CATHERINE KIM

Mache/Mary

I. Evia

Mache has one of her mysterious ailments. She huddles under the covers in her bedroom while her father strategizes. Colonel Mavrogeni has already consulted the best physicians in Athens. They listened intently to her gurgling belly. They kneaded it gently, as if it were bread dough. Their fingers tap, tap, tap, like hammers on piano strings.

They stroked their mustaches and shook their heads: it is likely nothing.

But now, the Mavrogenis are not in Athens. They are at their vacation home, in Kymi on the island of Evia. They are acquainted with the mayor, who happens to be a physician (in Kymi, as in many small towns, one man often plays several roles). Perhaps this country doctor can offer insight.

Being summer people, the Mavrogenis know only the short, officious man who greets them with vigorous handshakes. They are unaware of the mayor's troubles: Dr. Nicolas Papanicolaou has been unhappy on account of his son. George has recently completed his medical studies at the top of his class. Yet he has not joined his father's practice.

Instead, George wanders the island. Armed with his butterfly net, he stalks specimens in the tall, yellow grass. He scans the rocky beaches for shells. Despite shouted cautions from fishermen, he dives into the rough surf and swims furiously. His pale torso lifts and falls on the cerulean swells of the Aegean.

When the day's heat is most intense, he reads Goethe beneath the waxy leaves of his favorite olive tree.

These behaviors drive Dr. Papanicolaou to despair. At dinner, over steaming plates of soutzoukakia, he scolds his wayward child. It is all very well to speak of Zarathustra at university, the mayor declaims, waving his fork in the air. Of the fertility of sea urchins. I gave you drachmas for so-called essential books. Lessons in music, French, and German. A new suit each Easter.

For the defense of your thesis, a silk top hat.

We are not rich! In Greece, politics costs money!

And why do you torture Koula? You kept her waiting when you were children. You kept her waiting while you were at university. And you keep her waiting now. A beautiful girl with a mild temperament and a handsome dowry.

George listens, head bowed. The fragrance of cumin, cinnamon, and tomato sauce wafts up from the meatballs. He feels ravenous, guilty, and annoyed. So, he relents: I will seek out patients. (He says nothing about Koula).

Tomorrow?

Tomorrow.

Satisfied for now, the father ladles the crimson sauce over the white rice.

The following day, George makes his first house call. Twenty miles north, at Soutsini, a pine forest fringes an isolated beach. Kalogiros rock, a windswept crag of limestone and shale, marks the southern end as if in warning: lepers live here. George brings them food and clothing from the Papanicolaou home. He inspects the nubs of their hands and the wounds on the bottoms of their feet. He notes their disappearing eyebrows and eroding noses, bulbous ears and rashy skin.

As George describes the visit to his father, the mayor shakes his head both in sadness for the lepers' tragic state and resignation for his son's impracticality. The next day, when Dr. Papanicolaou visits the Mavrogenis, it is without George.

Unbeknownst to the mayor, Colonel Mavrogeni also worries about his daughter's prospects. Mache is short. She has a large nose and a weak chin. Her eyes, though large and lively, observe too sharply, like the eyes of a raptor. The colonel has tried to soften her quick intelligence with lessons in piano and French. But Mache stubbornly contradicts her father in all matters of decorum. She rolls her eyes when he speaks. She laughs too loudly. She argues with unbecoming zeal.

Also, there is the matter of the dowry. It is expected of a family of their standing, Phanariots who fought the Ottomans. Mache is sixteen, and an arrangement will need to be made. Yet funds are low. The colonel has already been forced to small indignities: a threadbare cuff, a servant less, the discreet sale of a prized set of pistols. Indeed, it

would have been best to release the house on Kymi, but this would have been too public a humiliation.

Of course, when the two fathers greet each other at the threshold of the Mavrogeni household, they do not share these worries. All has been well! What a pleasure to meet again, although the circumstances are unfortunate. Dr. Papanicolaou has spent years tending to the needs of his constituents, and he easily transforms from a harried father into the kindly general practitioner.

When the colonel escorts him into Mache's darkened bedroom, the doctor settles in the chair next to her bed. He looks at her expectantly. Start at the beginning, from when you were well.

