

The background of the cover is a night sky filled with stars and a prominent constellation. The sky transitions from a light, hazy glow at the top to a deep, dark blue at the bottom. Silhouettes of tree branches are visible in the upper corners, framing the scene. The text is overlaid on this background.

FROM WITIHN

A TALE FROM *INSIDE* THE STORYROOM

MIKE LONGMEADOW

From Within

A Tale from - inside - the Storyroom

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www.michellongpre.com

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Welcome to this special episode, where you will be transported
inside the Storyroom to see how a Tale is told.

Praise for Cosmic Consciousness

From Amazon certified reviews.

"I always love a story that leaves me pondering the truth as we currently perceive it. This book is cleverly crafted and an enlightening read."

"Opens up the imagination to new possibilities."

From Within: A Tale from the Storyroom

In order to fully appreciate this episode, it is recommended that you follow with “The Orchard”, the Tale the Storytellers are trying to share with the children.

Dedication

To my squirrel friend, who comes by each day to check in on my progress..

To my wife, who always knows what questions to ask.

To my grandsons, who have begun the adventure we call school.

Acknowledgments

To all who still believe in a simple dream.

From Mike with Author Academy Elite

Cosmic Consciousness

michellongpre.com/cosmic-consciousness

Tales from the Storyroom

Birth of a promise

A name for a Kobold

Searching for Forrest

Waking Celeste

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The Grand Celebration is a three-day event open to all resident of the Land of the Fey, whether they hail from the from the court of the Fairest, the court of the Shadows, or declared independent by the laws of nature. The event happened once every circle made by the earth around the sun, which marks the beginning of the summer solstice—which could be recognized by the fact the first sunray that breaks the horizon in the morning shone both in the human realm and the Land of the Fey. The light emitted by the first beam of the new cycle lingers for three days, and creates a dome of light that acts as a safe space where the Fey can celebrate without worrying about any rivalries exploding. On those days, all are equal to the eyes of the mycelial network. During that time, all passages are available to whomever wants to cross form one world to the other. In the past, this celebration ended with the launch of a Rade party, but today, it is more about saving the memory of a world that was forgotten.

Humans can participate in the event, but the rare ones who are chosen must be of an artistic nature—a musician, painter, a poet, or a chef—and their celebration is much more akin to working as they are mandated with keeping up the music for dancing, the poetry for laughing and crying, Fresh pastries to taste, and illustrating the event to create new memories. If a musician gets cramps, he must play though them. If a writer or painter runs into a lack of inspiration, they must delve deeper and still produce quality entertainment. If

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the chef runs out of fresh food and ideas, the food must still be of the highest quality. For any of them, stopping what they are doing means being sent to the dungeons, where they are assigned to cleaning duties—usually to scrub toilets for Ogres and Trolls. But let's get to the story, enough about the sacks of meat.

To create the call for all to join the grand celebration, land Fey brought blooming flowers to fill the air with varied scents. Many different flowers are used, and their spicy and sweet perfumes are then mixed to form a cloud of appetizing fragrances to entice the most distinguished pallets. This cloud then spreads to every corner of the Land of the Fey, travelling within the mycelial network's passages in seconds. Once enough Fey Folk have answered the call, the celebration, as was tradition, opened on feast day. Every part of the Land of the Fey was represented through food and drink, and it was customary for everyone to make their round and taste everything. At this time, human chefs are usually asked to remove themselves from sight so as to not curtail anyone's appetite.

The children also participated in the great food experience, but they usually had their fill rather quickly and were shepherded towards the entryway to the Storyroom. There, they would be treated to a story time like no other while the adults moved on to celebrations infused with special concoctions that would render their parenting skills useless.

The first children began gathering around the front door, laughing and squeaking in anticipation of what was to come. The excited chatter grew louder as more of them joined the fray. Then a hairy giant appeared around the corner of the home that housed the Storyroom, and silence fell in an instant, with all the children looking up to the large beast stricken with awe. In one synchronized movement, the children huddled into a tight pack, remaining perfectly silent and fixated on the monster. A Pukwudgie and an Elf found themselves side by side and grabbed each other's hands, both pale from the sudden fear.

