwife but the older women were already set in their ways. Ways that had proven to get the mothers and their children killed many times.

“He’s becoming suspicious, that he’s had less patients but he knows a lot of women in town are pregnant.”

“Well,” Agnodice swallowed a piece of biscuit. “I’ll just have to be more careful. I can’t stop now.”

“But-”

“Daddy, I told you that once I get enough women on my side, I’ll be able to convince the men to listen to me. I’m sure of it.”

Sebastian resigned himself. Amara had been right, she would give him headaches.

The two sat together for some time, Agnodice getting her father up to date with all the babies she had delivered, how well the mothers were doing, and the new techniques she learned.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

The couple jumped in their seats, both looking at each other and then at the hallway.

“What the hell-?” Sebastian was cut off by another round of loud banging.

Agnodice set her empty plate down and peeked out the window. Her bedroom faced the street and down below was a police car, two officers stood on their stoop. “It’s the police!” She hissed, panic starting to rise in her chest. “What could they want?”

“You stay here, I’ll go sort it out.”



Sebastian left the bedroom and headed down the stairs, another session of banging on the wooden door signaling that the officers were growing impatient. Sebastian shouted that he was coming, becoming annoyed with their rudeness.

Agnodice stood at the top of the stairs, careful not to be seen but trying hard to listen to the conversation.

Sebastian could feel his heart race as he opened the door, his palms grew sweaty, and he could feel his head begin to swim, unsure of what awaited him on the other side of the door.

“Good afternoon, officers.”

The officer in front of Sebastian looked him up and down. He was a portly man, the buttons on the uniform shirt looked as if it were struggling to keep it closed, the two on the bottom by this overused belt doing the most work. He was red in the face, already dabbing his forehead with a dirty handkerchief. The officer behind him was tall and lanky, like a newly sprung tree. He had on crooked black glasses and a thin-lipped grimace on his face as if whatever he had for lunch was beginning to turn against him. The bigger of the two spoke, after a small coughing fit.

“I’m Sheriff Esley and this is my Deputy Pryor.” The officer asked Sebastian if he was Mr. Magna. He stumbled over the last name, unsure of how to pronounce it.

“It’s Magna, and yes, I am. What can I do you for?”

The lanky man held up an envelope and passed it to Esley. “This is a warrant for your arrest.”

“My arrest!?” Sebastian took the paper and opened it, scanning it as fast as he could. “Adultery!?”

Hearing her father’s shouts, Agnodice rushed down to his side. “Daddy, what’s going on?”

“They say there’s a warrant out for my arrest! I’m being accused of adultery!” Sebastian let Agnodice take the paper from his hand.

“And rape!” The father and daughter looked at each other and then back at the officers. “What is this all about? Who’s pressing the charges?!”

“That would be the city,” Esley said, matter of factly. He then grabbed at both sides of his pants and hefted them up but it did no good. “Now, you seem like a reasonable man, if you would just quietly come with us-”

“Like hell, he will!” Agnodice placed herself between her father and the law, her small build like a twig to a boulder. “He didn’t do any of what you’re accusing

him of!"

It was the deputy's turn to raise his voice. He grabbed his handcuffs and held him over his head. "Now listen here, little lady, we got a job to do and we're going to do it! You're pappy here is under arrest and we will take him in!"

"No! He's innocent and I won't let you take him!"

"Agnodice." Sebastian's voice broke through to her, his voice tight but firm. He placed a hand on her shoulder and turned her to him. "Agnodice." He wiped the tears pouring down his daughter's face with the palms of his hands.

"Daddy no. I won't let them take you..." The hot tears wouldn't stop on her face. She wrapped her arms around him, unwilling to let him go. She couldn't lose another parent to an unjust world. Not like this.

Sebastian hugged her back, pressing his face against her neck. "Don't worry, my peace. I will prevail. I have to."

"Come on Mr. Magna..." The deputy spoke again, his tone different. His voice was soft now, almost apologetic.

Sebastian pulled Agnodice away, the two of them watching each other Sebastian was handcuffed and walked to the police car. Agnodice pressed her hands against the back window, her father staring back at her. She felt the car pull off, her hands slowly sliding against the window and then the car's hot metal body. Then she was alone. She stood there, her hands in fists, watching her father be taken away from her.

