

Agatha

I first met Agatha when we were in college. There was a minor subject that I needed to retake, so I was added to her class.

I really can't explain what it was that drove my attention towards Agatha at first. I would frequently sit in the back row since I wasn't a part of their usual block, and I would often find myself staring at her red hair. There were times when she would glance back at me, as if she knew I was looking at her, but I would always avert my eyes and pretend I was looking at something else.

I was never shy towards girls, or towards anybody for that matter, but there was something about her that was mysteriously intriguing.

She was not easy to approach. Despite the fact that she was remarkably attractive, I never saw any guy try to hook up with her. Although I never saw her hang out with anyone outside of class, she was nice to everyone. Agatha was a very reserved individual who was often alone, but her unusual personality was wrapped in a fairly pleasant demeanor. It was a perfect way to blend in while staying away from any unwanted attention. I saw right through her social mask, and I was captivated by her.

When the next semester came around, I had finished my subject and was back on the fixed schedule of my block. I couldn't see her as often as I did before, and my attention was filled with other things as well. I didn't really think about her much; not until something unfortunate happened.

A sudden explosion happened in a laboratory at our school – everyone in the building heard it. By the time I arrived, the building was already engulfed in fire. There were eight students still in the lab, and one of them was Agatha.

The door was jammed from the inside, and the students were trapped. The strongest and largest of the maintenance crew and faculty members tried to break the door open, but they failed. Every fire extinguisher in school was used in the attempt to put out the fire. They blasted them through the railed windows until the cans were emptied, but the fire just kept on going.

Despite the school's order to immediately evacuate the area, a lot of students gathered around, including me. It was a horrific scene to witness. We could hear the students screaming in agony as they were being consumed by the fire. I saw how the flames burned through their clothes, their hair and their flesh. I saw how they slowly suffered, how their guttural, desperate screams took the very last of their breaths as their friends and teachers cried in vain.

The firefighters arrived, but it was too late. They brought heavy tools and forced their way through the door. The stench of burnt flesh brimmed through the air as the thick smoke covered our sight.

And there she was. Amongst the charred bodies of the other students, Agatha was lying unconscious on the floor. All the witnesses were baffled when we saw her. The burnt bodies were hardly recognizable, and the lab was destroyed, yet Agatha was completely unharmed.

She was immediately taken to the hospital, and the school temporarily closed down due to the accident. A couple of days later, I decided to pay her a visit. Agatha was a little surprised when I showed up.

"Why did you come?" she said to me with a detached tone.

"I wasn't expecting any students to visit me."

“I just want to see how you are doing.” I said.

I started to think that it was a bad idea to come, until I noticed the gifts on the table. They were all from the faculty members; but there was not a single gift from her classmates. Apparently, some of the students were questioning how she survived. I couldn't blame them; I was wondering about it as well. So, I bluntly asked,

“What exactly happened?”

She looked at me, and then looked out the window as she responded.

“I don't know. I can't remember what happened. I wasn't even aware that there was a fire. We were doing an experiment in the lab because we failed the previous test. It was a make-up class. The next thing I knew, I was here.”

It seemed that Agatha blacked out before the fire even started. I wanted to ask her more questions about the matter, but it was pointless – she couldn't recall any of it.

No other visitors came, so I decided to stay by her side the entire day. It was the very first time that we had spent some time together. I didn't expect that this tragic accident would be the way for me to see her close once again, and it was so wrong to be thankful for this horrendous tragedy. But in some strange way, I was happy that I finally had this chance.

When the school resumed classes, Agatha and I started spending more time together. Through some of my friends, I heard how her miraculous survival had sparked unpleasant rumors.

“I heard the class was having an argument in the lab before it exploded,” one of my friends told me.

“They were failing the experiment, and Agatha was upset about it.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” I lashed out, “Everybody is pissed during chemistry class. You suck at it, so you should know.”

He backed away and told me to relax.

Some of Agatha's classmates were blaming her for what happened, while the others went even further and said that she was unharmed because she was a child of the devil.

“So, are you dating the daughter of Satan?” another asshole of a friend asked me sarcastically.

“She should watch her back, bro. This is a Catholic school, and you know how these Jesus freaks are.”

