The Lure

Chapter 1

Angelica was not allowed in the forest; it has been an emphasised rule from her parents ever since she can remember. To her, taking a single glance at the forest felt like betrayal of her parent’s trust – she could never forget the look on her mother’s face when she mindlessly fled towards the sea of emerald leaves. The mere thought sends shivers down Angelica’s spine. From that day forward, she never attempted to break this rule, after all, why would she? Her parents were keeping her safe with this rule. The forest was filled with peril - the bedtime stories her mother told her every night contained vivid details of what happened to those ignorant enough to explore the woods. Though, it is quite hard for her not to look at it, as their estate is surrounded by it. For miles and miles, the forest congregated around the estate; almost forbidding the house to leave.

It was midnight. Angelica was in her room, a rather expansive room. Filled with furniture and ornaments, fulfilling her every need every square meter; giving off the feeling that she would never really need to leave the room. Everything she needs is in arms reach - computers, consoles etc; Books filled every single shelf to the brim. Every now and then she would take a look around and be pleased by her collection, feeling warm and content beside them. Rising up from her bed with clear effort, she wandered to her computer placed on her huge desk, taking up all the room in the corner of her room, with a slick, light beige colour, completely rid of grime and decay. She sat down, with the look of routine burnt onto her expression, and turned on her computer. *Sigh,* she scrolled through Instagram mindlessly for a couple minutes; the posts she looked at were of her classmates and their miraculous lives; showing off the views of their holiday homes full of happy faces. The lifestyle all of her friends (well, people she knew from school) was something Angelica envied. She would sit in the corner of the lunch area and be bombarded with talks of what they’re going to do during the summer and plans of future hangouts. Friendship was almost taboo to even consider in Angelica’s head. The mere thought of a conversation larger than small talk made her heart race and face sweat. From post to post, she continuously scrolled. Happy face after happy face, her scrolls sped up in attempt to see at least one post that isn’t rubbing their perfect lives in her face; though, the abundance of happiness would not leave her screen. Agitation building up, her throat tensing, she sped up more and more. the attempt was pointless, she let out a frustrated groan, admitting defeat, feeling very silly with herself. “Are you okay?”.

Embarrassed, she turns to the right. Her father, standing outside the door with one arm resting against the door, holding a slightly concerned look. “Your dinner got cold, so we wrapped tinfoil around it and put it into the fridge if you want it later. How come you didn’t come down? Not hungry?”

“I was a while ago, just lost my appetite I guess”. All frustrations leaving her face, replaced by a look of dissatisfaction and sadness.

“there’s something on your mind sweetie. C’mon now, I’ve had 18 years practice of learning who you are, I know when somethings wrong”. Arms crossed; a more stern but caring aura surrounded her dad now; he always had the tendency to use humour as a probe to get her to talk about whatever’s bothering her. Angelica looked down at her desk with a faint smile, she couldn’t lie to her dad. “I don’t know”, not knowing how to linguistically express it, she stared down at her desk. “Why don’t we ever get out much?”. Confusion and intrigue appeared suddenly on her dad’s face, as if the unusual amount of isolation the forest caused the family and the house had never occurred to him to be out of the ordinary. The only road out to civilisation is the path from the front garden. The path that mum and dad uses to drop Angelica off to school is surrounded by trees on each side, making Angelica feel claustrophobic every ride to school. The ray of light from the sun above cannot penetrate the thick skin of the forest, a look into the forest from within the car is pointless, nothing can be seen from the outside.

“We’ve never really been an outdoor type of family thinking about it now, our house has always kept our family cosy” letting out a quick chuckle “how come you’re asking?”.

