

Decency

Mother told me the bandage on my forehead was to keep me safe. I didn't understand why until I took it off.

When I looked into a mirror, all I could see was the mark of a murderer across my forehead. I stared, as if I was looking at someone else's forehead. Then I knew no matter what I tried I would live to kill someone. I stood there until my mother turned me to her and planted the bandage back on my forehead.

"You have to keep this on your forehead. The town wouldn't understand that you are just a sweet girl Anna."

"Why did you keep me if you knew this was my fate? What was the point?" I asked her through tears. I stood there, heart broken and mind angry.

"Because when I first saw you after you were born, I couldn't see the mark. I saw my daughter and that was all I needed to see."

"You're lying! How could anyone love a future murderer? What if I was born to kill someone you love... or you?" There was a loud pounding at the door. Mother moved the curtain to see two officials standing at the door, guns ready.

"Anna, listen to me. Go to your room and lock the door. If anyone besides me knocks, climb out of your window and run."

When Mother finally opened the door, it was to a loud man, "We understand you are the mother of a girl named Anna. Is she here?"

"No she isn't. What is this about?"

"We understand she may have the murderer's mark... A nurse, the one present at your delivery, has come forward. She claims several years ago, she saw the mark on your child's forehead."

"That's absurd. How could the nurse remember that after all these years?"

"We are just confirming any information before accusing anyone. When will your daughter be back?"

"Well, in about an hour or so."

Decency

“We will return then.”

Mother closed the door behind them and flew up the stairs. She burst into my room whispering, “Anna, there is no time to waste. There are people looking for you. You have to go.”

“Mother, what... why can't I hide here?”

“Because the men will come back and find you. Listen to me. Run. As fast and as far as you can.”

“But Mother...”

“Now... before he comes back. Go on. Slip out the window. Just like I taught you.”

“When can I come back?”

“I don't know, just run.” Mother was frantic. She threw me a sweater and pointed towards the window.

I knew in that moment that I wasn't going to survive if I stayed. I slipped out of the window, refusing to look back at Mother. I ran as fast and as far as I could. I don't remember how long it was but when I finally thought I was safe, I dropped to the ground. I realized then that my bandage had slipped off. What was worse was I heard a man walking up behind me. I spun around to see a man with my bandage and the mark of a savior.

He reached me, breathless, “Is this yours?” He held my bandage out to me. I snatched the bandage from him and turned away so he wouldn't see my mark.

“Who are you?” He asked.

“No one. Who are you?”

“My name is Benson. You ran by my house. Tell me, why were you running?”

“No reason.”

“There has to be a reason. Anyhow, I'm sure your parents will be looking for you. It's getting late.”

“I'm not going home.”

Decency

“Why not?”

“No reason.”

“Well, no name with no reason, you look like you could use a meal.”

I looked at him, unsure if I could trust him when he said, “Your mark doesn’t worry me.” I fell in step behind him until we reached his small home. He had a meal prepared and I dropped to a seat.

“What’s your real name?” He asked me after he handed me half of his meager meal.

“Anna.”

“Alright Anna, why are you running?”

“There was a man that came to my house asking if he could see my mark. My mother sent him away and then told me to run.”

“So he is trying to find you to see if you indeed have the mark of a murderer.”

“Yes. You should be afraid of me I guess.”

“Have you killed anyone?”

“No.”

“Then I have nothing to fear.”

“Have you saved anyone?” I asked him, letting my curiosity show.

“Nope, not yet.”

“You should get started then.”

“One day when the opportunity presents itself. Then I will not hesitate to seal my fate.” He smiled.

“How lucky you are.”

“You know I don’t believe you are necessarily evil. Maybe you’ll murder a terrible person and save the town from destruction.”

Decency

“Perhaps.” I said, getting up.

“Wait a minute. Where are you going?”

“Further away from town.”

“In the dark? With no direction? You are free to sleep here and leave when there is light.”

“They might find me if I stay.”

“At the edge of town? I doubt it.”

He persuaded me to stay, but I insisted to sleep outside. I slept under a restless sky.

When I woke, I realized that it was midday. My stomach growled in anticipation, and I knew I had to eat something. I crept into the small home and tore off a chunk of bread that was on the table.

“The bread is for you.” I spun around to see Benson, smiling at me. “I figured you would have left by now.”

“No”, I said. I was embarrassed, not just because he caught me with the bread, but he expected me to be gone. “I’ll get out of your way.” I looked for the closest exit.

“Nonsense, have a meal with me.” He danced around me and pulled together another meager meal. He set it all in front of me without another word. We ate in silence until Benson asked, “Where do you plan to go?”

“I don’t know. Anywhere but here.”

“Seems like a good plan.”

“Do you have a better one?”

“No, but I’m not the one people are searching for.” There was a long pause before Benson asked, “What do you think you’ll need?”

I met his eyes and felt my shoulders stiffen. “I don’t know. Why do you ask?”

“I want to help. I’ll be right back.” He stopped and turned to look at me. “You’re worth saving.”