My friend was actually right. The religious individuals bothered Agatha the most ever since she returned to school. They were assertive in their claims, and Agatha couldn't do anything about it. She wanted to just leave them be, but I insisted on reporting the matter to the school authorities. Instead of doing something about the bullying, the authorities just asked the same question that was bothering everyone at this point.

How did Agatha survive?

I suggested Agatha transfer to another school with me. The harassment was getting out of hand, and it was too much for a person who had just been through a tragic accident. So, we did.

Once we had transferred to a different academy, things turned out well. Agatha seemed to have changed somehow. She had become friendlier and more open about her feelings towards me. We spent most of our time together. Needless to say, I had fallen in love with her, and she loved me back.

When we decided to go with our classmates to the beach, I discovered that Agatha didn't know how to swim. Oddly enough, she had never been to the beach, or even swam in a pool. I felt guilty for laughing when she told me the reason why. She was deeply traumatized because her mother died by drowning in a lake. I thought that she should overcome her fear. I said that she would be fine as long as I was around, but then I let her down.

She went to the water with some friends while the rest of us were having a couple of beers on the shore. They said that they would teach her how to swim, and she was quite cheerful about it. Everything was fine until one of them suddenly called us for help. Apparently, Agatha had lost consciousness the moment she submerged. I immediately jumped into the water and pulled her out.

Her skin was pale, and her lips were turning purple as if she had just died right there and then. I was genuinely afraid. I was about to burst into tears when she regained consciousness and hugged me tightly. She tried to comfort me when she saw how devastated I was.

"I'm okay. Don't cry. I'll be alright."

"What happened to you, Agatha?" one of our friends asked. "You had us extremely worried."

"I don't know. It's like I was suffocating suddenly. I felt weak, and then I blacked out." She replied.

I thought thoroughly about what happened, but I just couldn't make any sense out of it. She survived, totally unscathed, the fire that killed seven people, yet she almost died within mere seconds of being in the water.

Just when we were finally moving past the mystery of her reserved personality, something even more peculiar about Agatha was beginning to bother me.

In order to forget what had happened at the beach, I decided to take her to the carnival nearby. Little did I know, something horrifying was about to happen again.

Aside from it being Agatha's first time going to the beach, it was also her first time seeing a carnival. I was beginning to think that she had been kept in the shadows by her parents.

She was like a curious child; easily pleased by carnival games, trying every food she saw, riding any ride she liked. I was amused by her reactions, and I was glad that I had brought her there.

After wandering around and having fun for hours, we came across the booth of a self-proclaimed fortune teller. Just for laughs and giggles, we decided to go inside the small cubicle covered by thick, dark curtains printed with glittering occult symbols and stars.

"How can I help you?" said a voice coming from behind another curtain, as we sat in front of a table with a glass sphere placed at the center.

"We wish to know our future, O Great One," I replied with humor as Agatha and I tried to hold in our laughter.

“Oh, I most certainly could help you.”

An old lady in a black dress and a violet shawl stepped out from behind the curtain.

For some reason, right at the very moment that she saw us there, she glared at Agatha in a very strange and unwelcoming manner.

However, she kept on moving along, and sat in front of her orb.

“I will start by reading your palms,” she said.

As Agatha held out her hand, the fortune teller avoided making eye contact. When she looked at her palm, I saw how her expression suddenly changed. It looked as if she had seen something quite unpleasant.

It was starting to get awkward, so I broke the silence and asked,

“So, what do you see in her future?”

Our cheerful vibe was smothered by the eerie tension that had enveloped this very small, enclosed space. It all became uncomfortably serious.

“Something is clouding my mind, I couldn’t see it clearly,” said the fortune teller with a shaky tone.

She was obviously bothered by something, and she was trying to hide it from us.

“I will call forth some spirits to guide me. I shall see what lies ahead of you through their wisdom.”

Apparently, she still decided to go on with the performance. She lit a candle and held up some kind of talisman against her forehead and, eyes closed, began to chant in a weird, ancient-sounding language.

As her voice intensified, the flame on the candle started to flicker rapidly. A few minutes later, she turned towards Agatha and slowly opened her eyes. As she stared at her, Agatha became profoundly terrified. Her eyes widened as the fortune teller kept on chanting. I turned my head to Agatha to see what was scaring her, but I saw nothing.