Seconds later, another car sped up to the curb of where Agnodice stood. It was Warren. He was dressed in the same clothes he had on yesterday. He stopped right in front of the stoop, in front of Agnodice. She wasn't looking at him but past him. Down after the police car that was driving off. The car that held her father.

"Agnie...as soon as I heard, I tried to get here as fast as I could."

"Take me to the courthouse." Was all Agnodice said, her voice sharp and taunt, a crying begging to escape her.

"Agnie-"

"Now!" She turned her head, her curls flying about her head. Her voice was loud now, filled with hate and contempt for the world. "Take me to my father, now!" Her eyes were set, her brown tight and downward, all traces of the joyous smile that Warren had just seen the night gone.

Warren had jumped at Agnodice's sudden tonal change; he had never seen her this way before. Not when fathers and brothers got in the way during birth, not when she was trapped during a delivery during a snowstorm.

He did his best to compose himself, taking a step towards her. "Listen: I can't! I just came from the station. Deputy Halmill told me that his trial will be tomorrow morning, until then we can't see him! I'm sorry. I tried to get here before them to warn you but I got held up by farmer John doing a cattle run. I'm so sorry, Agnie."

"I have to do something. I can't just stand here while he sits in jail like that! Why is this even happening?! Who did this?" She demanded. The fear and sadness were replaced with harsh anger.

Warren hesitated, looking away from the woman in front of him.

She descended the top of the stoop steps, standing in front of him. "You know something! Tell me what you know!"

A deep breath. Another. One more. "It's because of you. Some of the women you helped, their fathers, brothers, whathaveyou, think you're seducing them and that you're having sex with them during check-ups and deliveries."

An incredulous look froze on her face. "What."

He just nodded. "They're trying you, your father, for their failures."

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Sebastian sat on the jail cell bench, the rusted chains creaking and groaning with each slight movement. He looked up at a small window in the cell, soft orange, and pink dawn rays slowly leaking in the room. He took a deep breath, rubbing his face, the exhaustion starting to catch up to him. He could feel the stiff stub starting to grow. He had been unable to sleep the night before, the worry of his daughter and what was to come of this trial.

He stared at the sky for a few minutes longer, wondering if this was a time for him to pray or not. He heard the front door of the station open but he didn't look. It didn't matter to him.

"You look like shit." It was Deputy Halmil. He dropped his keys and hat on the desk and walked over to a simple wooden stand that had a coffee pot and a few paper cups on the top. "How do you like your coffee?"

The man in the cell was quiet for a moment, his eyes still on the sky. He took a deep breath. "Black with three sugars...please."

“Sure thing.”

Halmil reached down to the first shelf and brought up a container of sugar. “You know, I’ve been to the big city for some sort of cop training, like how to profile better, how to get confessions out of your criminals, some bullshit like that, it’s been some time since then. But they had a little ol’ spot for coffee too. No more fancy than what we got here but those city boys were sure proud of it, I tell you what! Asking if I had ever seen something so “innovative” like this before. Told me I could take this idea back home. I just laughed at them.” He shook his head, chuckling. “Those city boys sure do think they know everything, huh?”

Sebastian couldn’t help but let out a small laugh. “You’ve told me that story a dozen times, James.”

“And it never gets old!” Halmil poured the hot coffee into a paper cup and then dropped three cubes of sugar into the cup. He handed Sebastian the paper cup, steam rising from the coffee. “I just let them believe that they’re smarter than me. I figured they deserve it with all their big city crime.”

Sebastian took a quick sip from his cup, the drink burning his lips and tongue. “I bet the coffee is just as shitty.”

Halmil laughed. “It’s worse!” He set his coffee on the desk, leaning against the edge. “But speaking of big city crimes...I don’t believe that you did what they’re saying you did.”

“I appreciate your words if only they could sway everyone else.”

“But you know something. Just tell them what you know! Make this easy for yourself.”

“I can’t, it isn’t that simple.”

“Why not?!” Halmil sat up in his chair, his voice desperate. “I can’t sit by and let you do this to yourself! You know what they’re going to do to you after your trial if you even want to call it that.”

Sebastian took another sip from his coffee, longer this time. “I appreciate that but it’s out of my hands. If not me, then someone else so it has to be me.”

The two men sat in silence for the rest of the morning, sipping their coffee.

