

The Roots of a Silent Song

Somewhere between waking and dreaming, Angela found herself in a garden filled with an unsettling sense of déjà vu. A kookaburra perched on a branch, its raucous laughter echoing through the still morning air and cutting through the hush of the early morning. Each plant's melody was different: some bright and clear, others soft, still others almost lost beneath the steady hum of life. She wandered the paths, each step stirring up new music, old memories, and dreams. When she opened her eyes that morning, she found herself standing in a garden where the symphony had become real.

Angela was an eleven-year-old girl who lived a seemingly peaceful life in a small town called "Summer Hills". She spent hours exploring flowers, insects, and the night sky, secretly wondering if one day she could uncover the mysteries of this world. She always early, never loud. Eyes down. Voice soft. No one noticed her. In the crowded hallways and noisy corners of the world, she drifted like a quiet breeze between storms.

The air was thick with music, melodies rising from petals and leaves, roots and bark. Every step she took awakened new harmonies: the laugh of a daisy, the soft cello of a weeping willow, the chilling trill of sparrows darting through honeysuckle. Some sounds comforted her, warm and familiar. Others sent a shiver up her spine, notes that trembled with regret or loss.

She wandered for what felt like hours, guided by instinct rather than direction. The garden sprawled endlessly, yet every path stirred a quiet sense of déjà vu. Angela brushed her fingers across a violet. At once, she felt the warmth of Chloe's hug, her best friend from preschool. A bent sunflower hummed the tune of long-ago summer days, golden and warm. For a second, she saw the golden trace of Chloe as she knelt beside Angela, laughing as they talked, then it vanished.

But not all was well in the garden. Here and there, she noticed patches where the music had thinned, where flowers were limp, and where their songs had faded. Some flowers had withered despite every effort to save them. She knelt beside a cluster of wild roses, their songs barely more than the memory of a lullaby her mother sang to her when she was young. Angela swallowed hard, surprised by how much the memory still hurt. She hadn't realised how deeply she still missed those quiet nights when her mother's voice

could make the whole world feel safe.

As the sun slipped behind a cloud, shadows came beneath the hedges. It was then that the gardeners appeared, drifting between the rows with movements as fluid as wind. Wearing dark hoods and carrying shears and sharp cutters, they were both unnoticeable and ominous. It was the grey gardeners, those who wanted to prune the sadness away from Angela. She ducked beneath a large oak tree. Waiting. They tilted their heads, laughed, and began ruthlessly chopping off the wilted flowers in her garden. The wilted flowers reminded her of every moment she had wished she belonged somewhere else, and she almost felt the urge to play along with them. No more sudden pangs in the night, no more replaying old failures, lost dreams, or the sadness of the loss of loved ones. But it still belonged to herself: it was a part of her. Tears rolled down her cheek as she wiped them with her palm, hoping the memories would remain untouched. The gardeners withdrew, their forms blurring at the edges, leaving a faint scent of cut grass and mud, laughing. Angela reached out and touched a wilted petal. Beneath the sadness, she felt something else: the stubborn root that had helped her survive heartbreak and disappointment.

“No,” she said quietly. “They all belong to me. I wouldn’t be myself without them.”

Angela strolled on, but the garden seemed to grow denser, the music more tangled.

Without warning, clouds began to gather. The light dimmed to the hush before a downpour. A gust of wind swept through the branches, tearing leaves from their stems and scattering the melodies. The first drops fell, cold and sharp, and then the storm broke.

Angela knew this storm and started to run. The ground slippery beneath her feet. The garden’s song was chaos now, fragments of melody clashing, some snuffed out altogether, others crying out in defiance. A sharp crescendo sliced through the air, overwhelming the gentle lullaby of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star that had once soothed her to sleep as a child. The two melodies collided, unraveling into a tangle of bitter notes. As Angela covered her ears, the harsh clash felt achingly familiar, the sound of a home coming apart, of voices that no longer knew how to find harmony. She darted from bush to bush, seeking shelter, until she found herself beneath a mighty oak. Its branches

stretched wide, leaves trembling but unbroken. Here, the music was steady: the bedtime stories her father used to tell and the drumbeat of her own stubborn hope. Angela pressed her back to the trunk and listened, letting the oak's song anchor her as the storm raged. Smiling through the storm, she realized that keeping her beat steady in a rough and irrational orchestra is important.

When Angela stepped out, she saw the garden had changed. Some flowers were gone, their melodies silent. Others, battered but alive, sang more powerfully than before. She wandered through the aftermath, and hummed along to coax their music back to life.

At the garden's heart, she found a lone plant: a delicate blue flower, nearly strangled by thorns and weeds. Its melody was faint, like the echo of a lullaby drifting through a closed window. Angela knelt and, gently as she could, began to clear away the debris. Memories came to her as she worked, a dream she'd harbored as a child, the very dream of being a scientist long since abandoned as "foolish". Now she saw it for what it was: the brightest note in her symphony, even if it had been buried for years.

She sang to the flower, her voice wavering at first, then growing stronger. She catered to its needs, watering it and gently tending to it. The melody came back to her, threads of hope weaving through sorrow and joy, and the garden responded. Color returned, petals lifted, and the music rose, richer, more complex than before.

Angela stood, breathing in the garden's renewed song. She understood now: to prune away the painful memories would be to silence part of herself. It was the combination of old grief and new hope, regret and forgiveness, that created her unique harmony.

She stood, the garden in full bloom, melodies of the songs still ringing in her heart. Angela walked forward, ready to nurture her dreams in the real world, as she stepped beyond the garden gate, a single blue note followed her into the morning air.