Within just a few seconds, things turned from weird to hellish. A small, insignificant flickering flame from the candle suddenly burst and caught the fortune teller’s shawl. I immediately grabbed it and tried to put it out, but the fire was already crawling up her dress. She stood up and screamed in pain as the flames reached her face, and then the fire caught the curtains.

Agatha tried to reach for her so she could help. But as she stretched her hands to her, the fortune teller recoiled even further and yelled,

“Get away from me!”

Agatha kept on reaching for her, but she kept stepping back until she was wrapped by the burning curtain behind her. I had no choice but to grab Agatha and drag her out. In seconds, the entire booth was burning, with the fortune teller inside it.

When it was finally extinguished by the carnival workers, it was too late. A person died in a fire, in the presence of Agatha, once again.

We were called by the local police officers to ask us what had happened. After hearing the story, they concluded that it had just been an accident. I wanted to believe what they said, but there were too many unanswered questions in my head. After the incident, Agatha didn't utter a single word until we were back home.

What happened at the carnival deeply troubled both of us, especially Agatha. I could sense that she was blaming herself for what had happened, so I persistently tried to convince her that it was nobody's fault.

She kept quiet for days, so I decided to do something. I finally confessed to her how I felt about her. Miraculously, it worked. Before the summer was over, I asked her to move in with me. She was living on her own anyway, and so was I, so I felt that it was the right thing to do.

Once we were living under one roof, I began to learn more things about her that I hadn't known before. As we grew more romantically comfortable with each other, I started to notice something odd about the way she would occasionally behave.

Most of the time, she was timid and very reserved, just as how I had always known her. But there were moments when she would get feisty and belligerent for no reason. It was as if she would turn into a different person who was the total opposite of her innate character. As time passed, the sudden shifting of her behavior happened more often, and became more intense. Whenever she would behave this way, strange things would occur around us. For some reason, it always had something to do with fire.

Just like any other couple, we would sometimes have arguments. During one of our petty fights during a diner, fire suddenly burst from the stoves as Agatha raised her voice at me. It seemed as if the fire was reacting to her emotions. When I was finally able to ask her about the matter, she seemed clueless as to why those things were happening. She could have asked her parents about it, but they had both passed away. I asked her if she still had any relatives around, and she answered me with hesitation. Agatha still had one remaining relative, the only person that could possibly answer our questions – her grandmother.

Agatha had nothing but bad memories of her grandmother. She described her to me as a hostile and demented individual. She and her mother ran away from her grandmother when she was very young, and she had never seen her since. So we decided to pay her a visit.

The place where Agatha was born was incredibly remote and hard to reach. The nearest town to the house was almost an hour away, and we had to walk across a dense forest to get there.

It was literally in the middle of nowhere. Nobody would think that there was still someone living there.

The house was very old, and it was hardly taken care of. Some parts of it were burnt, and it was quite surprising that it was still standing. Agatha reluctantly knocked on the door.

"Come in, the door is open. It has always been" the raspy voice of an old woman was heard.

We slowly walked inside the house. Aside from the subtle squeaks of what sounded like a rocking chair, it was dead silent. The dust was so thick that the place looked abandoned. We were leaving shoe prints as we walked across a layer of ashes covering the creaky floor. The shelves were laced with spider webs, and the roof was slightly caved in. The house was barely illuminated by the light outside beaming through the holes of the burnt walls. It didn't look like a person was living in there.

"I am here, Agatha. Come here. Bring your friend with you." the old lady called to us from the living room.

She was able to tell that it was Agatha without even hearing her voice, and she knew that she was with someone.

As we walked further, the successive squeaks became louder. And there she was, Suzan, Agatha's only remaining family. I didn't want to be rude to the first relative of Agatha's that I was meeting but seeing Suzan's appearance made me take one step backward. I was caught by surprise. She was wearing layers of gray and faded blue tattered clothes and looked as if she was at least a hundred years old. She rose her head and smiled with her gritty, yellow teeth and spoke,

"Welcome home, my dear. Your mother took you away from this place, and yet here you are."

"How are you doing, grandma?" said Agatha.

I could tell by her voice that she didn't want to be here. She couldn't even look straight at her, as if she was afraid of her own grandmother.

"It seems you are resisting your true nature, child. How are you with fire?" Suzan asked.

The question baffled Agatha, and she didn't respond.

"Your mother wanted you to live a normal life. She and her foolish ideals have always been a problem for me. It seems she hasn't told you anything, what with you coming here with that naive look on your face."

