

"Family Tree"

by
Mike Murphy

112 Lovering Street
Medway, MA 02053-2326
508-533-8310
mikeandzachary@gmail.com
WGA Registered

1

EXT. WOODED AREA - MORNING

1

On a beautiful morning, two people stand by the trees. The first is the ARKON. He is an older man with white hair and a beard. He wears a black robe and sandals and, about his neck, a chain holding a large purple jewel - a symbol of his high office. At his waist is a sheath holding a knife.

Also present is young MAGDALENA, a beautiful but poor washer woman dressed in simple clothes not far from rags. Her skin is the color of alabaster. Her eyes are beautiful, but woeful.

Together, they approach a sturdy tree bearing bright red leaves. The Arkon slowly draws his knife. He looks at Magdalena.

ARKON

Are you ready, miss?

Nervous, Magdalena focuses on the knife blade glinting in the sunshine. She speaks shyly, her head bowed for a moment.

MAGDALENA

Is this part. . . necessary?

The Arkon is surprised at her question.

ARKON

The tree must know of your sincerity.

MAGDALENA

It's only that. . .

ARKON

Speak, woman! I am the Arkon. I have *much* to do.

MAGDALENA

The money.

ARKON

Your fifty gold coins?

Magdalena looks at the Arkon.

MAGDALENA

One hundred.

ARKON

Ah, you wish for a *child* as well.

MAGDALENA

I am but a poor washer woman, sir.

ARKON

(dismissively)

I know of your situation.

MAGDALENA

It took me years of scrubbing my fingers to the bone to save up that much money. My meager table has not seen meat in *months*.

ARKON

Do you wish to withdraw?

MAGDALENA

(quickly)

Oh no, no!

ARKON

(growing upset)

Then *what*?

MAGDALENA

Is there any. . . "guarantee" this will work?

ARKON

I have been Arkon for nearly six years. I have seen *very few* negative outcomes from this ceremony. . .

He reaches out and touches the tree.

ARKON (CONT'D)

. . . but even *I* cannot predict the tree's mercies.

MAGDALENA

But the money -

ARKON

We all must make choices in life, my dear. Is filling your belly more important to you than a husband and child?

MAGDALENA

Certainly not!

ARKON
If you could have accomplished
either of those things on your own,
you would not be here today.

He holds the knife higher.

ARKON (CONT'D)
Are you ready?

MAGDALENA
(beat)
Will it. . . hurt?

ARKON
Only for a moment.

Magdalena slowly extends her ring finger. The Arkon cuts a small slice on it. Magdalena winces slightly from the pain. Together, they kneel beside the tree with the red leaves.

The Arkon grabs Magdalena's cut finger and squeezes several drops of her blood onto the tree's roots. Magdalena moans slightly and fights the urge to draw her hand back.

ARKON (CONT'D)
It is done!

They both rise. The Arkon removes a bandage from a small pocket in his robe and hands it to Magdalena.

ARKON (CONT'D)
Wrap this about your finger. It has
medicinal qualities.

MAGDALENA
Thank you.

She takes the bandage and does as she was told.

MAGDALENA (CONT'D)
When will I know?

ARKON
Your donation will be used to care
for the tree so it grows strong.
Hopefully, it will look upon you
favorably. I sincerely hope it
does.

FADE TO:

2

INT. ARKON'S HOME - LATER

2

The Arkon enters his opulent home. BROOG, a friend of his, is seated at a large wooden table with many coins scattered in front of him. He is younger than the Arkon, but dressed equally well. He, however, sports no jeweled chain.

The Arkon tosses the sack containing Magdalena's money onto the table in front of Broog.

ARKON

Add this to our ledger, Broog.

Broog picks up the sack, impressed.

BROOG

Another fifty coins?

ARKON

One hundred.

BROOG

(giggles)

She must be a real witch.

ARKON

Perhaps acceptable to someone in a lower caste.

BROOG

Will anything happen for her?

ARKON

Who cares? We have her money. Soon, we will be able to leave this village for good and live very comfortably overseas.

