

# MARIGOLD



WITCH BOLT



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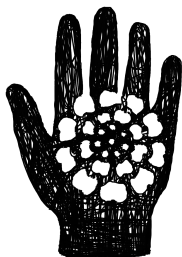


# THE VALLEY



# I

## Prologue: The Roots Before the Flower



Before the guardian, there was a sword. Before the sword, there was the garden. And before the garden, there was a child.

The valley grew her. With intent. With hope.

Marigold grew up where the world was magical and small. Many shared the land within the valley, but few could feel it the way her mother did. None felt it the way Marigold could.

There was something in her. A magic, maybe. A gift. Quiet, untamed, and ancient.

Her mother taught her how to listen and to heal. She learned to care first for plants, and then, in time, for people.

When a plague fell upon the valley and the village of Birchfell, Marigold, with her gifts, became their comfort and their hope. She worked tirelessly, boiling healing roots, whispering old hymns, holding dying hands.

She saved many, but lost more. People who had taught her. People she had grown up with.

Late one evening, after realizing she'd buried everything she loved, Marigold left her home and walked into the forest. She left behind a life of loss, with nothing to guide her except a desire to be free of duty. To leave obligation behind and to find a life of her own choosing, a life that asked nothing of her.

Along the forest path, Marigold met two teachers that gave her the means to carve her own path, without guilt.

And when the valley called her again, not to heal but to act, Marigold answered and chose who she would become.

## II

# The Valley Kneeled

*Before the sickness, before the sword, there was a child  
named Marigold and a valley that loved her.*



She did not ask the land to love her  
The trees made room  
The creek hugged close

She learned  
how the clover turned at dusk,  
how the hills hummed

The valley held her  
In the soft of its hand

### III

## Dig with Holy Hands

*Marigold began learning from the earth, planting herbs,  
helping her mother, carrying the weight of care with her  
hands.*



Marigold learned the world's weight  
by lifting what grew

A turnip clinging to earth,  
a pot of water warm from the sun.

Every green thing, she touched  
With a nursemaid's care

Each herb had a name  
and a slow turning hum

Her mother watched  
but did not speak.

In the still of something ancient

## IV

# Love the Soil Like Gods

*Marigold began learning to hear the earth itself, to know  
which roots would hold, and which would break.*



In time, she began to hear the plants.  
They taught her what to hold,  
and what to leave untouched.

There were days  
when she could feel the plants breathing.  
Something slow and deep,  
low like fog

They taught her:



Which roots remembered storms,  
and which forgave.

Which needed time,  
and which needed leaving alone.

She found herself breathing with them,  
long quiet pulls from the ribs

They whispered,  
You are part of us.  
Be still.

## V

# The Yoke of Mending

*One day after a storm, Marigold worked in her garden alone. It was the first time she understood what it meant to keep something alive.*



One day there was a storm,  
and after the storm,  
the world had been washed,  
and the earth left soft as bread

Marigold observed,  
And so she patted roots down firm.  
Straightened stalks,  
turned a leaf to see if it would hold.

The garden, bruised,  
Held its breath as she worked.

And she felt something new,  
the sense  
that love  
for a person or place  
cannot be untangled  
from the burden of keeping it alive

## VI

# The Sick Sank Like Stones in Cold Water

*When illness spread through the valley, Marigold became the one they turned to for care. She boiled herbs, sang to the ill, and buried the dead.*



It came quiet,  
beneath the breath,  
beneath closed doors  
A cough, a tired child  
Tremors in hands  
that plowed and mended

Her home, a new, unwanted garden  
This sickness, a storm

She tended to the people she loved  
as they were washed from the earth  
She boiled water,  
burned elder leaves,  
sang the songs her mother sang  
still they sank  
slow  
like stones in cold water

That spring the garden ached.  
The wind carried the smell of fever.  
Nettles grew tall  
as dry things watched

Marigold buried three children.  
Then a midwife.  
Then a man who carved flutes.

Still, they kept coming.  
Still, she kept trying.

