

Agency: Be the Hero of Your Own Story

As a writer, I've spent a lot of time studying the craft of writing. I've learned about character development, plot, story structure, pacing, conflict--there's too much to list. But one of the most important lessons I've learned is that your main character must be active. She needs to make things happen in her own life, rather than have things happen to her. She needs to have agency. No one wants to read a story about a passive character who doesn't do anything.

Sometimes agency can be challenging. In *Virtuous Women*, Hope had very little ability to make things happen in her own life. She was completely under the control of her father, and her choices were limited.

But she wasn't passive. She did have choices.

On the very first page you see her choose to try and protect her youngest brother from her father's wrath:

"She launched herself into the center aisle and enveloped the toddler in a bear hug, squeezing tighter than she needed to, hoping a little pain would help him understand the importance of obedience. Better her bent knees in his back than Papa's belt across it."

Jennifer, on the other hand, has a lot of freedom at the beginning of the book, and you see her actively taking the steps necessary for obtaining the life she thinks she wants.

Neither character just sits and lets life happen to them. That would be boring.

I've taken that lesson to heart and work hard to make my characters active participants in their own lives rather than mere spectators. As a result, my characters have far more interesting lives than I do.

Until now.

In last month's newsletter, I mentioned that I was packing up my house in preparation for my move to Canada. (By the way, thank you to those who sent me recipes for dairy-free rice pudding! I haven't had a chance to try them yet because of the craziness [or even respond to your emails--sorry about that!], but once I do, I'll let you know how it worked out.) You can read more about my reasons for wanting to make that move here:



At the Crossroads No Longer

Even though it's scary as hell.

The year was 2018. We sat in the basement of the Marcone Conference Center at Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham, MA. The man leading our monthly Oblate meeting, a local high school teacher and poet, gave ...



Ann Goltz

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Unfortunately, that move didn't happen. The short version is that my husband's job transfer fell through, and now we're living in temporary housing for a few months while we figure things out. The longer version is on my Substack.

Falling with Style

Maybe my wings were real, but they malfunctioned.



Ann Goltz

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(In case you're wondering, I publish 2-4 times a month on Substack, and I go a lot deeper into what's going on in my personal life than I do here. If you're interested, please subscribe! If you're only interested in my bookish life, then this newsletter is all you need. Either way, thanks for your support!)



It only took me ten minutes to walk to this location from my short-term rental. As a place for me to be while I get my head together, I could have

done a lot worse!

This whole experience has left me with the realization that I've been a spectator for much of my life, just letting things happen rather than making things happen.

I'm not doing that anymore.

It's time for me to be the hero of my own story. I guess it's appropriate that this is all happening at the beginning of a new year, when everyone's supposed to be reassessing their lives and committing to changes. But the truth is that the timing is a coincidence. I would have come to this same conclusion if all this had happened last summer, as it probably would have if we'd tried to move to Canada shortly after we'd returned from our trip.