She speaks with halts and starts because of the colonel's frequent interruptions. Mache's hints of worsened pain with womanly flow and specific vegetables seem ridiculous to him. His daughter's narrative rambles! It is not a report which will lead to a plan of action. Despite his experience in battle, his daughter's tears unnerve him.

Dr. Papanicolaou ignores the colonel. He only speaks to Mache and then with only an occasional prompt. What did you try? That was wise; did it help?

Over the course of the morning, her speech gradually loosens. Her worries tumble out as if they had been jammed into a closet. What if these pains never subside? What if she becomes an invalid? What if she cannot have a family? For this is what it is to have a meaningful life as a woman. She speaks until there is no more to say.

The sun has crossed the sky before Dr. Papanicolaou offers his opinion. There is the pain, and there is the worry about the pain, and they feed upon each other. There is no need to suffer silently. An aspirin at the time of your flow, with meals. Keep a diary. It is useful for determining what may precipitate pain and what may relieve it. Diaries also serve as a repository for troubling thoughts.

Rise before the sun and walk by yourself along the shore. Notice how your breath rises and falls.

Our lives change, continuously, often in ways we cannot anticipate (an image of his son flits across his mind, and he brushes it away).

II. Courtship

The brisk wind drives the ferry passengers inside. Except for Mache. The ship's deck is one of the few places where she may be alone. She enjoys the spray and the dramatic whitecaps brushed on navy water. Today, someone else is also on deck. A young man leans on the rails. He stares out at the channel, deep in thought.

As she turns away, he sees her and nods in greeting. The wind lifts his parted hair over his dark eyes.

Mache thinks he is the most dashing man she has ever seen. An uncharacteristic blush creeps up her neck. Good afternoon, she says, trying to sound nonchalant. It appears we are the only ones who enjoy the breeze.

He takes in her bold and friendly manner, her animated and plain face, her diminutive height. He relaxes in a way he could not with a beautiful woman. I prefer the ferry to the bridges. Seasickness does not trouble you?

Never, in all of our trips between Kymi and Athens. She approaches him and extends her hand. Andromache Mavrogeni. But I am called Mache.

He takes her hand and gives a slight bow. George Papanicolaou.

The son of Dr. Nicolas Papanicolaou? A smile lights up her face. Four years ago, your father helped me when all of the doctors in Athens could not.

He is the doctor for everyone in Kymi and then some.

How lucky for you! To have such an expert for a father.

George nods but says nothing.

Please, you must say hello to my father. He remembers you fondly.

Indoors, Mache enthusiastically introduces George to Colonel Mavrogeni, who simultaneously recalls Dr. Papanicolaou's hefty bill as well as his daughter's improved health. The colonel also sees his daughter's radiant face. Please, you must join us.

The colonel peppers George with friendly questions. George plans to be a researcher. He has already studied marine biology from the leading scientists in Munich.

George speaks of the wonders of the microscope. Under magnification, the miniscule water flea, the unthreatening Daphnia, looms like a monster. This tiny creature can become male or female, he

exclaims. How? What can the answers tell us of how a man becomes a man, how a woman becomes a woman?

Mache listens with amazement and admiration. How incredible, to travel to a country where no Greek is spoken. It seems to her no less an expedition than to the North Pole.

The colonel is impressed by the young man's daring. Your father was convinced? No? I can understand his reluctance. A physician's livelihood is a good one. Then again, your misery would serve no one. It's up to the young to look forward. Science seems a more gainful occupation than many.

The colonel opens his arms wide, as if to embrace the future and George with it.

George welcomes the attention from this distinguished war hero and his cultured daughter. Such a contrast from his father's exasperated scolding and Koula's daily reports on the quality of her naps! Over the next few weeks, George pays frequent visits to the Mavrogeni home. He and Mache discover their mutual love of music. He accompanies her piano with his violin. They begin simply, with Bach's Minuet in G. Quickly, they advance to the swooning, romantic sonatas of Beethoven and then Schubert. Mache plays soothingly, countering George's fiery melodies.