Broog gets out from behind his counting table and walks to the Arkon.

BROOG

Does the family tree have any *real* powers?

ARKON

(chuckles)

None.

BROOG

But your predecessors -

ARKON

Were *fools*. None of them saw the tree's potential to be a gold mine.

BROOG

So no one has ever benefitted from the bleeding ceremony?

ARKON

Of course not! It's all for *show*. If these simple-minded ladies want to water a worthless tree with their blood and pay us for the privilege, so be it.

(beat)

Whatever happens, *happens*.

FADE TO:

3 INT. THE CRESCENT INN - MORNING

3

A small inn in the village. It is tidy, but stuffed with knickknacks, many of a nautical theme.

A bell over the door rings as Magdalena opens it. She enters, closing the door behind her. She approaches TURSA, the elderly female proprietor, who is standing behind a counter looking over her guest book.

MAGDALENA

Morning, Tursa.

Tursa looks up briefly to acknowledge her.

TURSA

Magdalena.

MAGDALENA

Do you have any washing for me this morning?

TURSA

No, I don't.

MAGDALENA

No? Have your guests all decided to wear their dirty clothes over and over again?

TURSA

As long as they pay for their lodging, what they choose to do with their clothing is none of my concern.

MAGDALENA

But surely -

TURSA

They all know your services are available.

She holds up a sheet of paper.

TURSA (CONT'D)

I have this notice posted in every room.

(beat)

I can't *make* them contact you.

MAGDALENA

(sadly)

Of course not.

TURSA

Perhaps tomorrow.

MAGDALENA

One can hope.

The bell over the door rings again, and KLIM enters. He is a tall, handsome, rugged man dressed in well-tailored clothes and a cape. He is holding a large duffel bag in his left hand. He closes the door and approaches Tursa.

Magdalena is star-struck by him.

TURSA

May I help you, sir?

KLIM

The name is Klim. I wrote for a reservation.

Tursa turns some pages in her guest book.

TURSA

Yes. Four days.

KLIM

That's right.

TURSA
Your room is ready.

KLIM
Excellent.
(beat)
I was hoping you might help me with something else.

TURSA
What is that?

KLIM
I have a case to argue in the village tomorrow.

TURSA
You are a barrister?

KLIM
Yes. Unfortunately, my court attire became muddled on the way here.

He gestures at the bag.

MAGDALENA
(quickly)
I can help you with that.

KLIM
You can?

TURSA
Magdalena is the best washer woman for miles around. If anyone can make your court attire *sparkle*, she can.

Klim is struck by the washer woman's beauty.

KLIM
Magdalena, is it?

MAGDALENA
Yes.

KLIM
A lovely, lovely name.
(beat)
Will you be able to finish the job for tomorrow morning?

MAGDALENA
May I have a look at the clothes?

KLIM

Of course.

He lifts the duffel onto the counter, unbinds it, and starts rustling among the items. Magdalena looks into the bag as he speaks.

KLIM (CONT'D)

There is a shirt, a vest, a pair of trousers, and my barrister's -

Magdalena reaches for a garment that is about to fall out of the bag just as Klim does the same. His hand touches hers. He pulls it back quickly. Magdalena blushes slightly and lowers her head.

KLIM (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry!

MAGDALENA

For what?

KLIM

I touched your hand. I wasn't trying to be forward. It was *accidental*.

She looks into his eyes.

MAGDALENA

Not a problem, sir.

KLIM

Please, my name is. . . Klim.

MAGDALENA

Not a problem, *Klim*.

KLIM

Since it *wasn't* a problem. . .

MAGDALENA

(prompting him)

Yes?

KLIM

Might I. . . touch it again?

MAGDALENA

(shyly)

Of course.

She holds out her hand.

He touches it, stroking her alabaster skin gently and appreciatively.

KLIM

So delicate. . . and purer than any snowflake that ever fell from the heavens.

MAGDALENA

(shyly)

You flatter me.

KLIM

I speak the truth.