The giant seemed surprised to stumble upon the children and stopped at their sight, placing its hand to its mouth to muffle a scream of surprise. It was taller than the house and covered in

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shaggy looking brown hair, its eyes barely visible under the thick mane of hair that fell over its face. It stood tall over the children, which cast a long shadow over the tight huddle. It smelled of cake and cookies, which contrasted with its disheveled look. After taking a moment to absorb the surprise, it placed one hand behind its back and smiled.

“Please do not fear the appearance that is mine, children. I am a land Cryptid and mean you no harm. Humans call me the Sasquatch or Bigfoot, but that’s only because I like to play tricks on them and make them believe I have giant feet.” The Cryptid paused, looking at its feet, which seemed too small to hold up such a large creature, then the children with an expression of surprise on its face that said it was expecting a laugh. Silence prevailed, as some of the children replaced their hair following the burst of wind that followed the Cryptid’s words, and the Cryptid huffed. “Very well, I know of some who consider my humor to be quite entertaining.” He squared his shoulders. “You know, they make documentaries about me in the human world that they watch on their image frames for days on end.” Seeing that the children stayed in their huddle in silence, the Cryptid sighed. “Regardless of your humorless condition, before you enter the Storyroom, I have a surprise for you. In the Land of the Fey, Cryptids are renowned for one thing in particular—candied pine nuts.”

On those words, the Cryptid stretched out the hand it was hiding and opened it to reveal a handful of candied pine nuts that released a perfume of almonds and sugar that filled the air with nutty goodness. The children had all turned their focus on the pile of pine nuts in the giant’s hand.

“Go ahead, take some, I made them especially for this special day.” Said the Cryptid. “It will be our little secret.” He added with a wink. Led by the Pukwudgie and the Elf, the children moved as one, quickly emptying the Cryptid’s hand. But before the children could taste their secret candy, the door to the room opened and everyone instinctively hid their candy. A Dark Elf stepped out, his brow furrowed and his gaze darting around, looking for something. He stood before them and looked at each child one by one, carrying his

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gaze from head to toe at each child. The Dark Elf was the guardian of the room, and he was especially vigilant when the grand celebration rolled in. While he continued his inspection, he spoke up.

“What is the nutty smell I perceive? Has a Cryptid been near you, children?” He asked in a gruff voice. If his first question was asked calmly, the second held a much sterner tone.

The children remained tight lipped while the Dark Elf went to scour the grounds around them. He went straight to the tracks left on the ground by the Cryptid, then went to where it had come from before coming back, his face as stern and emotionless as it always was.

Without saying another word, he went back inside the Storyroom and closed the door without letting anyone in. The children all looked at each other, dumbfounded. Their round eyes all asked the same question. Had they ruined Storytime for a handful of candied pine nuts? They stared at the door – some started crying while others stood still with a blank stare. The Elf and Pukwudgie looked at each other, then at the door.

“Maybe it’s unlocked. The Dark Elf isn’t known for its hospitality, he could have just closed the door behind him without thinking of us.” Said the Elf.

“I’m not risking opening the door when it’s not yet time.” Replied the Pukwudgie while combing away stray strand of spiky hair with his fingers.

The Elf acknowledged in silence and kept her eyes on the door handle, as if she was somehow hoping that looking at it would do something on its own. A few moments passed and the group calmed down. Those who had cried were now wiping away the tears, while those who were immobilized by fear and wonder began to inch towards the door. The Elf decided to check and see if the door was unlocked. As she placed her hand on the handle, the Pukwudgie and the children took a deep breath together. The only sound heard around them was the Elf’s heart beating loudly in her chest as she pressed harder on the handle, ready to turn it. She knew that if she opened the door without permission, she would be punished with banishment from Storytime and possibly even from the entire three-day celebration. She had to be careful to only push the door open.

