

The woman ventured into the trees, marveling at the way the forest looked as if it had been tucked in for sleep under a fluffy white blanket. She was still young enough the snow filled her with wonder and glee. Angeline had not yet seen how cruel the winter could truly be; her life had not been shadowed by the harsh loss many in her village had experienced. There was a knowing amongst the elders that the cold had a way of taking things when you weren't looking. The village had some easy years recently, so much so that whispers of good fortune and blessings began tickling the ears of any who would listen. A lull of comfort had settled over the people, a sure feeling that nothing could go wrong. Angeline believed more than anyone that there was no reason to worry. She was sure that only good things could be on the horizon.

As she walked further, her surroundings started to look unfamiliar. Though Angeline grew up just outside of these woods, she had only ever been through the area when the air was warm and full of life. Now the air was crisp and biting, a warning to those paying attention. It had always been a rule in the area that the forest was off limits once the first snow had fallen. Angeline was prone to breaking rules when she didn't think the reason for them was good enough. The cryptic warnings and folk tales she heard just didn't seem like evidence to her, so she ignored them. There had always been a part of her that thought there was something to discover out here, hidden in the snow just waiting for her to find it. She'd be foolish to ignore the knowing in her bones, wouldn't she?

Suddenly, the forest became more than just unfamiliar to her. It hadn't alarmed her at first, but Angeline was becoming increasingly aware of how uncanny her surroundings looked. She was finding it hard to put her finger on it, but it was like everything around her had a sharpness to it. While she could see the hard edges in her peripheral, she found it hard for her eyes to actually focus on anything enough to understand what was happening. She was just beginning to panic when a voice rang out loudly in her head.

*You shouldn't be here.*

Every hair on the back of her neck stood up. Was she hearing things, or was someone speaking to her? Angeline thought it was a man's voice, but there was something hollow about it that unsettled her deeply. She glanced around, desperately hoping her fear was just causing her to make things up. Her parents were always telling her that her overactive imagination would get her in trouble. Surely that could explain why she was suddenly hearing voices.

*Don't be a fool. I'm as real as you. Don't tell me you silly humans have already forgotten.*

Alright, maybe it wasn't a voice in her head. A growing sense of dread was beginning to fill Angeline's body. She wanted to run, but her legs seemed to be too heavy to move.

*You wouldn't get very far even if you could manage to lift your feet off the ground.*

Angeline shuddered as the voice filled her head once more. There was something so unnatural about the way it spoke, as if it was an approximation of what the words would sound like. She quickly decided that was a horrifying thought she didn't want to examine any further at the moment. It was then she realized she may not get many more moments at all.

As she pushed that morbid thought to the side, Angeline became aware of a new sound nearby. It was almost like a tinkling, reminding her of the wind chimes her grandma would hang on her porch. A faint smile touched her lips as she remembered how Grammy had said the chimes would keep bad spirits away. She didn't believe the sound drew attention from the spirits like other folks around the area. It seemed as good a time as any to believe in an old woman's superstition. A sinister chuckle cut through her thoughts.

*It seems you've found the path out this time. Do mind your step. I'd hate for something to happen to that pretty flesh before I find you again.*

With that, the environment around her lifted in a way that let her know she was alone once more. The trees came back into focus and the forest looked just as picturesque as when she first walked in. The only thing that hadn't changed was the tinkling chimes that were sounding a bit more insistent now. Angeline turned and tried to find her bearings, searching for the source of the noise. As soon as she turned, she saw that behind her was a small stone path that lead straight to the doorway of a small log cabin. The cabin surely hadn't been there before, but that didn't even occur to her. She was too distracted by the fact it was clearly Grammy's cabin, surrounded by flowers and greenery that shouldn't be there at this time of year. Angeline cautiously started up the path, fearing that perhaps she was already dead, or at least losing her mind. To be determined.