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Agnodice and Warren pulled up to the courthouse, the court steps and sidewalk crowded with townspeople, a line of officers standing in front of the courthouse doors. The people were shouting and jeering, trying to get past the officers.

Warren turned in his seat to look at Agnodice. “It would seem that word has gotten out about your father, everyone in town must be here.”

“Here to watch my father hang for my actions...Let’s go.”

Agnodice nodded and the two exited the car. As they pushed their way through the crowd, the sea of people began to quiet down until no one was making a noise. All eyes are on Agnodice. The pair reached the top of the steps, standing in front of the officers. Deputy Pryor stood in the middle of the others.

“I don’t think you should go in there, this isn’t something for a lady like you to see or hear.”

“You can’t expect me to just let my father go through this alone. If you don’t let me in, I will find another way.” She held eye contact with Pryor, her voice as cold and hard as steel. “Please move, I have to be in there.”

Pryor resigned himself and stepped out of the way to let her through. Before she reached the door, she turned to face the crowd. “My father is innocent! This is a clear display of wrongful conviction and lackluster policing! My father is innocent and I will prove it to you all today!”

She pulled open the large wooden doors and marched inside, Warren, the officers, and the townspeople following them into the building. They followed her down to the courtroom.

Inside, Sebastian sat at a large wooden table with his lawyer, another lawyer sitting to their left next to the jury stand. The 12 jurors were already seated. Everyone turned their heads when the court doors flew up, Agnodice leading the charge.

“Daddy!”

Sebastian jumped from his seat, embracing his daughter when she ran into him. “My peace! What are you doing here?”

“I can’t just leave you here alone like this! Mommy wouldn’t want us to be separated, not now, not like this.”

Tears pooled in Sebastian’s eyes. “You have become just like her, perhaps even stronger. She would be so proud of you, I know it.” He kissed her head.

A voice behind them spoke up, seemingly booming in the once-quiet courtroom. “I thought I said this was to be a private matter! What is the meaning of this, Deputy Pryor?” It was Sheriff Elsey. He was exiting the judge's chambers, the judge following behind him.

Pryor pushed his way through the crowd, stammering over his words, trying to come up with an excuse for his negligence.

“Well, there’s no use in fusing over it now, everyone is here and we must continue.” The judge said, taking his seat at his bench. “Everyone, get seated, quickly.”

Father and daughter hugged each other one more time before Agnodice took her seat on a bench right behind her dad and his lawyer. Warren sat next to her. The rest of the crowd quickly filled up the empty seats, some forced to stand or lean on the walls.

Once everyone was settled and quiet, the judge spoke. “Is the state ready to present?”

The lawyer stood and began to make his cause. He told the court that Sebastian Magna was here on charges of adultery and rape. He was pretending to be a doctor to help women give birth or to check on them during and after their births but in reality was sleeping with them or forcing himself on the mothers.

Agnodice couldn’t take these lies anymore. She stood up and shouted, “This is lies! My father would never do such things!”

The judge banged his gavel. “I will have no outbursts in my courtroom! I already was lenient with letting you make yourselves at home in my courtroom, do not push your luck, Ms. Manga!”

Warren gently grabbed her arm and pulled her back down to her seat.

“It won’t happen again, judge.” Sebastian’s lawyer said, his voice was timid, as if he was unsure of himself. “Sorry, judge.”

“Continue, Richard.”

“Don’t worry, I’m done. The defense may go.”

Sebastian’s lawyer stands. He clears his throat, trying to calm his nerves. He stutters over his words, trying to explain to the judge and jury how his client, Sebastian, is innocent but he can’t explain how he is innocent at this very moment. He then sat down. Warren placed his head in his hands and Agnodice groaned in frustration. Agnodice leaned forward and whispered in her father’s lawyer’s ear. “Please tell me you have a stronger argument than what you just presented.”

“I’ll think of something.” That was all he could say.

Minutes went by, soon turning into hours. Witness after witness came up and down the stand, mostly of men, fathers, husbands, and brothers, all testifying

that they thought Sebastian was a doctor helping their daughters, wives, and sisters, only for it to be found out that he was abusing them. It took everything in Agnodice not to scream that they were lying. She gripped Warren's hand, watching her father become more and more defeated with each witness.