TURSA

(clears her throat)

The garments, sir?

KLIM

(chuckles)

Oh, yes.

(beat)

Could you make them presentable for court tomorrow?

MAGDALENA

Without fail.

TURSA

They will look *better* than new.

(beat)

Here are her fees.

She passes Klim the sheet of paper she held earlier. He takes it and reads silently from it.

KLIM

Very reasonable. I thank you.

MAGDALENA

The pleasure is mine.

(beat)

When in the morning will you need your things?

KLIM

Would 7:00 a.m. be too early?

MAGDALENA

Not at all. I sometimes employ a boy to run garments to their owners. He can -

KLIM
Could you deliver my things?

MAGDALENA
I. . . suppose I could.

KLIM
If there's any additional charge
for. . .

MAGDALENA
Not at all. I will see you in the
morning.

Klim smiles.

KLIM
I can think of no better way to
begin my day.

FADE TO:

4 INT. MAGDALENA'S SMALL BRICK CABIN - NEXT AFTERNOON 4

A very spare home.

Magdalena stands before a barrel of water bubbling with soap powder. Several garments hang over the sides. As she stops to wipe her brow, there is a knock at the door.

MAGDALENA
Come in!

Klim enters, shutting the door behind him. He is dressed in the court garments Magdalena so lovingly cleaned. She is surprised to see him.

MAGDALENA (CONT'D)
Klim?

He walks to her.

KLIM
I hope I'm not disturbing you.

MAGDALENA
Not at all.
(beat)
How did you find me?

KLIM
The innkeeper told me your address.
(beat)
(MORE)

KLIM (CONT'D)

Forgive me for intruding like this,
but I just *had* to share the news
with someone.

MAGDALENA

What news?

KLIM

I won my case!

MAGDALENA

Good for you!

KLIM

My superiors have asked me to move
permanently to this village. It is
near the locations where several
cases are pending. I'm going to
purchase a home soon.

MAGDALENA

It will be good to have you as a
neighbor.

KLIM

And the judge - oh, you *must* hear
this! - the judge even commented on
the *immaculate* condition of my
court attire.

He gestures proudly at his clothes.

KLIM (CONT'D)

He said it showed my sincerity and
respect for the law.

(beat)

I gave him your rates. I hope you
don't mind.

MAGDALENA

Not at all. The more clients, the
better.

Klim grabs both of her hands.

KLIM

I cannot thank you enough,
Magdalena. Thank you!

In his exuberance, he kisses her on the mouth. Magdalena is
pleasantly surprised.

MAGDALENA

Did you just. . . *kiss* me?

KLIM
(quickly)
It. . . It was a mistake.

MAGDALENA
Too bad.

KLIM
Why?

MAGDALENA
(shyly)
I was going to ask you to do it
again.

FADE TO:

5 EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

5

Several people are milling about near the central water fountain as Magdalena and Klim sit on a bench, holding hands.

MAGDALENA
(getting teary)
Oh, Klim. . . . Of course I will.
I'll marry you!

Klim is overjoyed. He springs to his feet, letting go of her hands.

KLIM
Oh, my love. You make my heart
sing!
(beat)
I have purchased an estate for us
on Sunflower Way.

MAGDALENA
(eagerly)
The one with two spiers?

KLIM
Correct.

MAGDALENA
That must have been so expensive.

KLIM
Don't you worry your pretty head
about that. My position is secure.
We will live there together in
harmony for ever.

He holds out his hands to her. She puts her hands in his, and he slowly helps her to her feet.

KLIM (CONT'D)
Now let us plan the wedding - the
biggest affair this village has
ever seen.

FADE TO:

6 INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MONTHS LATER

6

We see Magdalena, now wearing an ornate wedding ring, sitting in the DOCTOR's office. He is an older man, thin and bald.

MAGDALENA
(anxiously)
Doctor, am I. . .

DOCTOR
You *certainly* are.

MAGDALENA
Oh my!

