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Buried in the Woods

by Mia Sundby

"Here," Agatha said, extending a large bucket to me from across the room.

"Would you go fill this from the tap outside? I need to mop the floor." I glanced at the gleaming tiles.

"Sure."

"Thank you, dear."

My hands were stiff as I took the bucket from Agatha. Her papery hands were cold, despite the heat still radiating off of the huge stove, which she'd no doubt been hunched over since the early hours of the morning. *Just one more night*, I reminded myself.

"It's just around the corner there." She added, opening the old wooden door and gesturing out into the dew-sprinkled garden.

"Thanks," I smiled –though it felt more like a grimace, "I'll be right back." Turning back to the stove with a grateful nod, she began quietly humming to herself. I shut the door behind me with a click.

Looking around, I was unsurprised to discover that the garden was more or less the surrounding forest itself; part of the reason I'd thought the house had been abandoned was because it was tucked away out here.

"Maybe it wasn't always this far in," I murmured as I traced the path Agatha had pointed out to me.

There was a palpable quiet in the surrounding forest. After I rounded the corner, I stopped, ears straining.

Woods were supposed to be busy, filled with animals running through bushes, scampering down trees, birds calling to each other in the branches... At least a wind to rustle the leaves.

But all I could hear was the *absence* of noise. Silence, I discovered, is something you can actually hear.

After a few more moments of standing and listening hopefully, the silence began to unnerve me. Casting a look about, I spotted the outside tap.

It was rusted almost entirely green, and looked as though it would take a wrench to turn on.

I placed the bucket down, shook out my hands, and set to work. If Agatha could work the tap –which I assumed she had to, if Frank spent half his day looming creepily in the house’s many hallways–, then so could I.

The tap wheezed beneath my hands. After a couple of seconds, it let out a weak squeak.

“Come on...”

The squeaking grew louder and more high-pitched. I grimaced.

“You little shit, come on...” I strained again. Something in my wrist clicked. Just as I was wondering if I ought to be concerned about that, the tap twisted free. The sudden looseness threw me off-balance and I yelped. I managed to catch myself on the rough stonework of the house’s exterior before I did any more damage to my ankle, though.

My ego, I’d examine later.

Laughing lightly, I dragged the bucket under the tap and continued to twist it on further. Nothing.

I frowned. The thing was so loose now it was in danger of falling off. Something must have stopped working.

I wasn’t quite sure how water supply worked in far-out places like this, but I knew that Frank and Agatha sure as hell weren’t connected to a central plumbing system.

With a sigh, I straightened up and made my way back around to the kitchen.

The door hissed open into an empty room.

I stuck my head in. “Agatha?” Nothing.

I tried again, raising my voice. “Agatha? The tap’s not working.” I called louder, “I think there’s a problem with the water!”

Not so much as a creaky floorboard.

Exasperated, I leaned against the door. I could work this out. Whatever this house ran on, it would be down in a basement or something.

I stopped, a grim smile creeping across my lips. *The basement. Fantastic.*