With the colonel, George debates: Greece is a country trapped by its traditions. We argue whether we should speak ancient or modern Greek. In the meantime, foreign powers decide which kings should rule us. Their scientists decipher the secrets of life. No wonder that thousands of us seek our fortunes abroad.

So you agree with Venizélos? The colonel asks.

George flushes, remembering Koula and her wish to settle in Kymi in familiarity and comfort. He replies, If Greece is to claim its destiny, we need to shed outdated customs. Such customs include the idea of marriage as a contract, sealed by exchanges between families, as if we were cattle.

Although he is a monarchist, the colonel nods as if in agreement. He intuits that the young man is fleeing his father and an arranged marriage. Importantly, George does not expect a dowry.

The colonel senses an opportunity for expediency.

After the sun has set, George and Mache stroll in the cool evening air. The streetlamps and leafy canopies of the trees cast deep shadows

around them. My ideal is not to become rich or to be happy, he tells her. My dream is but to work, to create, to do something worthy.

For each step he takes, Mache must take two. A fine sweat forms on her upper lip and brow, and she breathes deeply at the effort. But she is entranced by the nobility of his conviction. He is a born scientist, whose purpose can only be realized in the laboratory! As the moon rises and stars appear in the night sky, she feels she has glimpsed an important secret.

He takes both of her hands. Children will detract from his focus. My hours will be long, I will frequently be preoccupied with my work. I understand if this is not a sacrifice you are willing to make.

She looks up into his handsome face, so immediate, and thrills to the gentle pressure of his hands. As long as I am with you, it is not a sacrifice.

When George proposes, the colonel, then Mache, happily assent. The couple weds in the Mavrogeni home. Dr. Papanicolaou is not present. Out of fear that the doctor will scuttle the arrangement, George has decided to delay informing his father until after the wedding. When the doctor learns of his son's marriage, the couple has already departed Greece.

III. A Rough Start

Generously, the colonel pays for their first-class steamer passage to the United States. On the SS *Athenai*, the young couple wear fine clothes and dine on pâté de foie gras. They converse in French. Their fellow passengers offer unsolicited advice about New York City.

Mrs. Cutting is the most opinionated. Reside below 96th Street. Avoid the newer residences with smaller servant quarters. Irish maids are not to be trusted. As she speaks, the ostrich feather atop her hat bobs in warning.

George and Mache do not share that they have little more than the $250 required for entry. Although George has written circumspect letters announcing his arrival to various zoologists, he has yet to procure a research position. When George and Mache disembark, they promise to meet their shipboard acquaintances soon. They know they will not.

Instead, they hustle. There is cheap housing at 112th and Amsterdam. Despite his accented English, George finds work selling rugs at

Gimbels. In the evenings, he serenades diners with his violin at the Knickerbocker Hotel. From the size of the tips, he quickly learns that they prefer the light melodies of popular tunes to the darker strains of Schubert. On the weekends, he edits the copy of *Atlantis*. At the paper, he hears news from home. He relates the newspaper's patriotic stories of Greek sacrifice and Bulgarian treachery to his wife.

Wages, thirty dollars a month. Expenses, thirty-one dollars.

Mache also secures work at Gimbels. Although she cannot speak English, she can sew. The stores need seamstresses and are accustomed to young women flooding the city from across the ocean. A common language is not essential. The women understand when they see the needles, spools of thread, and tiny bone buttons. They understand the gestures of the managers, men with unsmiling faces and brusque gestures. Sit there. Sew these. Stay later.

After George falls asleep, Mache lets herself cry from homesickness. At night, she dreams of Greece.

One day, Mrs. Cutting enters Gimbels while George is on duty. Awkwardly, he approaches her while weaving between the stacks of carpet samples. He questions her in French. She answers in English and avoids his gaze.

George tries his best. He shows her several selections, which she declines. Please excuse me, she finally says, I am in a rush.

George resigns that day.

As he relays the story to Mache that evening, his voice shakes a little. The humiliation! He, a top graduate of the University of Athens, a physician, with a PhD in zoology. The son of the Mayor of Kymi. Married to a Phanariot. Forced to sell rugs.