DOCTOR
Everything looks wonderful. I would
say that you and your husband can
look forward to the birth in late
August.
(beat)
My congratulations to you both.

FADE TO:

7 EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

7

Magdalena is walking among the crowd of villagers when she spies the Arkon and calls to him.

MAGDALENA
Oh, Arkon! *Arkon!*

Surprised, he approaches her.

ARKON
Magdalena. I haven't seen you in
several months.

MAGDALENA
Several *eventful* months, sir.

ARKON

How so?

She holds out her left hand. The Arkon looks at the wedding band.

ARKON (CONT'D)

You have wed?

MAGDALENA

Yes, and I have a *child* on the way.
Such wonderful news! I was just
heading home to tell my husband.

ARKON

But your home is in the other
direction.

MAGDALENA

Not any longer. I live on Sunflower
Way now.

ARKON

(surprised)

You do? That's an *expensive* part of
town.

MAGDALENA

It is a *joyous* part of town! And to
think that all this happiness came
from a mere one hundred gold coins
and some drops of blood.

(beat)

Oh, may the family tree be blessed
for always!

She hurries off.

FADE TO:

8

INT. ARKON'S HOME - LATER

8

Broog is seated behind the counting table speaking to the
Arkon.

BROOG

She married Klim, the village's new
wealthy barrister.

ARKON

How could I have *missed* this news?

BROOG

I don't know. I assumed you had heard.

(sarcastically)

She got everything she asked for in the bleeding ceremony, didn't she?

ARKON

(angrily)

She did.

BROOG

But there's no truth to -

ARKON

Are you going to start wondering about that stupid tree *again*?

BROOG

No, but it certainly is a coincidence that -

ARKON

That's all it is: A *coincidence*.

(growing unsure)

Even though things were *not* looking good for her before. . .

The Arkon grins.

BROOG

What are you thinking about?

ARKON

A way to profit from Magdalena's marriage. Her husband could pay us *handsomely*. We could be overseas in no time!

(beat)

All I need is an angle.

FADE TO:

9

INT. SUNFLOWER WAY HOME PARLOR - LATER

9

Klim speaks to HANNAH, a pretty, blonde nurse. Many expensive pieces of art surround them as the sun pours through the stained-glass windows upon them in their chairs.

KLIM

You are confident in your duties, Hannah?

HANNAH

Yes, sir: I am to care for your wife and make sure she does not exert herself.

KLIM

Exactly. The doctor says she must relax during the remaining months of her pregnancy. When I *must* be at the office, I am putting her care in your hands.

HANNAH

I. . . I understand.

KLIM

(beat)

You sound unsure.

HANNAH

It's not that! I can look after your wife confidently. I have cared for *many* in the village.

KLIM

Then what?

HANNAH

(longish beat;
embarrassed)

Several months ago, I cared for the son of the Arkon.

KLIM

(prompting her)

And?

HANNAH

I once heard him talking to his aide, Broog. I didn't mean to eavesdrop.

KLIM

(getting aggravated)

Tell me!

HANNAH

He was speaking *meanly* of a woman who had paid him one hundred gold coins for the bleeding ceremony.

(beat)

He said her name was. . .
Magdalena.

KLIM
My Magdalena?

HANNAH
I believe so. I know of no other in
the village.
(beat)
He was gloating of how he had
stolen her money.

KLIM
What is a . . . a "bleeding
ceremony?"

HANNAH
At the edge of the woods, there is
a large, old elm known to the
locals as the family tree. Many
believe it has supernatural powers.

KLIM
A tree?

HANNAH
I do not share that belief myself,
but many do.

KLIM
You said this ceremony involves
payment?

HANNAH
Yes, sir. A woman gives the Arkon
fifty gold coins if she desires a
husband; one hundred for a husband
and a child. The gold is meant to
secure the tree's blessings.
(beat)
And then there's the blood.

KLIM
Blood?

HANNAH
The woman's ring finger is cut by
the Arkon with a ceremonial blade.
A half a dozen or so drops of blood
are applied to the tree's roots.
The blood and the gold, the woman
believes, will win the tree's favor
and grant her wish.