## VII

### Buried Beneath Frost

*Her parents were among the last to fall sick. She buried them alone, in the soil she once tended, and wept.*



Marigold's parents lay abed,  
like so many of the others.  
Her father's breath rasped like leaves  
Her mother's hands trembled  
as she failed to stir the broth herself.

Fearing what would come  
Marigold did what she knew  
changing cloths, cooling foreheads,  
pressing fingers to failing pulses  
as if enough attention  
could push out the disease

When the fever climbed higher,  
her mother asked  
With a single word  
“Sing?”

Marigold remembered her mother  
singing during storms, to calm her  
‘til the thunder passed  
But Marigold turned away.  
“Not yet.”

She could still do more.  
Singing meant accepting,  
and she wasn’t ready  
to give them permission to leave her.

She mixed a tincture. Willed the roots to work.  
Marigold turned to her mother,  
But her mother was gone.  
The song unsung.  
And by morning, her father had joined.

No one came to help.

They were all buried or too weak to dig.  
So she dug the soil she'd loved like gods.  
Winter's soil that was once the source of life  
Now cold and hard,

She wrapped her parents in what she had,  
her mother's sheets.  
Folded each corner  
with hands that no longer shook

Marigold.  
A flower planting seeds  
that would never grow.

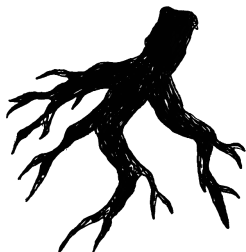
And when the graves were filled,  
the nettles bowed,  
and Marigold wept



## VIII

### Iron Root Boiled Bitter

*Marigold continues her work after the illness begins to wane. She boiled what needed boiling, saved who needed saving, but the work was ugly, and kindness no longer came with the cup. She'd lost something. And the village began to feel it.*



She pulled the roots before light  
black bone-twisted and stinking of iron,  
its shape like something that had fought the earth  
to grow.

She rinsed them in the trough until her hands  
numbed and the water went cloudy.  
The brew took hours.  
Bark split and Steam rose

She crushed the last of it in a wooden bowl  
stained with ironbark resin and bile.

She brought a clay cup to the boy who hadn't  
opened his eyes in two days.  
Mouth thin, his mother watched,  
Marigold held the cup  
"This will help."

The boy choked so she held his jaw  
Then held his head as he coughed.  
Wiped the spill from his neck  
with the edge of her sleeve.

The boy turned his face from her.  
But he slept, and the fever broke.

And so it went.  
With burns, and frostbite, and twisted bellies

They wanted her touch to be clean.  
They wanted healing to feel like comfort.

They did not understand  
what had to be boiled,  
what had to be bitter.

## IX

# Sleep if Sleep Will Come

*She sat beside a man as he died. When there was nothing left to try she sat with him, and sang.*



He was dying.  
There was no fever to break,  
no root with strength to pull him back.

So she sat  
And held his hand in hers  
He drifted in and out.

He whispered names of family, friends, farms

She let the fire burn low and sang softly.

She sang the song her mother would sing when  
storms were near  
and no one could sleep.

He turned toward the sound.  
It was enough to let her know he heard.

*Lay thee down, the sky is turning,  
wind has come to walk the hill.  
Hearth is warm and lamp is burning,  
let the storm do what it will  
Still thy hand, the hour is hollow,  
roof and root may strain and groan  
but the valley holds beneath thee,  
and thy heart is not alone.  
Sleep if sleep will come to meet thee,  
wake if waking waits instead.  
Every hour is still a mercy,  
even those we keep in dread*

His breath slowed.  
Slower than the trees of the valley  
Then stopped.

She sat a while longer.  
until the fire burned down to the soft orange  
of what's left when everything useful is gone.

She left the cup full and blanket folded.

And when she stepped outside,  
the frost was thick on the grass.  
But the sky had cleared.

## X

### Trowel & Tincture Laid to Rest

*The fever passed. The people of Birchfell begin to heal but Marigold can't. So she buries her tools and leaves home*



The fever broke in others  
before it did in Marigold.  
The people of Birchfell  
began to laugh again, to gather.

