

*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.



Courtesy  
of Saratoga  
Springs Public  
Library

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