KLIM

Barbaric!

(beat)

My wife took part in this?

HANNAH

From what I heard, yes.

KLIM

The Arkon stole her money. How dare he!

(beat)

He will pay for this! I will see to it!

FADE TO:

10

INT. KLIM AND MAGDALENA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

10

Magdalena is lying in their ornate marriage bed. She is visibly pregnant. Klim kneels by her side.

MAGDALENA

(growing teary)

I did, my sweet.

KLIM

(confused)

You thought that a tree -

MAGDALENA

I did and *do*.

(beat)

Look at what that investment has wrought: You and, soon, our child.

KLIM

My dear, I didn't come to this village to fulfill the promise of a tree. I came of my own accord.

(beat)

I never heard of this family tree until earlier today. It has no power over me.

MAGDALENA

Then how did we meet?

KLIM

Chance. Wonderful, *blessed* chance.

(beat)

The Arkon stole your money. He will pay for that.

Magdalena rises slightly in bed.

MAGDALENA

Please *don't*! To anger the Arkon is to anger the tree. That will ruin everything we share!

He grasps one of her hands and gently strokes it.

KLIM

Everything will be *exactly* the same! Nothing bad will happen to you, me, or our child when I confront him.

MAGDALENA

(sniffs)

Are you. . . sure?

KLIM

Definitely.

Magdalena lays back down. Klim rises and stands over her.

MAGDALENA

(wistfully)

Back then, a hundred gold coins was an *incredible* amount of money to me. Does it matter now that we are well off?

KLIM

It insults my honor. I will not stand for someone treating you so poorly.

FADE TO:

11 INT. ARKON'S HOME - LATER

11

Broog enters through a side door and speaks to the Arkon, who is sitting in a large padded chair.

BROOG

Klim is waiting to see you. He *doesn't* look happy.

ARKON

Excellent!

BROOG

What?

ARKON

Here I was wondering how to extract
some money from him, and he pays *me*
a visit.

(beat)

Show him in.

Broog walks to the door, opens it, and calls out.

BROOG

The Arkon will see you now.

Klim enters angrily. Broog closes the door and, sensing
trouble, follows him. Klim strides purposefully to the Arkon.

ARKON

So good to meet you, barrister. I
usually personally welcome all
newcomers to our village but
business has been piling -

KLIM

(bluntly)

I'm not here to exchange
pleasantries.

The Arkon gestures at an empty chair.

ARKON

Have a seat.

KLIM

I prefer to stand.

ARKON

As you wish.

KLIM

You know my wife, Magdalena?

ARKON

A lovely woman.

(beat)

I understand she is expecting.
Congratulations!

KLIM

You have cheated her.

ARKON

Me?

(beat)

How?

KLIM

In the bleeding ceremony.

(beat)

Do you deny she participated in it?

ARKON

No.

KLIM

How could *anyone* believe in such foolishness? A tree that can grant a woman a husband and family!

(beat)

You don't believe it *yourself*, do you?

ARKON

Of *course* I do. I am the Arkon.

KLIM

You are a thief and a scoundrel!

The Arkon leans forward in his chair.

ARKON

How *dare* you!

Broog looks ready to pounce.

ARKON (CONT'D)

It's alright, Broog. Stand you ground.

Broog stands at ease.

KLIM

You stole money from my wife. I demand its return.

ARKON

I stole *nothing*. Your wife asked for a husband and child. Both wishes have been granted through the good graces of the family tree.

KLIM

Rubbish!

ARKON

You insult my religious beliefs, sir, and those of *many* villagers.

KLIM
(angrily)
I want her money *returned*.

ARKON
It has already been spent on the care of the tree - fertilizer, pruning, watering, and such.

KLIM
I'm sure you have a hundred gold coins lying about. Give her those!

ARKON
Why should I? She paid for services rendered and now has what she wished for.

KLIM
I'm not part of a tree's plan and neither is our child!
(slowly)
Will you give her the money back?