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The children all had their gaze fixed on her. An eerie silence fell on the huddle. Before the Elf, who answered to Alea Toyre, could do anything, the handle turned, and the door began to open. Still fully synchronized, the children all took one step back while Alea let go of the handle before anyone could see she tried to open it. The door slowly swung open, and no one was behind it. The children all looked at each other, unsure of what to do next. Its opening usually meant it was time to enter, but no one wanted to risk stepping in and get chastised for dealing with a Cryptid. The Pukwudgie, who answered to Quamarra of the Little People, decided to take a step and peer in. The inside of the room seemed normal—the Dark Elf was standing at the back of the room, waiting to open the door to the Storytellers. He looked angry, but then again, he always did. He gave Quamarra a quick nod, which made the strip of white hair he wore in a mohawk dance on his head. The rest of the children bunched up behind him, crowding Quamarra to look over his shoulder as he tried to avoid being forced into the Room before he was allowed to go in. The Dark Elf's nod was the signal they were waiting for. Still synchronized and moving as one, the children erupted into the room, each one racing to get the bed they wanted, tussling and pushing each other to nab the best position possible as Quamarra rode the wave that pushed him inside. Multiple beds were scattered chaotically throughout a large room decorated with nothing more than a bookcase that spanned the entire back wall. Candles were lit on two hanging chandeliers, producing just enough light to circulate but dim enough to create a calming atmosphere for bedtime. Alea tussled with Quamarra, both homing in on the same bed. Quamarra managed to seize the middle and settled himself.

"I want to be closer this year. Please let me have this bed," said Alea. "Answer me a riddle, and I'll consider it," answered Quamarra, who gave her a wink to tease.

"Schuh! It's starting," whispered a Gnome in the next bed who was pointing to the back door of the room.

The intensity of the children's eruption into the room had been replaced by a sense of calm. More children were slowly filing in,

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quietly picking a bed and settling in without saying a word. The Dark Elf stood idle waiting for everyone to be settled in their beds, waiting for complete silence to fall on the room. He didn't have to wait long, as the children were eager to get started. Once the silence was complete, he opened the door to let the Storytellers in.

The children closest to the door slid under their covers as a first hooded person entered the room, entirely cloaked in a dark cape from head to toe, followed four more cloaked individuals. The children, still moving as one, created a movement that resembled a wave as they all hid under their covers. Five hooded individuals had emerged, and the four who followed the leader in glided silently to four corners in the room. They kept their hood over their faces as they moved, seeming to float inches above the floor. The Elf and Pukwudgie looked at each other, both wearing a look of confusion as this did not look like anything they'd seen before. Alea pulled on the covers, nodding to Quamarra to join her.

"It's a big bed, we can share." She whispered.

Quamarra nodded and slid under the covers next to Alea. They cuddled for comfort, a little scared by the silent ones that now surrounded them. The first one who had entered staying in the middle of the room, observing. Alea slid under Quamarra's thick mane of hair, with her attention focused on the five hooded people who now surrounded them. Quamarra grabbed Alea by the shoulders to hold her even closer. They then grabbed each other's hands and held on tight.

The five individuals were now spread out and in position, seemingly awaiting some sort of signal. The first person who had entered the room, still standing in the middle, pulled her hood off. She was an Air Sprite, her skin blue as the sky and her eyes deep as a fiery sunset. She scanned the room which set off an excited chatter as the children emerged from under their covers to try and settle themselves more comfortably in their beds. All the attention was turned toward the Air Sprite, who wasn't smiling.

"Children, we are ready to begin the telling of the events surrounding the great Rade that ushered in the times we now call the present. Let the comfort of the bed support your body and let

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your mind wander, this chronicle will help enlighten you to the reason for our annual celebration.” She paused and took a breath. “But before we can proceed, please empty your pockets of the candied pine nuts offered by the Cryptid.”

All the children wore the same surprised look—eyes wide open and mouth agape. No one disputed her claim and all of them pulled out their stash to place them in the container the Dark Elf was passing around.

“You mustn’t accept any candied gift from a Cryptid.” The Air Sprite said in her most supportive tone. She paused, thinking of what to say next. “At least until you are old enough. They are delicious yet each one carries a secret, your secret. Until you are strong enough to withstand the power of the revelation it holds, it is advisable to avoid them at all costs.”

The Dark Elf finished gathering the pine nuts and sealed the container with a metal lid he sealed by producing a small ball of fire with the palm of his hand, then went to guard the door, where he sat leaning on the wall with the container next to him.

