

The Witch of Saratoga

I can remember totality,
flowing through me like rain.
As still and full as a lake.
It was how I felt looking out
watching the strong branches of old-growth trees
sway in the winds of a heavy thunderstorm.

As memory blurs,
I hear lighting crashing,
Blankets on a bed,
The shield of a child.
There are evergreens in my window,
Witches in my forest.

Childhood in Saratoga Springs.
Children catch frogs in the streams,
Witches vie with the devil for youth.
Ghosts never age,
children who die young are children forever.
Infinity becomes tangible only in death.

Much like I,
The Witch of Saratoga
born Angeline Tubbs,
came to Saratoga from
across the sea.

She was born
on a rainy day in 1761
at the Star and Garter Inn
of Watford, England.

Much like I,
the Witch came to Saratoga a child
Back then, she wasn't a witch at all
16 years old, newly married
Angeline faced the New World

Alone

Her husband was a soldier
Drafted to suppress the Rebels
Who cost the crown so much
From across the sea

She crossed the stormy Atlantic
Only to be abandoned by him
And as soon as the battle was lost
Angeline was alone, again.

His red coat,
The rage of war, red as blood.
Her fear, the darkness of the forest around her.
Nothing but uninhabited land for miles
Leaves obscure the sky
The forest whispers decadent secrets
As it has since the Earth was born

The witch found providence in the woods
And found her way to Saratoga
Which then, in 1777
Was little more than a village
In the shadow of a looming hill
Known today as “Angeline’s Hill”

The Witch of Saratoga was born
The day she had to brave the New World alone
They moment she faced the edge of the forest
Trees that stood like ancient gods
Titans frozen in wood, barring her from the wide sky
Nothing like the sky that would stretch for miles
Over the English moors

The child she was when she came to America
died amongst the trees
Ash, aspen, crabapple, dogwood, elm,
She ran deeper and deeper into the woods

Trying desperately to escape her sorrow
To leave behind the husband who had left her
Who left her for dead

Long, spindly branches tore and tangled
The plaits in her hair and the lace in her skirts.
She kept running until she came upon
A hill that stood against the sky
The only thing taller than the maze of trees

As she watched the darkness begin to settle
Over the mottled trunks that stretched above her.
A shiver of cold whispered through the leaves
Night fell, darkness dissolving the forest into a black nothingness.

It's said she settled there,
at the base of that hill
Lived alone in a shack
In the thick forest
Alone for decades,
Save for a brood of cats.

They say she began practicing magic then
Convening with the spirits of the forest
Making polyjuices and potions
Confiding in the medicine of the Earth.

But Saratoga grew larger
As the settlers came and built
Cut down trees for their new houses
The city borders expanding out into the dark of the forest
Locals began to catch glimpses of Angeline.

A woman, alone in the forest
Contemptuous in appearance,
Dirty, mangled, dirt-streaked
She seemed against nature to them

She died at the age of 104

In that hut she had built almost a century before
The garden of herbs she maintained grew awry
Harsh winters wore away the hut,
snow caving in the wooden roof.
But in the shadow of the hill,
Within the gates of neverending trees,
Angeline lives on.

And so two centuries passed til I learned of her name.
My father took me hiking as a child
There wasn't much else to do in Saratoga
It didn't matter, I was never bored
The woods had enough secrets to last a lifetime.

My dad and I would explore;
There was never really much of a destination,
the woods went on forever,
and my tiny six year old legs
couldn't carry me too far.

But one day we went much further than we ever had before
Continued hiking until the sun was beginning to go down
And we came upon an abandoned hut
in a clearing deep within the woods.

The windows were broken, and chairs, tables, newspapers,
jars of dark gelatinous matter,
all stacked upon one another.
Dust covered everything.

My dad told me a witch once lived there.
He smiled as he said it,
but there was something serious about the way
he ushered me away from the door
and didn't let me go inside.

I think about Angeline
the ghosts of Saratoga:
the soldiers lost in the war,

the spirits of times lost
the dark figures I would see in the hallways of my colonial house,
I've never really stopped thinking about it.

It was death that made Saratoga powerful
So many had lain in the deep glens and meadows
And accepted death into their hearts
Blood seeped into the grass
The spirits wander the forest forever
In death is eternity
In death is the infinite

There is something unspoken in old, small towns
Towns with stories, ghosts of the past
It's the presence of death, of history,
The looming shadow of the past leads to
the acceptance of darkness as a part of life

Living on the edge of the wilderness creates
A friendliness with the cruelty of nature
A union with the unknown
A fascination with the darkness
That was childhood in Saratoga Springs

It's one of the few things in my life I can't explain.
The things I saw, the things I felt
I know they were real, even if they stretch beyond the logical
I know that hut held a powerful darkness
whether it was the witch, I cannot say.
But I know there was a darkness in those woods,
shadows of something beyond human experience.

In my life, I've found faith in strange places,
I never felt sure of the light,
I never found solace in the sermons in mass
in the grey carpeted gymnasium of my school's morning mass
That feeling that believers described as "divine"

I think about Angeline,

when I face darkness:
abandonment, isolation, loneliness
death, mortality, eternity...

A woman who survived
Left for dead, treated like nothing
She used her mind and her soul
To create a life solely for herself

In the maze of New England woods
Angeline made a home
Angeline lived to be 104
She saw a century come and go
Locals will tell you her ghost still wanders the woods.

A girl overcoming pain becomes a woman at home in it
A woman overcoming fear and death
To be called a witch is to be powerful
Powerful because you are friends with the dark.



Angeline Tubbs, 'the witch of Saratoga,' at age 97. She died in 1865 at the age of 104.