Marigold lingered.

Not sick.  
Just emptied.

One night, at dusk,  
she walked to the edge of the forest

She knelt where the soil  
still remembered her name.

She buried her tools one by one  
A dull knife for cutting roots,  
a cracked mortar,  
The cloth she used to wrap the dying.

The valley still loved Marigold  
and received without question.

And then she left.  
Into the trees.

The woods did not welcome her.



# XI

## Finding the Thread that Ties All Things

*Alone in the forest, Marigold wanders and wrestles with  
the ache of having nothing to tend.*



She didn't know if she was healing  
or fading away  
The trees swayed, and rocks whispered  
Light came in strange angles

She stopped sleeping.  
Or maybe she slept always.

Her thoughts tangled like brambles  
She forgot her home.  
Let the old names dry up  
and fall away

Sometimes she thought she heard someone calling  
A voice she might have loved once.  
A voice that never said her name.

Her hands itched for work,  
but there were no wounds to heal,  
only the ache of nothing needing her.

She followed birds  
Spoke aloud  
Laughed when she stepped through a patch of sun  
that clung to her

She remembered being a girl once  
digging frostcap with her mother by lantern light

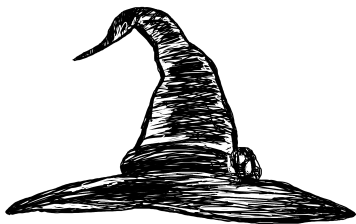
She remembered a storm,  
and water seeping under the door,  
and singing until the thunder surrendered

She forgot again.

## XII

### Amberwind: The Witch & The Flower

*Marigold meets a teacher in the woods.*



Marigold wandered for weeks

One day, a shadow  
taller than the trees  
whispered  
And the valley stopped

Amberwind.

No greeting.

No threat.

Just a gaze that pinned Marigold  
like a leaf beneath glass.

Marigold had heard that Amberwind was a witch,  
and a spirit,  
and once the valley itself.

She didn't know what was true,  
only that Amberwind belonged  
to the valley's history,  
and to Birchfell's.

"You're far from the path,"  
Marigold heard  
Unsure if it had been spoken

"There wasn't one,"  
Marigold replied.  
"Or I left it."

Amberwind nodded.

As if both were true.

They walked a while  
not side by side,  
but near.

Marigold afraid to look at her directly  
“Why are you walking alone?” Amberwind asked.

Marigold knew from her tone  
that Amberwind knew her,  
She knew why she was hurting,  
why she was lost,  
and the answer to the question she'd asked

“I can't heal them all,”  
Marigold said.

Amberwind's smile was slow.  
Not cruel. Not kind.  
Just old.

Amberwind spoke again  
“Not all wounds need mending,”  
Then she was gone.

No sound.  
No footprints.  
Just Marigold and the trees breathing slowly

She stopped, and stood, a long while  
unmoving

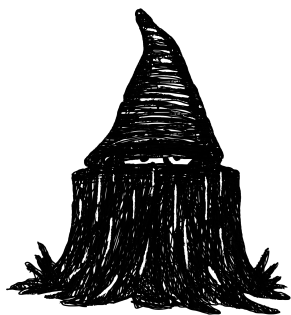
Not because she was lost  
Not because she was reflecting  
but because something inside her  
had stopped wanting

The words planted in her like seeds,  
not all wounds need mending,  
seeds she hoped would not bloom.

# XIII

## Thistlebur: Damp Leaves & Ink

*Marigold encounters a creature that had never been lost or broken.*



She heard humming before she saw him  
soft and off key,  
like someone keeping themselves company.

Then the smell of tea.  
And mushrooms.  
And ink.



He was kneeling beside a stump,  
nearly hidden  
sketching the curve of a hill  
no map had cared to name.

His hat was crooked.  
His boots were damp.  
His joy, unbroken.

He looked up, and grinned  
as if they'd always known each other.