“I see a lot of kids from my school always talking about how much fun their summer is going to be, all the places they’re going to visit and what not”

“We always make the best out of our summer darling”. Gaining confidence to speak her mind, Angelica lifts her head back up to look at dad and leans back into her chair, “Yeah, but we never leave the house and go to new places, I feel like the only place I’ve ever really been to is this house and school. I just wish we’d get out more. I’ve explored everything in this house that I can and now I feel really bored; yet there’s that big ass forest near our house that we’ve never even attempted to- “

“Angelica!” said dad sharply, looking progressively more irritated. Angelica looked back down at her desk, regretting mentioning it. “You need to appreciate how lucky you are, you have so much to do here; you haven’t played that piano in weeks, and you know how much me and your mother love to listen to you play from the lounge”

“I do appreciate what I have!” attempting to find the right words to explain her feelings properly. Immediately denied by the interruption of dad, “come spend some time with your mother and I downstairs in the lounge, you’ve been spending too much time alone in your room doing nothing”. And with that, he leaves the room, with a dominant assumption that Angelica would follow. It was no surprise to her that the reference of the forest was immediately denied the mere second it was introduced. With not a single attempt of mentioning the forest in years, Confusion overwhelmed her; With undertones of shame for what she had said. She knows that nothing good will come about mentioning it. Her dad treated the forest as if it is not even there; not a single glimmer of curiosity to explore the dense, dark wonderland. A lot of his time was dedicated to managing his work from his own home, hands stuck to his laptop. He rarely let Angelica in his study, considers it a distraction for him, when he can just “get back to keeping this family afloat”. When he’s not working constantly, he always asks Angelica to come downstairs to either watch a movie together or play a boardgame. The failed effort of expressing her feelings defeated her. She looked around her room. Walls covered with posters of her favourite bands and shows, furniture completely rid of dirt and grime, bright and colourful carpet, and rugs. Her room was perfect. Though, a part of her felt unsatisfied with her position; a flutter in her stomach, as if something were attempting to climb out of her, from years of being supressed and stationary. Unsettled as it may have made her, she ignored it, and reluctantly went downstairs.

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*“I can’t believe you would do something like this. After all I’ve done for you!”*

*“You don’t get it, do you? I never asked for this. For us!”*

*“It was your choice to marry me, you bastard”*

*“No…it never really was”*

*“Wh-what do you mean?”*

The drone of the low budget melodrama from the TV filled the room; a pedal note for Angelica’s subconscious, as she slowly drifts away into daydream. The TV kept mum in a trance, shovelling popcorn into her mouth without facing away from the screen. Sitting next to her, dad scrolled through his laptop emails, updating himself on the most recent info at work. The whistle of the wind outside was not completely drowned out by the TV or the houses organic creaking from the wood, but it was still there. Though, Angelica was creeped out by the fact that the howling of the wind seems to only begin once it turns to night. But she concluded it as a coincidence. “How can you even watch this rubbish?” scoffed dad, with an exasperated sigh. Nothing takes Mums eyes off the screen, especially when its one of her corny romance shows. Though, the sarcastic question from Dad mixed with the giggle let out by Angelica drew her eyes away from the TV. “How can you not? Besides, it’s getting really good now. Marshall is just about to admit that he was forced to marry Jacelyn by her father, who is actually a mob boss!”. Excited by her own explanation of the story, she turns back to the screen. Inevitably, dad turned back to his computer. It never made sense to Angelica, they would always go on and on about spending time with them, especially when she shows any sign of excitement; any adolescent whim that she used to feel when she was younger, yet they barely acknowledge her presence. Though, it must be hard for dad to juggle work, mum, and Angelica all at once. Mum looked at Angelica, noticing her lost in thought, as if Angelica’s projecting her inner rant on a screen.

“Have you packed for school sweetheart?”. Angelica rose to meet her eyes, Startled by mums sudden attention on her. Her mum was an interesting one. The eccentric one of the household. As if her bubbly happiness diffuses all around the house like spores. Especially when Angelica is noticeably upset or jaded. A bundle of joy. But, when Angelica is fine, she is as busy and caught up in her own activities as her dad is. *I wish they spent more time with me.* An intrusive thought that would appear more often than she would like it to. It made her guilty, as they do spend time with her when they’re not busy, yet, when she genuinely wants to spend time with her, they forget she’s there. Even when they do spend time with her, there’s always something missing. Although, this thought brought up a theory in her head, maybe she’s just bored because she wishes her family dynamic was different. She wishes that mum and dad gave her more attention, more than just gifts and various items that she has stored away in her room.