As he speaks, Mache stares at him, wide-eyed. Then she throws her head back and bursts into laughter. Tears of mirth appear at the corners of her eyes. Look at the pair of us! George Papanicolaou, failed rug salesman! Mache Mavrogeni, seamstress to the masses! What is it they say here? You must sell yourself, instead. You must swallow your pride. Write to professors, explain your credentials. Directly ask them for a position, however humble, in their departments and laboratories.

As she wipes her eyes and sighs with amusement, George stops frowning. The corners of his mouth lift slightly.

IV. Guinea Pigs

The community of those who study fleas and flies rally around. George's work on Daphnia is known by those who study Drosophila. Researchers who study Drosophila know those who study rodents. George secures work as an anatomy technician at Cornell.

He cares for guinea pigs. He feeds them; he sweeps their cages of droppings and replaces the straw and sawdust. Under the supervision of the laboratory director, George feeds the dams alcohol. He examines the babies for malformations. He tallies the lists of deformities; he sketches and graphs. He speaks constantly to Mache of guinea pigs: their bright, black eyes; their soft, multi-colored fur; their jumps and squeals; their friendly huddling and humping.

Although it is improper for a husband and wife to share a workplace, Cornell will turn a blind eye if Mache forgoes pay. Mache and George accept immediately. What better way to ensure George's success than having a dedicated helper? Mache is happy to leave Gimbels. For the rest of her life, she associates the guinea pigs' faint musk with the same affection as the aromas of black wines or salty air.

She feels a strange mixture of sympathy and envy for the female guinea pigs. Sympathy, because the animals will spend most of their lives inebriated and pregnant. Then, of course, they must be sacrificed. She learns not to mind, or at least to care less, when the creatures are anesthetized and their ovaries are dissected.

Envy, because the female pigs do not have mates who meticulously compare contraceptive methods. Cost, convenience, and pleasure. George makes columns for both his and hers, for she is an important variable. Withdrawal, douche, caps and condoms made of rubber. To Mache's amusement, George tests each device for drips under running water.

Envy, because how small the pups appear when they are born, their eyes still creased. When their mothers nuzzle them, they squeak softly.

When she shares these thoughts with George, she tries to sound as if she is only musing or amused. Despite the lateness of the hour, he snaps to attention, his eyes alarmed and magnified through his spectacles. Guinea pigs are known to eat their young, he tells her. When they feel overwhelmed.

As a reward for their months of diligent care of drunken guinea pigs, the director permits George to begin his own investigations. George is overjoyed. For months, he has dreamt of possible experiments. He believes that he may determine when the females ovulate without killing them. Rather, ovulation may be determined from the vaginal cells alone. He purchases a small metal instrument designed to stretch the nasal opening. The speculum also fits easily into the vagina of the female guinea pig.

George spends hours observing the cells under the microscope. He eats lunch at his desk so he can read scientific papers and take notes in the margins. He begins experimenting with dyes to highlight features that interest him. He perceives meaning in the constellation of cell shapes and their dark, concentrated centers.

Mache becomes expert in creating the dyes. She begins with extracts of the logwood and alum. With a glass dropper, she adds phloxine to create deeper reds, acetic and hydrochloric acid to sharpen the cells' transparent edges. She learns when water wash and xylene should be added. She learns when to finish by dropping the paper-thin glass cover slip on top, with the finesse of an artist.

She records the subsequent shades of blue and pink meticulously, as George has taught her, in her own notebook. Her elegant handwriting, originally intended for penning invitations, soon fills the pages. She is almost as proud of her rapidly improving English and her soutzoukakia, created from the pennies remaining after rent payment.

As winter comes, they return home after the sun has set, leaving only an orange glow beneath the horizon. Gradually, they adjust to the winter chill of Manhattan. Their coats are too thin against the cold, but they can stay warm if they walk quickly, with the pace of New Yorkers rather than the amble of Grecians.

George is happy. Therefore, Mache is too.

How do I describe this in my letters home? she asks her husband. That I examine the vaginal secretions of guinea pigs.

George laughs. Tell your father that you are discovering the secrets of life, not the secretions of pigs.