“You must know that the secret you carry is never the one you believe.” He mumbled almost inaudibly.

“We appreciate your effort, Magmus.” Said the Air Sprite, giving him a hard look. “But please refrain from idle chatter.”

“I shall do as requested, Wind Sparrow.” Replied Magmus to the Air Sprite, as he bowed his head.

The Air Sprite nodded to him and smiled. She turned her attention back to the children, her smile as gracious as ever.

“This is the first day of the grand celebration. On the human calendar, it is said to be June twenty-fourth. This is an important day in many of their realms. Bonfires are lit, people dance and celebrate; summer has arrived. Some places in the human land even declared it their special day. But as hard as the humans have tried, they have never come close to holding a successful Grand Celebration as they never hold the event for more than a day. We do, which is why we are capable, during that short period, to open our minds and show you the history of the Land of the Fey. All through the Grand Celebration, divisions are erased, and Fey from all allegiances can

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unite and rejoice until exhaustion. These three days are the single most important in our realm, but it hasn't always been as such as you will see in our stories."

"We know all that. Tell us the story!" yelled a Goblin boy.

The Sprite smiled at the outburst. "Open your hearts, free your minds. Let us transport your imagination to a magical place."

She then gave the Storytellers the signal with a quick nod. They removed their hoods and got into position. There were two other Air Sprites, a very old Elf, and two humans, who were without a doubt changelings who chose the human form for theatrical effect. No human could perform this task without losing their minds. Wind Sparrow's eyes began to shimmer as she spoke. "Tonight, we share the first part of the Land of the Fey's most recent History."

She scanned the room, locking eyes with the other Storytellers, who had settled into their Storytelling positions—some crouched, some standing, all of them looking at Wind Sparrow. The children had their eyes wide open, refusing to blink to avoid missing anything. Some were biting their pillows; others had slid back under the covers.

Wind Sparrow raised her right hand. The other Storytellers took a deep breath, then closed their eyes. Silence filled the room. Soon, thin strands of light began to emerge from the Storytellers' heads. It seeped up like vapor, and within moments, each Storytellers' strand of light reached the middle of the room, where they merged together to become a thick wall of smoke. Alea and Quamarra had their arms wrapped around each other, holding their breath to avoid inhaling the smoke. It didn't take long before they had to breathe, and both looked at each other, amazed the fumes didn't affect their breathing.

The cloud started producing small flashes of lightning, and gradually, an image began to form, developing from the middle of the cloud to its outer edges. It filled every nook and cranny in the room and soon everyone was carried to another place. The children's focus on the developing creation offered by the Storytellers infused it with enough energy to bring it into focus and bear witness the Chronicles of the Great Rade.

Before the Storytellers could infuse their knowledge of History to

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complete the circuit and start the Tale, a scratching sound that came from somewhere in the ceiling broke Wind Sparrow's connection. She tried to ignore it and reconnect herself to the emerging story, but the scratching sound only became more insistent. Magmus had noticed it too and was already scouring the ceiling with his gaze, trying to pinpoint the location of the sound. Seeming to have located the origin of the scratch, he leaped to grab on a sconce that hung loosely from the wall, but only managed to rip it out and fall on his back.

The Storyteller's cloud had almost completely transformed into a fruit tree orchard in the human realm, and the four Tellers had managed to maintain it as they waited for Wind Sparrow. It instantly dissipated at the sound of the crashing Dark Elf and the Storytellers opened their eyes. All the children turned their attention to Magmus, who was lying on the floor, his face red from embarrassment. A soft chuckle broke the awkward silence, and soon the room was filled with laughter. Magmus seemed outraged for a moment, but he found his position – cornered behind a bed and unable to move – was quite funny and he started laughing at his own foibles with everyone.

Wind Sparrow found it touching to see Magmus let his guard down, even if for just a moment, but the scratching sound had not stopped, in fact it was getting louder. The worry must have shone through her gaze, because Magmus stopped laughing instantly and lumbered his way back to his feet after pushing away the bed that cornered him.

He was back to intently tracking the sound and this time, the children all found refuge under their covers at the sight of this Dark Elf in hunting mode. His eyes were blackened by a fully expanded iris that emitted a light that spread like a shadow across the ceiling.