“Yeah, I’ve packed. But I can’t find my ribbon anywhere”. The silky, maroon ribbon her mum got her when she was very young to tie up her long, graceful brown hair - Angelica hated hairdressers ever since she was a kid; a stranger in such a close proximity to her face was a terrifying thought. Considered it an “unpleasant tactile experience”, attempting to sound mature to be taken more seriously. Though, it was not her ludicrous attempts to convince them that stopped them from taking her, it was the dramatic outbursts that stopped them from taking her.

“Oh yeah, I put it in the wash, as my mong of a daughter got it all dirty when she was playing around in the garden the other day! And your school clothes!” mockingly snapped mum, shaking her head. “But I’ll leave it on the end of your bed in the morning sweetie”. And with a bright, reassuring smile, she went back to the TV. A smile that Angelica cannot help but reciprocate.

The living room was the cosiest area in the house; a slick, maple matted cocoon, kept warm by the aromatic fireplace underneath the mantelpiece next to the TV. The couches were brown and soft to the touch, a touch that would keep little Angelica occupied; fascinated by the consistency of the lined patterns flowing around the couch. Running her fingers along the lines. Even finding her way behind the couch between it and the walls to follow the patterns. The couch used to seem so big to her. Everything was much bigger back then; especially the old tapestry at the top of the staircase that mum and dad got at an auction for £5000. A couple of maidens sitting comfortably on rocks, tending to goats and lambs in front of a rich, light forest with a waterfall accompanying it. Curious cherubs finding their way into the corners of the picture. A light colour scheme of green, blue, and dull worn out yellow, that gave the feeling of security and nostalgia. The more Angelica would sit on top of the staircase and admire the tapestry, the more that she realised she didn’t notice the last time she looked at it. She always found herself coming back to it. If only it was still as big as it seemed to be.

It is 23:30, mum and dad took off to bed, leaving Angelica to carry on watching TV and lock up the house for the night. The house speaks during the night. Creaks and croaks through the floorboards and the walls. The washing machine plumbing ambience comforted Angelica; a deep, warm whirling sound. Many noises soared through the house at night. She turned off the TV, and locked up all the outside doors, having a peak into the darkness of outside, listening to the whirling of the wind. A couple of crow caws can be heard every now and then, flying across the forest. *Sigh,* “tomorrow is another day”. The constant comfort was an aching bore, a suppresser, a restrictor. Rubbing her eyes from built up fatigue, she slumped upstairs, and climbed into bed.

Chapter 2

Structure –

Chapter 1

* Angelica in her room, introduction to dad
* Watching movie in lounge, introduction to mum

Chapter 2

* Next morning, go to school, gets picked on by her bully
* Sees missing posters of multiple kids on a lamppost when walking back home

Chapter 3

* When back home, tells parents about missing children’s posters
* In bed, looks out window and looks at woods, sees something moving inside the forest
* surprised as she has never seen anything move in it before, sneaks outside to take a look, finds friend
* short lived interaction, sees light turn on upstairs and hears creaky footsteps, friend disappears into the woods. Angelica hides as mum comes out, she sneaks back in and goes back to bed.

Chapter 4

* Next morning, sees an unseen channel explaining folklore on enchanted forests that cause children to go missing, father and mother look concerned
* Goes to school, tears off the missing posters before leaving, compares folklore channel with missing children’s posters.
* At night, she stares through her window, waiting for the possible appearance of the person again, and boom surprise, it happens.
* They exchange names and sit beside a gazebo next to the house.