Decency

I sat there, stunned. I'm worth saving? Did he not see the mark on my forehead? Did he not know I was destined to kill someone? I heard him shuffle around for several minutes before he returned. He had a bag brimming with supplies.

"This should take care of you for a while." He dropped a bag in front of me.

"Why?" I squeaked out.

Benson looked at me and said softly, "Because I'm here to save people. Good, bad or otherwise."

For the rest of the day, we plotted out where I should go and where I could eventually stop. Benson gave me almost everything he had. When I objected, he ignored me and added more. We continued planning and talking until I couldn't say another word. Benson insisted that stay until there was light. I insisted on going back outside for the night, which I did. I lay there and was comforted by the landscape of stars that shone above. I fell into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning, I woke up to someone shouting my name. "Anna, you are to come with us." I startled awake to see a man peering over me. "Anna, you are to come with us." He repeated. I looked around for any sign of Benson, but he wasn't there.

Then it hit me. He told them where I was. I felt my arms being lifted by two men who dragged me up. They marched me back towards town where I knew there was no escape.

I felt my heart sink when I thought of Mother. She must have hoped I made it out.

Then I felt anger for trusting Benson. His hospitality was just enough to guarantee my arrest. I was seething by the time we marched into the mayor's home.

"The girl Mayor."

"Thank you." He stood, regal with the mark of a leader displayed on his forehead. The two men dropped me to the ground. I didn't want to make eye contact with the mayor. He wanted to kill me for things I hadn't done yet. "You're are to be put to death to protect the town from yourself. Do you have anything to say?"

I spit on him. I heard my name. I spun around to see my mother. Her eyes filled and she reached for me. The mayor stepped between us. "A word." He nodded curtly to Mother. She was led away, her eyes never left mine.

Decency

The mayor spoke to her clearly. “She has to die... think of all the people we could save.”

“She is my daughter. I can’t let you take her.” Mother had not lost her frantic tone.

“She is a danger to the community. How can you look at her knowing that she could kill anyone of us?”

“Because she is part of me.”

“It’s time to cut that part out of you. For the good of the community.” He looked to the guard,

“Restrain her, and take her below.”

“Yes Mayor.” The guard restrained Mother.

“Please...show mercy. She is so young.” She pleaded.

The mayor stiffened. “We should have done this a long time ago.” He motioned to the guard.

The mayor walked to where I was scowling. My bandage was off, and my mark glared at him. He stood over me. “You shouldn’t have had a chance to live.” He lifted and dragged me until I was in front of his house where a crowd had gathered in anticipation.

“Anna, you are an impending risk to this community. Because of this, we are forced to kill you for the good of the community.” He stood straight and cleared his throat. He glared down at me and pointed. “This girl has the mark of a killer. It is the only good thing we can do for you.”

“Wait...” A man yelled. The town looked from one to the other, but they couldn’t find the voice.

“You can’t kill her.” Benson came out of the shadows and yelled, “I’ll take her place.” Benson pushed his way to the front.

“Wait...you’re here? I thought you were... I thought you told them where I was.”

“Anna, I didn’t... couldn’t do that. I knew you had been captured when I woke up and saw the bag was still there.”

“No...Benson. You’ve got to go... you can’t do this.” I said. He lifted himself onto the platform.

“You are worth my life.” He held my gaze for a long moment and stroked my forehead. “When I look at you I can’t see the mark.”

Decency

“Well fortunately, I can see it,” the mayor interrupted, “this woman is destined to be a murderer. Her punishment is death. Even if you were to give up your life, she will not change. Her mark will not change.”

“I understand. But I will still take her place.”

“Benson, you can’t do this... think of all the people you could save.”

“Anna”, he said, his voice soothing, “your mark does not stop my love for you.” He kissed my forehead and I could feel my mark burn. He turned to the mayor, “Do what it takes to let her go.”

He towered over Benson and murmured, “You foolish child. What a waste of your potential.” He turned to the crowd, pushing me aside.

“This man has decided to take the place of a future murderer. He takes a sentence of death with him. Are you sure you want to take that sentence, boy?”

“Yes.” Benson caught my eye and smiled faintly. He wasn’t not afraid of death. He had taken the opportunity presented to him. He was dragged to the middle of the stage and with one motion from the mayor, he was no more.

He was gone, and I couldn’t bring him back. He had died for me, and I felt empty of fear and love. I glanced around and saw the eyes of every town person on me. They were looking at my mark in awe. It was as if they were looking at my mark for the first time. One woman pointed and said, “She is one of us now.” The whole town nodded in approval.

I knew whatever the townspeople were thinking now, eventually they would forget what he did. They would come after me, eager for another life. Their want for justice would overcome the need for grace.

I knew I had to go as far as I could. So I leapt off the stage and ran. I ran past everything that I knew and past people that I didn’t know. I ran past a window and didn’t even notice that the murderer’s mark had faded and a savior’s mark was there instead.