"Ah! There you are," he said  
She stopped in the path and frowned.

"This is our first meeting," she said, a little  
aggravated that her peace had been interrupted.

"Well, sure," he said, offering a biscuit tin.  
She didn't know what to say  
So she sat.

He poured tea.  
Then pointed at the sky.  
“That cloud looks like me,” he said  
and pat his belly  
It did.

She laughed a little  
it cracked something open.

They sat for a long while.  
Birdsong stitching the afternoon together.  
Marigold began to understand that like  
Amberwind, Thistlebur may also know more  
about her than she did about him.

At last she whispered,  
“I thought I might stay away.”  
He nodded.  
“Fair. But I’d have missed you.”

She looked at her hands  
“I don’t know if I belong with people anymore.”

He bit into a biscuit. Crumbs caught in his beard.

"That's fine," he said.

"You can belong near them."

The fire was small. But steady.

Like him.

Marigold chose to camp near him for a while

That night, she slept.

And didn't dream.

## XIV

### Blade Beneath Moss

*Thistlebur led her to something ancient, hidden in the earth: a blade, waiting for her hand.*



One day, shortly after sunrise  
Thistlebur came to Marigold  
with eyes like morning

“There’s something you need to see,” he said,  
She had learned to say no with grace,  
But did not say it this time.

So they walked  
Thistlebur talked, of paths, of bees, of weather  
but the hush pressed through, deep and green.

She felt the valley hold her again,  
as it had when she was small and whole.

There, half-sunk in moss,  
a hilt wrapped in soft worn leather  
The blade lay like at an angle that looked as if the  
hilt were reaching for her

Her fingers curled around it.  
No thunder.  
No voice.  
But it knew her.

The valley nodded,  
now knowing that Marigold would not loose  
what it had pressed into her hand

She didn't know its purpose  
but knew it was meant for her

## XV

# The Hush Before Flies

*On their way home, a thief stepped from the trees.  
Marigold draws the sword.*



Marigold told Thistlebur  
she was ready to return home  
and he agreed to accompany her.

They walked together, blade wrapped in burlap.  
While he spoke of unmapped caves,  
and relics left by the Collector,

she was thinking of tinctures she had made,  
and the tinctures she hadn't

The thief stepped from behind the elm as if invited  
Thin and desperate  
Colliding full force with her plans

He asked for her things  
Then asked again, louder

She froze

On Hearing the fall of a foot  
too heavy for asking  
The burlap fell

Marigold chose to step forward, to take action  
she wasn't sure if she chose  
to thrust the blade forward

Intimately familiar with the sounds of death,  
the sounds of flesh  
This was new, wet, internal,  
the sound of something sacred being torn.

He looked at her  
Saw her  
like he knew what she was now

She did too. Not healer.  
Not keeper of the quiet herbs.  
Not the one who eases pain.  
But the one who creates it.

The man died in the grass  
with the bees still working the clover  
near his hand.

The silence that followed was not peace.

It was a hush  
before rot,  
before the flies come



# XVI

## Something Turned its Face from Her, Something She'd Prayed to

*In the heavy quiet after violence, Marigold reckons with  
the part of herself she just lost.*



She hadn't cried for the thief.  
She hadn't prayed.  
She simply stood, and changed.

The ghost of warmth on the hilt  
lingered long after.

The world, not the valley  
asked for something ugly

And she gave it

He had tried to crawl.

She had watched.

"You had no choice" Thistlebur insisted

Both knew this was true

and also wasn't

And she thought:

This is how the world hardens a woman.

Not all at once. Just enough

that she never softens

in quite the same way again.

There would be no weeping.

Only a change

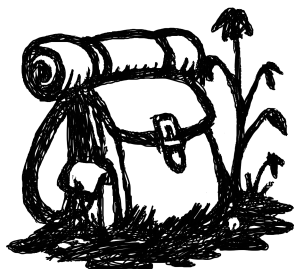
in how long she stared into the coals

at night.