ARKON
I will *not*.

KLIM
Then I challenge you to a duel.

ARKON
What?

KLIM
I have two pistols at home. They should do nicely.

ARKON
When and where?

KLIM
Tomorrow at noon. . . and by this *supposedly* sacred tree. We will invite everyone in the village to witness our duel.

ARKON
Agreed.

BROOG
(alarmed)
Sir, you -

ARKON
Tomorrow then.

Klim leaves hastily, slamming the door shut behind him.
Worried, Broog walks to the Arkon.

BROOG
What are you thinking? A *duel*?

ARKON
I am an excellent marksman.

BROOG
What if Klim is a better one?

The Arkon smiles.

ARKON
It's all coming together now.

BROOG
What is?

ARKON
How dim can you be, Broog?
Tomorrow, Klim dies by my hand in a
totally legal way. Then, I slowly,
but *expertly*, advance upon the
grieving widow and stake my claim
to the riches her late husband has
no doubt willed her.
(beat)
It's all so *simple*.

FADE TO:

12 EXT. WOODED AREA - THE NEXT DAY

12

Many anxious villagers have gathered to witness the duel.
They stand about in a group, chatting. Broog is there.
Magdalena, visibly nervous, stands at the front of the crowd.
Tursa stands beside her, gently holding her arm.

Before them, Klim and the Arkon, both armed, stand leering at
each other. The doctor faces the crowd and begins speaking.

DOCTOR
Fellow citizens, I have been asked
to officiate in this duel.

He faces the combatants.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Gentlemen, you *definitely* wish to
go through with this?

ARKON
Yes.

KLIM
Absolutely.

DOCTOR
(sighs)
You will stand back to back. At my
say, you will take ten paces - no
more, no less - turn and fire. You
each have been given one bullet.
(beat)
Are there any requests before we
commence?

ARKON
Just one.

DOCTOR
Yes?

ARKON
I would like to take my ten paces
toward the family tree. It has
always given me comfort.

DOCTOR
Klim?

KLIM
No objection.

Magdalena breaks free from Tursa, rushes to Klim, and
clutches at his arm.

MAGDALENA
(nervously)
Husband?

KLIM
Get with the others, dear.

MAGDALENA
But -

KLIM
Go. I will see you after the duel.

She very reluctantly goes back to where she was.

DOCTOR

Begin.

Klim and the Arkon stand back to back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Ten paces. . . precisely.

The doctor backs up to the crowd, getting out of firing range.

Each man takes ten paces. They turn. The Arkon fires, hitting Klim in the shoulder. Many of the villagers gasp. Klim winces from the pain and grabs at his shoulder with his left hand. Magdalena screams and, weeping, rushes to her husband's side.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

No, child!

Seconds later, a large branch of the family tree cracks above the Arkon.

BROOG

Arkon!

The Arkon looks up. The branch falls onto his head, sending him to the ground in a heap. Broog rushes to his side.

The doctor approaches Klim and looks at his wound.

DOCTOR

It's only a flesh wound.

MAGDALENA

(through tears)

Thank heavens!

DOCTOR

We can take care of it in my office.

Broog urgently calls in the distance.

BROOG

Doctor, quickly!

The doctor, Klim, and Magdalena rush to him.

BROOG (CONT'D)

He's not moving!

The doctor kneels beside the Arkon. He feels for his pulse and then puts his hand in front of the Arkon's mouth.

DOCTOR
He breathes not.
(beat)
The Arkon is dead.

The doctor rises and faces Klim.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
You are the victor, sir. You have
killed the Arkon.

KLIM
No, I haven't.
(beat)
Look.

He opens the pistol's mechanism and shows the doctor that his
one bullet is still in the chamber.

KLIM (CONT'D)
My weapon failed to fire.

MAGDALENA
Then how. . .

KLIM
I may have been wrong about the
family tree, my dear.

MAGDALENA
How so?

KLIM
I'd say it just took its revenge on
the Arkon.

FADE TO BLACK.