“And that's when I had returned home, and saw Beatrice in bed. She had been crying and said that a doctor came in to check on her but I don't remember hiring no doctor!” Johnson Taylor was on the stand now, telling the court how he had found his sister in her room after Sebastian had left. “And I thought it was strange, for him to be doing house calls so late at night but he said he's a doctor and that I could trust him.” He looked right at Sebastian, cold hard hate in his eyes. “A mistake I will never make again! Now she just sits in her room all day, crying thanks to you!” Johnson jumped up from his chair and ran over to Sebastian, aiming to attack him. The court officer was quick and grabbed him, pulling him off the table, Johnson shouting vitriol and cursing Sebastian's name.

The judge banged his gavel, demanding order in his court. Once Johnson had settled down, he asked the plaintiff if he wished to cross-examine the witness. He said no.

“Very well then. We will be adjourned for a 20-minute recess.” The judge slammed his gavel down. The crowd in the courtroom began to file out and the courtroom officer walked to Sebastian, handcuffs out.

“I'm sorry.” Was all Agnodice could say as she watched her father be taken away for a second time.

Hot tears once again rolled down her cheeks, the reality of the situation setting in. There was nothing she could do to fix the situation. Even if she exposed herself as being the actual doctor, would the court even believe her? Would they have more or less mercy on her than they were going to have on her father?

Agnodice was lost in her thoughts when Warren spoke up, breaking her thoughts. “I'll be back. There's something I have to take care of.” He left before he could be questioned, pushing his way through the crowd. She had barely registered what was said to her, lost in her thoughts of despair and heartache.

“Ms. Magna? Ms. Magna!”

Agnodice snapped her head up at the voice. It was her father's lawyer. His face was flushed, he looked as if he was about to cry as well. She could see sweat forming at his brow but she didn't know if it was the stale heat of the courtroom or if it was nervousness. She guessed it was probably both.



“Yes, what do you want?” Her words came out harsher than she would have normally meant them to but she didn’t care, not really. The man in front of her was in charge of making sure her father didn’t get convicted of a crime he didn’t commit, a crime that she should be held responsible for, and he was doing an absolutely bad job of it. So what if she sounded ungrateful and rude, so what if he was free, he wasn’t good at his job!

It was as if the lawyer had been reading her thoughts, his next words shocked her. “I know I’m failing you and your father. I’m new to this as if it weren’t obvious. I’m from Maryland and we do things differently there, more formally and I’m afraid to say that I am completely out of my element.” He took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to the crying woman. “I’m sorry I’m doing such a bad job. I can’t tell you how much I wish I could do more but I really don’t understand what’s going on, that is to say, I don’t understand who is even pressing these charges against your father or why none of the actual victims are on the stand.”

Agnodice wiped her eyes and stood. She was about an inch or so taller than the lawyer, she found humor in this. She’d never been taller than a man before. She told him as much. “I’m sorry I was so curt with you...what is your name?”

“Samuel. Samuel Halmil.”

“Halmil...are you related to Deputy Halmil?”

Samuel nodded. “He’s my uncle. He called me early yesterday morning and asked me to come as quickly as I could to represent your father. Had I known these were the stakes, I would’ve brought help. I worry I may have made things worse for him.”

“I would be lying if I said that I don’t agree with you. But, I do appreciate what you’re trying to do but it unfortunately won’t be enough.” Agnodice took a deep breath. “It’s my fault that this is happening.” She sat back down on the bench, her hands clasped together on her lap, looking down at the ground. “He’s in this situation because of me.”

Samuel took a seat too, confused. “How could this be your fault?” He paused. “You’re not raping the women, are you?”

Agnodice looked up at Samuel, her face completely natural, unable to fully process what he just said to her. “Boy...we’re going to come back to that later. But no, that’s not what has been happening.” She paused, looking around the room. It was empty except for the pair. “Listen, the mortality rate in my town is high, too high. Either the mother or the baby doesn’t make it through the pregnancy, that is how I lost my mother.” She reached into her shirt and pulled out a gold locket and opened it up. Inside was a picture of Amara, her smile

bright and cheerful. Samuel told her she looked just like her, especially in the eyes. Agnodice smiled, closing it and clutching it in her hands. “I get that a lot.

“She died while giving birth to me. My daddy says we all watched the sun rise together, that she wanted one morning with her family before she left this world. He’s told me that I am their greatest gift but now...Now I feel like the worst person in the world. I am letting him take the blame for my actions, all because my town is so closed-minded and cannot and will never accept a woman as a doctor.”