The endless succession of experiments provides a welcome distraction from the conflicts in Greece, which prevent them from returning home. Even as their families beg George and Mache for

news, their letters report turmoil. The king supports Germany; the prime minister supports the Entente. Soldiers camp among the ancient ruins below the Parthenon.

To go home now is impossible, George tells Mache. Perhaps next year, after the Axis powers surrender.

Perhaps in two years, after Turkey surrenders.

Perhaps in three years, after Greece and Turkey reach detente.

Perhaps in four years, after Greece surrenders.

Perhaps after the Depression lifts.

Perhaps after this latest Axis conflict.

When George's father dies, George and Mache learn by telegram. Mache carefully places it with the mayor's letters entreating them: come home.

V. A Daily Ritual

George and Mache celebrate the publication of George's paper on guinea pigs with a bottle of good red wine, the cost of a week's rent. After the bottle has been emptied, and the candles on the table flicker in pools of wax, George gazes at her intently and takes her hand. Mache's breath no longer catches at his searching looks, but she squeezes his hand in reply.

I have been thinking, he tells her, it is time for the next stage.

A child? she asks in surprise and delight.

He shakes his head, disappointed in her. No. Never that.

What then? She tries to squelch her irritation.

Never mind.

Don't sulk.

The next stage of research, after guinea pigs. Women.

That might prove a challenge, asking women to submit to what you have only done to drunken rodents. What woman would consent to daily inspections with a metal speculum?

He looks at her, hopefully.

Their initial attempts are marked by discomfort. Although George has procured specula from the Women's Hospital, he has not had practice using them. He opens Mache's legs too wide, and her hips

spasm in protest. The metal speculum invades like a slab of ice. The glass pipette feels simultaneously sharp and dull. She learns to expect spots of blood on her underwear.

As he stoops between her legs, she can see the top of his head. A shiny bald spot has appeared amidst his jet-colored waves of hair.

When Mache believes his technique has improved, she asks other women to volunteer. To her surprise, many hospital employees quickly agree, in the hope it will improve fertility or health. She prepares slides of these cells, as well her own. When she sees their finished pink and blue hues, she tells George, the specimen is ready.

Among the many samples, George finds an anomaly. Cells with bizarre shapes; unnatural, bulging centers; misshapen edges. He looks up from the microscope. These aberrant cells must mean there is malignancy. Mache, do you know what this means?

This poor woman has cancer?

Yes. But also: we have found it early.

George—and by extension, Mache—now come to the laboratory an hour earlier in the morning. They arrive as the still-groggy nurses arrive for their shifts, as the garbage trucks and street sweepers tidy the still-sleeping city. As soon as they arrive, George collects Mache's sample. She comes to associate the deep gnawing of the scrape with the beginning of her day, as others might drink a cup of coffee or sort through the mail. Each morning, hers is the first sample that she prepares.

George—and by extension, Mache—leave the laboratory an hour later at night. They leave as the weary medical students depart for a few hours of respite. The neighborhood's residents have already come home. Their windows are lit by flickering television screens or the steady glow of lamps, or their shades have darkened for the night.

George's cell catalogs consume him. Mache's cells become George's standard for appearance during ovulation and menstruation, during the waxing and waning of hormones throughout the reproductive lifespan. He arranges and rearranges the photographs and slides by women's ages and phase of menstrual cycle, the regularity of their configurations, the darkness and size of their nuclei. When Mache closes her eyes, images of cervical cells swim before her, as if the cells themselves float in midair.

George travels to the Midwest by train to present his findings. His hands and voice shake slightly. Finally, he tells his audience. We have a

means for detecting cervical cancer early. These vaginal scrapings can be used for cancer detection.

His presentation is met with silence, then skeptical questions, then hostility. Biopsies, not scrapings, are necessary. Other than women of dubious character, who would consent to have such a procedure done? A violation of modesty, year after year.

The so-called Pap smear is a useless endeavor.

Discouraged, George returns to New York. It was a failure, he tells Mache. The hours and hours of work. An utter waste. He holds his head in his hands.