"I...I don't understand" Agatha mumbled as she struggled to reply.

She looked confused, totally clueless about what her grandmother had said. The answer that Suzan gave her next was hard to take in. It didn't make any sense to me, yet it was still quite unsettling.

"Our family is unique, my grandchild. We are descendants of people who worshipped an omnipotent and ubiquitous force of the fire. We are mere shells of flesh for this being. Neglect it, and it will take over you. The written history of this modern civilization chose to forget about us, for they feared our kind. An ordinary person could not handle the presence of this force. With just a very brief glance at the true face of the being that lies within us, anyone who would cast their eyes upon it will burn."

Suzan turned her head towards me and stared at me with disdain.

"The men of this world called us witches a long time ago, and feared that we could dominate the lands. For ages, there hasn't been a single male that was born in our family, yet we could easily overpower the barbarism of these insolent creatures."

"He's my friend. I love him and he loves me." Agatha defended me assertively.

Suzan simply smirked at her and replied,

"Do you not know what happened to your father? Your mother turned him into ashes when she deemed him useless."

Everything that her grandmother said was too much for Agatha to take in, even though she must have realized these were the answers to questions that had bothered her for a long time.

“You have to accept your fate, my dear. We are living temples to the fire. It is the purpose of our existence. It was inconsiderate of your mother to throw her life away so selfishly. She knew that a fire would lose its light once thrown to the opposing element of this world. Unfortunately, we are the last remaining three.”

Suzan looked at me again and said,

For that, I should thank you.”

“I thought that we are the only two left in our family” said Agatha with a confused look on her face.

Her grandmother replied with an answer that surprised us even further. “Agatha, my dear, do you not know? You are bearing a child.”

Agatha and I headed back home with most of our questions finally answered, but with a heavyweight cast on our shoulders from the revelations we had just heard. However, there was one good thing that came out of this unpleasant trip. We were having our very first child. At that point, we were more happy than worried. Agatha and I were about to start our own family.

I told Agatha to stay in our apartment as long as she needed to, so she could rest for the sake of the baby. Now that I had an idea of why those weird things had been happening, it was best to avoid upsetting her, especially in her state, in which she was prone to mood swings.

Everything was turning out well despite the challenges I had to overcome during her pregnancy. I strictly avoided producing fire whenever I was around her, just to make sure that it wouldn't suddenly burst out of control. We relied on an electric stove and a microwave to heat and cook our food. We avoided going to restaurants as much as we could.

Agatha was very considerate about our situation. Despite the limits she had to bear with, she seemed quite happy and at peace. We even planned on getting married once things got less complicated.

Several months later, our child was finally ready to be born. Even though we were both excited about it, Agatha was in pain, and that wasn't good. Bringing her to the hospital was a very difficult task, and I was terribly nervous the entire time. I tried to make her feel as relaxed as I possibly could, but there really wasn't much that I could do aside from holding her hand.

When we finally arrived at the hospital, she was immediately taken to the labor room. I diligently kept on the lookout. I assertively asked the doctors if there was anything nearby in the hospital that was using fire. But even before anybody answered me, Agatha screamed in pain. We heard a sudden explosion inside the building. It was the gas stoves in the hospital's kitchen. It had begun.

Most of the people inside were evacuated, while some of the staff remained to tend to the patients who needed immediate attention. Agatha screamed even louder. Our child was crowning. At that point, even the lights flickered and exploded. I had never seen her in so much pain before.

As she kept on screaming, all the equipment around her went haywire, and the glass windows shattered one by one. The doctors and nurses were frightened. Most of them ran away, forcibly dragging their patients out with them. Even the doctor who was tending to Agatha tried to bolt, but I grabbed his hand and begged him to help us.

As Agatha's screams echoed inside the room, the things around us started to ignite. Even though there wasn't any fire around, the sheets, chairs, even the walls began to catch flame one by one. I realized with horror that she could create the fire herself.

I tried to do what I could to put out the flames around us as the doctor helped Agatha deliver our child. We had no choice but to bear the wave of heat. I could hear the frantic noises from the other remaining people inside the hospital as they escaped. The fire had already spread throughout the entire building.

Agatha screamed and pushed as hard as she could. And as she did, the doctor and I were caught in an unexpected explosion that threw us out of the room. I was dazed and couldn't get back on my feet.