Wind Sparrow ordered the Storytellers to form a circle around the beds and join hands to form a barrier to protect the children.

"It's the Cryptid." Said Alea to reassure the Storytellers. "It wants to join us." Added Quamarra.

Magus took a step back and began to quietly hum. His blackened iris began to pulse under the vibrations of his voice. The room was now flooded with a shadowy light that illuminated the room as much

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as it cast a gloomy shade. This gave him an X-ray version of the room and he was able to pinpoint the exact position of the scratching sound. He saw it as a wave that spread out from one single point of origin, mimicking the waves created by a stone being thrown in the water. Magmus left the room so fast it was as if he simply disappeared. From the room, they heard his footsteps as he ran on the roof towards the scratching sound. Everyone in the room moved their heads in unison, focused on the sound of Magmus' footsteps. He stopped where the sound waves originated. Silence fell on the room. Even the air stopped moving. Alea, Quamarra, and all the children held their breath, unsure of what to expect. The Storytellers tightened their circle, ready to throw up a shield of protection. Wind Sparrow could hear Magmus' voice, but couldn't hear clearly and tried to make sense of what she heard by listening for the emotion in the voice.

A few moments passed and everyone stayed on high alert. Wind Sparrow let go of the circle to go and see what Magmus was up to. Just as the Storytellers had rejoined hands to form the protective barrier, there was a loud bang on the ceiling. Then another, this time causing some plaster to break off and fall to the ground. The Storytellers tightened their circle even more which created the image of a large blanket that quickly spread out under each child. They lifted the children away and retreated to a corner of the room, keeping the circle tight. There was a third bang, this time breaking off the rest of the ceiling plaster. Soon after there was another impact and a hole appeared. Magmus stuck his face in it. His smile was unusually wide and twisted his facial features in ways no one had seen before. Alea smothered a laugh, and she could feel Quamarra's shoulders dancing as he tried to muffle his laughter as well.

"The Cryptid we encountered earlier was but a child." Magmus said, his voice crackling. "She did not ken the candy could be hazardous. She says she snacks on them all the time without any issues." Magmus made a sad face by pouting his lower lip, which caused a chuckle to roll through the room at the sight of the fearsome Dark Elf making sad faces. Magmus ignored the snickers and continued.

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“Her parents are direct descendants of the Cryptids that helped during past Rades, and they’re quite busy with the festivities. She felt alone.”

Wind Sparrow now stood under the hole created by Magmus. She looked at him like a disappointed mother looks at a child that is covered in flour after an unsuccessful attempt at baking.

“Please enlighten me.” She said. “What filled your mind with the idea that punching a hole in the ceiling was a good idea.”

“Well, our little friend Cornelia here is but a child.” Started Magmus, whose eyes were rolling in their sockets, seemingly independent from each other. “She was trying to scratch a tiny hole to watch the story. I helped her finish.” Magmus wore a stupid smile on his face as he spoke. Wind Sparrow understood he had eaten some pine nuts and decided to play along.

“That’s very noble of you Magmus. But bear in mind we were in the room while you pierced that hole.”

Magus’ face contorted itself into one of surprise and pain. “Oh no! Have I caused harm to anyone?” He asked, his skin paler than ever. “Thankfully no one was injured.” Wind Sparrow leaned her head to the side and looked beyond his shoulders to let Magmus know she wanted to speak to the Cryptid.

He jumped back, giving a signal to the cryptid to lean in.

“Welcome Cornelia,” Started Wind Sparrow, “you may stay and watch, but I cannot say if the Tale will reach out to you through the opening, I know not how it will work with an open ceiling.”

“Oh, goody! I promise I’ll keep quiet and just watch. I don’t mind if it’s not a clear image, I’m happy to sit and watch from a distance.”

Said Cornelia the Cryptid, as she crossed her hands over her mouth to demonstrate her pledge.

The wind from her voice forced a few more pieces to break off from the new hole in the roof, forcing Wind Sparrow to hold on. “Your attitude is highly appreciated.” Wind Sparrow said. She looked around the room. “But before we can return to the telling of the Tales, we have some cleaning up to do. Magmus, if you would be kind enough to come down and help to clean up your actions?”