She takes his hands. Nonsense, she says. One group of doctors in Michigan. Idiots! I remember the doctors in Athens. They thought they knew best, but they told me nothing.

And then I met your father.

Unlike all of those doctors, I am a woman. I have let you do this to me every day, this strange scraping, for almost a decade; other women will allow it once a year.

You keep going as long as you are allowed to keep going. You will find the right listener.

You will save hundreds of women from cancer. You will save their families.

George listens and nods.

Over the next decade, the laboratory collects thousands of samples. Mache makes the whimsical suggestion to create an atlas with drawings. To her delight, George hires a watercolorist to capture the cells in their delicate shades of blue and pink. Her cells, which George describes as beautiful. The cancerous cells, which will interest researchers the most.

VI. The Technicians

George and Mache no longer need to speak during the smear. They do this as silently and efficiently as they pour each other glasses of wine; wash and dry dishes; and settle on their respective sides of the bed, he on his side and she on her back. She only needs seconds to sit on the examination table and to scoot to its end. He only needs seconds to insert, painlessly, the metal blades and to swab her insides. After he finishes, he gives her one of his handsome, searching glances.

She remembers when she saw him on the ferry to Athens when they were young.

My favorite guinea pig, he always says. Your cells are the gold standard.

Thank you, she always replies. I am glad that I have inner beauty.

Gratefully, he pecks her cheek.

They repeat this, daily, for thirty years.

When the technicians are in the laboratory, George behaves with more restraint. He will come over to the microscope, hands behind his back. Ah, thank you, Mrs. Papanicolaou, he will say with a courtly nod.

Mache hires and trains the technicians, all young women who like the laboratory's quiet, its cleanliness, its neatly labeled glass-stoppered bottles. They do not want to be salesgirls or typists. They do not want to be maids, although the wages can be excellent. They would prefer not to marry yet, for that means children; as few as two but perhaps as many as ten.

At first, Mache is only a little older than the technicians. Sometimes, she feels much older when the technicians gossip about how to style their hair and apply their makeup. She cares little about hemlines and stockings, movies and film stars. They speak with a breezy, slangy confidence that seems years younger than her courtly, accented English.

My father told me I should vote for Coolidge, laughs one technician. She wears lipstick and bobs her hair. Can you imagine? But I told him, stick a sock in it, I'll vote for whomever I please. Maybe even La Follette.

Despite these differences, Mache enjoys the life the technicians bring. They throw off the light of youth who never worry about growing old. Mache no longer eats lunch alone. She dispenses motherly advice, including advice about contraception. The girls listen, often giggling and flushing with disbelief, then appreciation.

Please call me Mache, she tells them. It is short for Andromache, like Hector's wife.

Upon seeing their perplexed faces, she adds, Or you may call me Mary.

Ah, Mary! they smile.

They are aghast when they hear that Mache has not seen her family for years. Do you dream in English or Greek? they ask her, wide-eyed.

Oh, English now, she answers easily. This no longer pains her.

She is thankful for their company and for their help, for the number

of samples soon outpaces those she can prepare herself. The lab thrums with the murmuring of voices, the faint clinking of glassware, and the whir of the fan in the corner of the laboratory. George peers into the microscopes and comments appreciatively on the technicians' skill.

These days of quiet industry are the days when they love each other the most.

He moves to Long Island for Mache. If she cannot have children, she would like to have a garden. She would like to be near the ocean, as she was at her childhood home on Evia. She cannot have olive trees, but she can have peonies. She grows thyme and rosemary and a hardier species of sage. She learns to love the spring, when the ground has begun to thaw, and crocuses push up through the snow. She learns to love autumn, when her Japanese maple turns fiery red.

At other times, Mache loves George less. When she must drive, so he can read or relax. When he forbids correspondence with her family because their letters make her morose. Put a sock in it, she tells him. I can write whenever I please. When he refuses to celebrate holidays, even Easter, because he must write another paper. When he retires after midnight because he must craft another presentation.

Like the watchful children of feuding parents, the technicians can sense these unhappy times. When Mache sees their worried glances (George does not notice these), she forces her face into a smile. She squeezes him oranges so his juice may be fresh and pulpy.