The next thing I knew, Agatha's room was engulfed in flames. Somebody dragged the doctor and me out of the building. I refused to leave, but I didn't have the energy to pull myself away from whoever was saving my life.

The entire hospital was being swallowed by the fire within just a few minutes of it starting. I was lying on the ground in front of the building. There was nothing I could do. Thick smoke spread above us, dimming the light of the sunny sky.

This day, supposed to be about the welcoming of our first child, had become a nightmare in real life. I looked around at the number of people wounded and crying. Many of the survivors had severe burns, while others did not make it in time and were claimed by the merciless fire.

The firefighters and police finally came to aid us. As they approached the burning building, I saw ahead of them the silhouette of a person walking down the hallway, toward the burned-out front doors. It looked as if the fire was under some unseen command. The flames swelled from floor to ceiling, giving way to this person who was unaffected by it.

The silhouette drew closer, and I finally recognized who it was. It was Agatha, and she was carrying our child with her. I can't explain how happy I was when I saw her. Unfortunately, people around me didn't feel the same way.

"It was her! She caused this fire!" one of the wounded patients yelled.

"She did! She tried to burn us all!" a nurse seconded.

"Officers arrest her!" they kept on accusing her.

One of the officers replied,

"How can you be sure it was her? Why would she do something like this? How could she start a fire that ended up burning the entire building? This must have been done by more than one person. It didn't take us five minutes to arrive here. It's just impossible."

The response of the officer should have suppressed the accusations, but the crowd simply became more aggressive.

"Why are you defending this heartless monster? We saw it with our own eyes. She started the fire!" said a lady with a burnt arm.

"She's telling the truth! We were all witnesses to what happened. Isn't that enough?" another supported the woman's claim.

When Agatha finally arrived at the front door, the crowd yelled and pointed their fingers at her. They were getting out of control, and officers started to put their hands on their guns as if they were ready to pull them out.

“Look! Look at the fire!” someone yelled louder than the others.

And he was right. With every step that Agatha took, the fire was following her. The flames were surrounding her as embers spread through the air. People moved back in fear as she approached with wild eyes. And then I heard the screaming. Shouts of indignation at Agatha were giving way to screams of horror and pain – people were catching fire.

One by one, from no visible source, the bystanders were bursting into flames. One minute they were people, the next, columns of flame. People fled in panic, and the firefighters attempted to help those who had suddenly ignited.

The officers didn’t know how to react to this bizarre situation. They pulled out their guns and pointed them at Agatha.

“Stay right there! Don’t come any closer or we will open fire!” one of the officers warned.

As soon as I heard what the officers were about to do, I ran towards Agatha, who seemed out of control. Despite the warning, the fire raged on.

“Stop this, right now!” an officer yelled.

As I desperately tried to get close to her, my clothes caught fire, burning through to my skin. I disregarded the pain and kept on going. Despite the chaos around her, Agatha’s face did not show any emotion. I was afraid that she had lost herself.

And I was right. Her other side was starting to take over, and she was losing her sanity. I hugged her tight as I screamed through the pain of the burns. As I looked at her, a teardrop suddenly fell down her cheek. In a fraction of a second, I could see her face changing. It didn’t look like the face of a human at all; it looked more like a grinning demon. She was trying to hold it in, but she couldn’t much longer.

“Take care of our child.” was the last thing she said.

She handed me the baby and shoved me out of the way. She was worried that I would burn to death if I were to see the other being hiding within her, as her grandmother had warned her.

As soon as I had the baby in my arms, the remaining officers opened fire right away. I bawled my eyes out as the flames started to diminish. I cried and cried before the bloody body of the person I loved, with our only child in my arms. The hellish nightmare was finally over, and Agatha’s life faded with the fire.

Nineteen people were burnt to death that day, including some of officers and firefighters. For a while, people spread hushed rumors of a girl who controlled the flames. But the truth was too mythic to last, and all that was remembered was the fire.

I named our daughter after her mother. Six years have gone by and people have forgotten about the incident. I have my burn scars to remind me of it, and the lovely child who was left behind.

My daughter, Agatha, is growing up just as beautiful as her mother. She's got her stunning red hair and her innate shyness. Oddly enough, she is starting to show a curious fascination with fire.