## XVII

### She Answers the Cry, Not the Caller

*Marigold came back. The valley had changed. So had she.*



Marigold decided to return home, or near it  
She crossed the river as the sun was setting,  
she hadn't considered what she'd do,  
who she'd see, where she'd sleep.

Some children shouted, "healer",  
though she no longer felt like one

An old woman clasped her hands

Marigold smiled,

because they needed her to,  
and Marigold still loved them.

They gathered like a slow tide  
A boy gave her a small carved flute.  
She didn't speak, but she let them.

No one addressed the blade hanging at her side  
as if it were a tool like any other

She set her pack down by her old garden.  
Touched the soil like it might scold her.  
Then set to work.

The sick came.  
The wounded.  
The fretful mothers and their red faced babies.

She boiled herbs,  
set bones,

stitched cuts that would leave gentle scars.

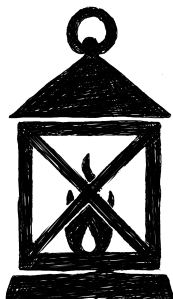
They called her healer again

Marigold accepted this, for now,  
and wore the title like a borrowed coat

## XVIII

### A Lantern Lit for No One

*She built a home near the village, but not in it. Close enough to help but far enough to heal.*



Marigold watched the wind move through grass,  
listened to the faint breath of green things,  
and wondered how long  
before the needs of Birchfell  
split her open again.

She built a cottage just across the river.  
Near enough to come when they called  
far enough to remember

who she was healing into

Thistlebur came sometimes  
with stories and radishes.

He asked if she was lonely.  
"not yet" she'd say

Most evenings, she'd carry the sword,  
and light a lantern by the bridge  
in case someone came in need.

Most nights, no one did.  
And that was good.

# XIX

## A Call too Quiet to Name, Too Deep to Ignore

*She was still called healer but no longer belonged to the  
name the way she once did.*



The sword stayed by the door.  
She again felt held,  
because the valley knew  
something was coming.

She still rose early,  
Still crushed mint  
between her fingers,



Still tucked glowmoss  
into her apron pocket  
and still whispered,  
“Thank you,”

The sword always leaning  
by the doorway.  
It no longer startled her  
to see it there.

At dusk, she walked the river.  
specimen satchel at her hip,  
brushing the reeds like she used to

before she knew what it meant  
to harm... or defend...  
or something in between

It all felt the same  
but she felt different  
Less... permanent

It wasn't a profound realization  
that life was precious,  
fragile, or fleeting.

Just. small.

Life went on this way for Marigold  
Not everything was healed  
and that was okay.

Marigold began to believe  
that while she'd been Birchfell's savior once,  
she couldn't be forever

And while the shadows in  
the forests corners were darker,  
she felt held

Because she loved the valley  
And the valley still remembered  
how it used to kneel

## XX

### Epilogue: The Waiting Blade, The Flower Bent



After the sword, there was still the valley. And in the valley, there was still Marigold.

She did not return to the life she had before. But she stayed close, to the people, to the land, to the quiet space she had made for herself.

She was no longer just a healer. No longer just a keeper of herbs and kindness. She had held a blade. She had ended a life. She had carried both

mercy and violence, and the valley had seen all of it.

The sword rested by her door. She did not reach for it. But she never moved it away.

The world had found peace, but peace was not permanent. The wound that once let life and magic flow into the valley was beginning to close. And the land was growing still in a way that felt wrong. The stars were watching. The silence was shifting.

Marigold did not know when it would come, only that it would. Another choice. And when the time came, she would return to the blade. Not out of duty. Not out of anger. But because she chose.



## About the Author



### If You'd Like to Stay in the Valley

This book is part of a larger, and growing world told through music, art, and narrative.

You can find companion pieces at:

[witchbolt1.bandcamp.com](http://witchbolt1.bandcamp.com)

[www.youtube.com/@WitchBoltMusic](http://www.youtube.com/@WitchBoltMusic)

Or search for Witch Bolt wherever you listen.

Step Softly.

