

SACRIFICE

by

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A young family picnics in a wooded area near an idyllic waterfall. Their clothing suggests early twentieth century, an American family during World War I.

ANNA (30) relaxes beneath a tree, reading "ANGELS' SONGS FROM THE GOLDEN CITY OF THE BLESSED." Her husband, EDWARD(31) stands over her. He's entirely focused on young EVELYN (3) as she runs about, carefree.

EDWARD

Evelyn, dear. Not too close to the water.

ANNA

She's fine, Edward. Let her play.

Edward watches after his daughter, nervous. Anna closes her book with a contented sigh, taking in her surroundings.

ANNA (cont'd)

So peaceful.

EDWARD

(distracted)

Peaceful.

Evelyn runs to her mother, arms outstretched.

EVELYN

Blanket!

Anna smiles. She reaches into her bag and produces a small, tattered TABLECLOTH.

Evelyn's eyes light up. She grabs the tablecloth and presses it to her cheek.

EDWARD

We can afford a blanket, Anna. She doesn't need to traipse around with an old tablecloth.

ANNA

It makes her happy, Edward.

EDWARD

It's unsanitary.

He turns away, staring at the falls. Anna pulls Evelyn close, hugging her.

(CONTINUED)

EDWARD (cont'd)

I spoke with Franklin, from the college. He received word from a hospital in need of a few qualified surgeons.

ANNA

Oh? Where?

EDWARD

Montreal.

Anna frowns. She lets go of Evelyn and pulls herself to her feet. She stands beside Edward, both of them watching Evelyn at play.

ANNA

Montreal... that's quite a ways from Virginia.

EDWARD

Could be worse. Could be France.

She turns him to face her.

ANNA

Is the need for surgeons in Montreal so critical?

EDWARD

Perhaps their government has sent all of their old surgeons away to the war... away from their wives and their daughters.

ANNA

Perhaps.

She takes his hand. He pulls her close, embracing her, pressing his face into her shoulder.

EDWARD

I don't want to leave you.

ANNA

The war's almost over, Edward. I'm sure of it. My aunt told me that this current push will finally end hostilities. (beat) This is our opportunity to help.

(CONTINUED)

EDWARD

Ours?

ANNA

Yes. Ours. You will lend them your skills as a surgeon, and I... I will lend them the man that I love.

She smiles at him. He wants to tell her how much he loves her, but words fail him.

They hold one another as they watch Evelyn play, her tablecloth-blanket trailing behind her.

2

EXT. BOSTON HARBOR DOCKS - DAY (1918)

2

A sea of somber men and women drift around the docks, dressed in grays and browns and blacks. Anna stands stock still amidst them, holding Evelyn's hand.

Their matching YELLOW DRESSES contrast sharply with the dreariness surrounding them, openly defiant.

Evelyn rubs the tablecloth against her cheek.

Edward faces his wife and daughter, his suitcase at his side. Evelyn smiles up at him. He keeps his emotions contained. He can't show them how much this hurts.

Edward opens his mouth to speak to Anna, but he's interrupted by the piercing WHISTLE of the passenger ship behind him: the USS MACHIGONNE. He throws an angry glance at the ship.

Anna steps forward, taking his hand. Her smile falters.

ANNA

Promise you'll return to me.

EDWARD

Promise you'll be here when I come home.

The stare deep into each other's eyes, unspeaking.

Anna leans in for a kiss, tender. She pulls back, but Edward clutches the nape of her neck and pulls her close. Another kiss, this one passionate, unrestrained.

The passenger ship whistle sounds again.

(CONTINUED)

With one last heartbreaking look at his family, Edward turns and walks to the waiting ship. If he looks back, his resolve will crumble.

Anna watches him disappear into the crowd.

A SICK MAN stumbles into Anna, hard, knocking her forward. She turns to glare at him. He's sweating, trembling. A racking cough escapes his mouth.

Blood-specked spittle lands on Evelyn's tablecloth.

The man claws at Anna, pleading.

SICK MAN

Help... me...

He falls to the ground, out cold. Anna holds Evelyn tight.

ANNA

Someone! Please! He needs help!

A crowd gathers around the unconscious man.

3 INT. SURGEON'S TENT - NIGHT (1918)

3

Edward shuffles in, exhausted, his surgical whites a mottled tapestry of blood and bodily fluids.

He plops into a chair. On his desk, a LETTER, addressed to him. The handwriting is distinctly feminine.

With newfound energy, he rips into the envelope, opens the letter, and reads.

ANNA (V.O.)

My dearest Edward, I pray all is well with you.

4 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (1918)

4

Rows of beds line a wide hall, every one of them occupied with the sick and the dying. A nurse fails to comfort a grieving Anna. Evelyn's body lies unmoving in a nearby bed.

ANNA (V.O.)

I'm sure by now that word of the influenza epidemic has reached you. Rest assured that Evelyn and I are well. We're far enough from cities to have avoided exposure.

5 INT. ANNA'S HOME - NIGHT (1918) 5

Anna writes by lamplight, coughing.

ANNA (V.O.)

I felt compelled to write and ask you to stay the course. The service you are doing for our soldiers, for our country, is truly noble. I want your mind to be at ease as you continue in that work.

She glances at the table behind her, and at the small body lying on it, wrapped in the tattered tablecloth.

6 EXT. CRABTREE FALLS, VIRGINIA - DAY (1918) 6

The sky is overcast. Anna clutches Evelyn's body to her breast, the child's body still wrapped in the tablecloth.

Anna is weak and unsteady. She shivers, although she's drenched with sweat. She's knocking at death's door.

ANNA (V.O.)

Do not fear, beloved. Evelyn and I are safe from harm.

Anna steps forward, throwing herself over the falls.

7 INT. SURGEON'S TENT - NIGHT (1918) 7

Edward is seated at his desk, poring over the letter.

ANNA (V.O.)

We love you always. Anna and Evelyn.

He folds the letter and places it on the table.

EDWARD

(whisper)

And I love you.

Edward coughs, wiping a thin sheen of sweat from his forehead.

FADE TO BLACK