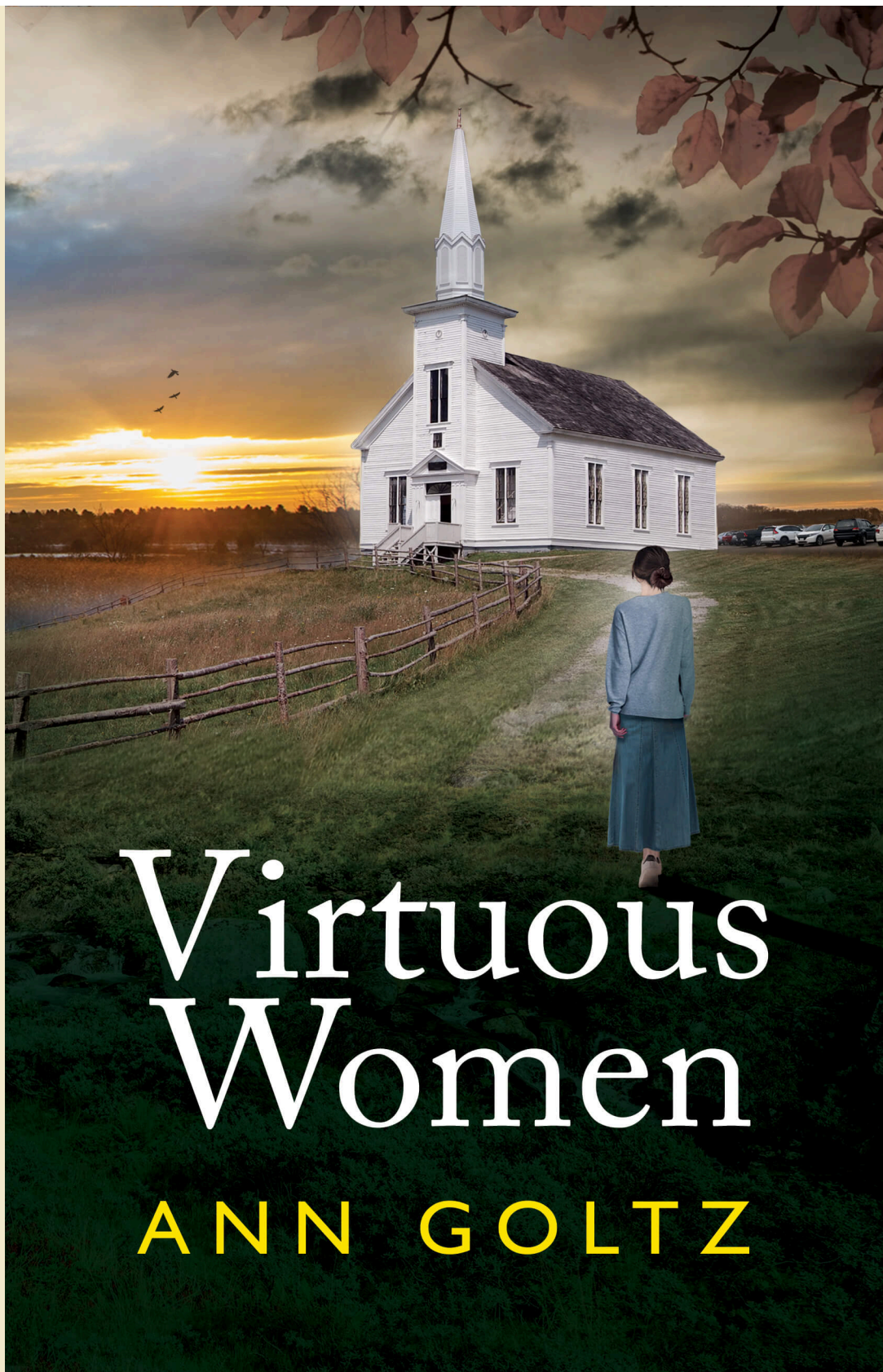
Is it scary? Absolutely. Are the results guaranteed? Absolutely not. But I'm tired of waiting for things to happen to me. I did that for far too long, and it hasn't served me well.

One thing that isn't changing is my writing. I'm nearly finished with the first draft of my next book, which I hope to publish this year. In the coming months I'll write more about that, including asking for some of you to read through my draft and give me feedback. (I'll give guidelines on what kind of feedback I'm looking for, and who would make a good beta reader. Spoiler alert: you don't have to be a writer!)

Anyway, 2025 is shaping up to be one hell of a year for me.

Who knows? Maybe I'll write a book about it someday.

Are you the hero of your own story? I'd love to hear what that's been like for you. Reply to this email and let me know!



[Bookshop.org](https://bookshop.org)* (paperback)

[Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) (paperback/ebook)

Book Giveaway

It's been a while since I've given away a copy of *Virtuous Women*. In March, when I celebrate the one-year anniversary of its release, I'm going to sponsor another Goodreads Giveaway contest, with 50 copies of the ebook up for grabs. In the meantime, however, I'm going to offer two ebooks and one paperback to subscribers of this newsletter. Just **reply to this newsletter with your name, city, and state (or country) by Monday, February 10, and let me know if you want to be considered for the ebook, paperback, or both.** (If you don't specify, you'll be in the running for both.) Sorry, US addresses only for the paperback, but the ebook contest is open to anyone.

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