“That’s what this is all about?”

“Yes. I try to do it at night but I help the pregnant women in my town. Seven years ago I left town to study childbirth, I came back only two years ago. I had tried to join the local doctors but they all turned me away and made sure to tell all the men not to allow me in their homes. They were mad at the thought that I could know more than them and wouldn’t allow me to share my knowledge. So, I had to resort to secrecy. I would go to their homes when they were away on cattle runs or out in the fields, either saying I’m stopping for tea or what have you.

“It was hard at first, getting the women to trust me but eventually I won them over. The problem arrived when I had women who lived with their fathers or brothers and the men wouldn’t leave the room. I had to get creative.”

“That’s where your father comes in.”

She nodded. “Yes. I pretended to be his son who came back from medical school. I offered cheaper prices than the town doctors, it wasn’t about the money; I just didn’t want to see any more families separated from something so preventable!” She took a deep breath, trying to calm herself down. “I saved hundreds of women and babies, in this town and nearby ones and now all my efforts have gone to waste and my father is going to jail.”

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news but that’s not all they want to do. My uncle told me that if he is found guilty, and the way this trial is going, he probably will be, they’re going to hang him.”

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Court had now continued, the room was filled with townspeople once again. Sebastian is in his seat next to Samuel. Agnodice sat alone completely defeated. Warren still had not returned.

“Alright, now that we are all back, let us continue.” The judge spoke. “Are there any more witnesses to be seen?” The judge looked at both lawyers.

The county lawyer said no, that he was finished with his witness. Samuel was going to say the same, not having any witnesses to begin with. He felt a tap on his shoulder, it was Warren. He leaned down and whispered something in his ear, the father and daughter looking at each other, confused.

“Is there something you would like to share with us, Mr. Halmil?” The judge asked, impatient. “I don’t like secrets being kept in my courtroom.”

“Sorry, your honor! But it’s for good reason! My uh,” Samuel glanced at Warren then looked back at the judge. “My assistant has found my witnesses!”

People in the courtroom gasped, immediately talking, wondering who the surprise witnesses could be.

“Order, order!” The judge banged his gavel several times. “Approach!” The two lawyers quickly made their way to the judge's table. “And who are these last-minute witnesses you have to bring to my courtroom?”

“We had trouble locating them the night before but my assistant was able to find them during the recess! If you will forgive our unpreparedness and let them speak, I promise this won’t take up any more time.”

The judge looked at the county lawyer. “Do you have an issue with this?”

“None whatsoever. I don’t think anything they could bring now would make a difference in this case.” The defense lawyer gave Samuel a cocky grin, confident that he could add this case to his win tally.

“Very well. You may be seated. Bring up your witnesses.”

Agnodice looked at Warren. “What’s going on? What witnesses?”

Warren just smiled. “I don’t want to ever hear you giving up on yourself or what you do ever again.” He didn’t wait for her response. He rushed to the doors and opened them. A small crowd of women, holding infants, toddlers, and small children came marching in, stone-cold and fierce expressions on their faces. The defense lawyer's jaw went slack. He glanced over at his previous witnesses, their faces matching his.

One of the male witnesses from before stood up, pointing at one of the women. “Beatrice! What are you doing here? I told you to stay in the house!”

“Oh shut up, Robert! I am so sick of you trying to tell me what to do all the damn time! You ain’t my daddy and you damn sure ain’t my husband!”

The brother and sister began to argue, yelling and cursing at each other. The group of women witnesses began to yell at Robert as well, causing the male

witnesses to join in. It was an all-out blame game, some of the topics having to do with why they were in the courthouse.

In a futile attempt to settle everyone down, the judge banged down his gavel, calling for order. The defense lawyer began to complain to the judge, now demanding that the women witness be removed from the courtroom, causing Samuel to shout how it was unethical and ridiculous for him to now have an issue with the women witnesses.

The chaos of the courtroom continued for some time before a gunshot had pierced through the noise, silencing everyone instantly. Agnodice stood next to the court officer, his gun in hand, pointed at the roof. She looked at the judge and told him she would pay for the damages later. She returned the gun to the officer and then stood in front of the courtroom. "I think this has gone on for long enough. I told you my father is innocent and I meant that." She looked at the men who had testified against her father. "I am the one who has been in your home at night with your wives. I have been the one at all hours of day and night, successfully delivering your children to you! Me! Not my father! He has had no part in this whole affair."