Sometimes, she leaves the laboratory. When she steps outside the hospital, she takes a deep breath, allowing the hurly burly of the city to wash over her.

The technicians always leave, eventually. They marry, they get pregnant. They send Mache affectionate letters, although these become less frequent after the first baby. At Christmas, the mantelpiece bristles with holiday cards, soon outnumbering those from Greece.

VII. Evia

Mache is sixty-seven years old when they return to Greece. When she was there last, she was barely twenty. Horses pulled carriages along the dusty streets. Now, telephone lines swoop across the horizon. Neon signs and streetlamps puncture the night. The tinny sound of television

replaces the hushed darkness. As their driver navigates unfamiliar roads, she must cast her eyes up to the Acropolis to orient herself.

George has long been famous and Mache along with him as his wife and helpmate. They call her Lady Mary, and she is awarded the Order of Saint Helen. Postage stamps in America show George's face, a bit less lined. In them, he wears a tie and lab coat, as he has done every day for the past fifty years.

The president of Greece greets them when they arrive. Flashbulbs pop, and there are many handshakes and smiles. Dignitaries escort them to the newest buildings in Greece, erected with mechanical cranes and tractors. They offer George directorships. Soldiers in military dress parade in his honor. Their rifles and buttons gleam in the sun.

To Mache's relief, Evia is more familiar. The briny air, the bleached cliffs, and the dark sea are exactly as she remembers. The ancient amphitheater, built before Christ, still stands majestic and crumbling. Acacia trees still line the town square, and old women still sell figs and honey. Old men sit in chairs outside the shops and regard the passersby as if they have always done so, although these men must have been children when Mache herself was a child.

For George, this homecoming is overshadowed by darker thoughts: his disappointment at not receiving the Nobel Prize. A Romanian scientist claims first discovery for the vaginal smear. Denial of permission to expand his laboratory. The quicker and cheaper processing of specimens by younger rivals.

On Evia, he begins to have troubled dreams. Always obsessive, he begins recording the details of these nightmares in a journal. He describes them to Mache, his voice low and almost trembling.

His father, a young man, cries out to him from the ocean. George dives into the ocean to rescue him, only to find that he cannot swim.

The lepers plead with him. Their faces, distorted, plead with him piteously. Please help us, they beg. They overwhelm him, and he thrashes himself awake.

Koula, young and perfect, smiles at him from across the ruins of the amphitheater. Wait for me! he cries, but she laughs and runs away. He remains frozen and can only watch her disappear. Her white dress vanishes into the dusk.

Mache listens patiently, as she always does. Koula never would have endured America, she reminds him.

George sighs. Yes, yes. But what does it mean?

Only now are the sacrifices made real for you, she tells him.

Whereas I have known all along, she thinks. But George suffers, so she keeps this to herself.

Perhaps I should have stayed, joined my father's practice, he laments. Dark circles rim his eyes. Not dragged you to the other side of the world. You could have had your garden here, with olive trees. Perhaps I should have chosen a family.

He looks at her, pleadingly.

For an instant, her anger flashes. You ask for my permission now? she thinks.

But Mache has found her own happiness, and she will not let it go. Without a word of English, she crossed an ocean, accompanied only by her young husband. She created a home with the slenderest of means. She can navigate the subway lines and crosstown buses. She drives with aggressive aplomb perfected through her daily commute. She has befriended women from all countries. She has mastered skills for which she had no formal instruction.

She has deciphered secrets mysterious to men and women.

So it is her older, steadier self that responds. Think of the women, the thousands of women you have saved. All of those lives, all of their families.

I was happy, even in these most unpromising of circumstances. And I am proud because I was happy.

George weeps, which he does more and more often as he grows older.

In the evenings, they stand on the terrace and gaze across the Aegean toward home. George reaches for Mache's hand, and she allows him to take it.

Author's note: This story is based upon the lives of George and Andromache Papanicolaou. It is true that Dr. Papanicolaou performed daily speculum exams upon his wife for decades and also chose not to have children in order to forward his research. It is also true that he quit his job as a rug salesman after being forced to display rugs to a former acquaintance.