"That's horseshit! There ain't no way a woman could have delivered those children!" One of the men shouted, the other roaring in agreement.

"Oh put a sock in it!" A woman holding two babies stepped forward from the crowd of women. "We are all the proof you need that she performed these miracles! The miracles that no other doctor in town had been able to do! I have both my daughter and son with me here today because of her! You have your sons and daughters, grandchildren, and so forth because of her!"

An older woman stepped forward as well. "Marcus."

The judge looked at the old woman, a shocked look on his face. "Martha! What are you doing here?"

"I am here to tell you how ridiculous you are! To entertain such an idea that Mr. Magna or even his daughter would bring harm to the pregnant women of this town when she is the reason why you have your grandchildren today!"

Beatrice spoke again. "You should all be ashamed of yourselves! God brings a gift to you, someone who can do what others have failed to do: keep your wife and child alive and you try to destroy it! You try to destroy what you do not wish to see as a gift! None of us would be here if it wasn't for her and we will not allow you to punish her for what she has done!"

Agnodice turned to the judge. "You can punish me for impersonating a doctor all you want, I don't care about that but please, find it in your heart to let my

father go! He was only trying to protect me, you shouldn't fault him for that."

The judge paused, looking from the women and men to Agnodice and Sebastian. "No, I suppose I shouldn't. Under normal circumstances, I would give out a sentence for such a crime but these aren't normal circumstances. I will be dropping all charges against Sebastian Magna." The judge banged his gavel and the courthouse erupted into cheers. Agnodice rushed to her father who stood with open arms. The two wrapped their arms around each other, both beginning to cry.

"As for you, Ms. Magna," the judge started. The room became silent again, the tense air that had just left quickly returning. "I understand what you had done was in good faith but I cannot let the impersonation of a doctor go unpunished. And for that, I sentence you to 10 years in jail," protests began but the judge kept talking. "But, after reviewing the evidence and hearing the testimonies, I have decided that you have done time served for up to 11 years." He looked at the jurors. "Does this seem fair?"

All 12 members of the jury gave their agreements and the judge banged his gavel. "I hear by deem this case dismissed."

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*Four weeks later*

Warren dropped the soft yellow colored paint brush into the paint bucket, wiping sweat off his brow. His shirt and pants were covered in yellow paint. He grabbed his glass off a nearby table and took a long drink of his almost room-temperature sweet tea.

Agnodice came into the room, carrying a plate with a large slice of cherry pie. "Ready for a snack? Daddy came by with Mrs. Edwards. They brought us pie."

"Smells delicious!" Warren gave her a peck on the cheek then picked up the fork, taking a piece of the pie. "She's a great cook, I'm surprised your daddy hasn't tried to court her."

Agnodice laughed. "We were just talking about that a bit ago, actually. He's worried that he would be moving too fast since her husband passed but it's been about six years since so I think he's good."

"He's old school, so I don't blame him. I mean...I'm still nervous about going steady with you." Warren cleared his throat and turned away from her. "Uh, what do you think of the wall? Pretty professional right?"

She laughed, looking at the wall too. “Much better than your flirting, that’s for sure.”

“Hey, it’s a work in progress! I think both are pretty good!”

“Says the man.” Agnodice smiled, taking her bite of the pie. He gave her another kiss and pulled her into a hug. “But I guess you’re right, it is a work in progress.”

Warren grinned. “I’m glad that Dr. Taylor decided on an early retirement and gave you his building for cheap. I see great things for this place and you, very great things.”

“And I’m glad I can share it all with you.”

The two stood there silent, eating the cherry pie.

Agnodice set the empty plate and forks on the table next to Warren’s glass. “I want to thank you, for everything. Not just for helping me fix up my office but for helping me and daddy. I can’t think of many others who would have realized the women I helped were missing and how important they turned out to be. And the risk you took before to help me with my crazy idea.”

“Not crazy, important. You don’t have to keep thanking me. Everything I’ve done and will do has been out of love, Agnie. Don’t forget that.”

The two wrapped each other in their arms, their lips pressing together for one of the many kisses they would share.