Magus jumped down through the hole without hesitation.

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“At your service.” He said, standing at attention after a perfect landing. “Where shall I start?”

Wind Sparrow couldn't hold back a smile. Seeing Magmus in this state was highly amusing.

“We need you to stand in the middle of our circle to anchor our clean-up story.”

Magus looked at Wind Sparrow with a quizzical look without moving.

“Just go and stand there.” She said bluntly, pointing to the middle of the debris.

He did as told without saying a word, skipping and jumping to the middle of the debris field he created. The Storytellers surrounded Magmus and linked their hands.

“Children, pay attention. Telling stories is not only for the purpose of entertainment, they have practical uses as well.” She gave her team a nod, and soon the wisps of imaginary steam were released and converged towards Magmus, who stood tall and proud amidst the debris. The effects of the pine nuts seemed to wane as his face slowly returned to its stern look, although a layer of fatigue was obvious around his eyes.

The wisps of steam created by the Storytellers maneuvered through the debris with purpose, disappearing under parts of it. Soon, a shape began to form underneath the pile, as walls of wood planks rose on four sides. They had formed a box around the debris and Magmus.

“Magmus, if you can, please walk out the door.”

Nothing happened for a second, but soon, under the loud grunts emitted by Magmus, the massive wood crate was moving towards the door. He was forced to bear the weight of the debris for the Storytellers to be able to hold the box together.

“This is so cool.” Whispered Cornelia, who was trying to stay true to her promise of keeping quiet. Except she had yet to realize that a quiet whisper from her would cause hurricane like winds to explode in the room and her whisper ripped all the sheets from the bed and sent them flying all over the room.

Magus was still in the middle of the container, crouched under its

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weight that was pressing down on him. He was pushing hard to force his way through the doorframe while the Storytellers tried to adapt their creation to help him pass by emitting waves of negative space to let him pass. They didn't lose focus at Cornelia's windy whisper and help the box together while Wind Sparrow gently broke off from the creation. The image carrying the debris faltered ever so slightly, but that was all Magmus needed to make it outside with the debris. There was a loud thud.

"There! Nothing can come between the children and Storytime." He declared, stomping on the debris as he walked back inside the house.

"I'm sorry." Said Cornelia, her face filling the hole in the roof. Half the residents of the room went flying when she spoke. Cornelia pulled back and slapped her hands to her mouth. Tears appeared at the corners of her eyes and she quickly blinked her eyes to push them away, causing another breeze to pass through the room, although this time it was much calmer.

Wind Sparrow landed on her head in the corner of the room, her face covered with a stray bedsheet. She fought her way back to her feet and took a moment to dust herself off before turning to the Cryptid. The last thing she wanted was for the room to be flooded with her tears, so she tried to reassure her.

"Do not let worry take over your mind, Cornelia, I know your heart is good, yet you must remain quiet. Your voice carries a power that is not aligned with Storytelling." She looked around the room. "Now we must make the beds. Children, grab your sheets and proceed, please."

Alea sighed loudly.

"Can't you make a story to help us? Like you did for the fallen plaster?"

Cornelia pulled away to laugh, which sounded like thunder inside the room. Wind Sparrow cringed, expecting more pieces to fall from the ceiling, then reassured it would not, she turned to Alea.

"This is different, this action we can accomplish easily, it needs no extra incentive. Now grab your sheets and make your bed."

Out of the corner of her eye, Wind Sparrow saw Cornelia taking a

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breath, seemingly ready to say something. She shot a glare at her and placed her finger to her mouth, to which Cornelia carefully exhaled her breath towards the sky and said nothing.

“I feel I must apologize. My destructive nature overcame my good sense. I will take care of fixing the roof for tomorrow’s telling.”

Magmus said, looking at the ceiling.

Wind Sparrow looked him over, to see if there any trace of pine nut craziness left in him. “If I’m being honest, Magmus, I’m happy I got to see you lose control a little. I find reassurance in the idea your soul is imperfect, like us all. And I accept your offer, it would be nice to have a true ceiling over our heads.”

Magmus bowed and sheepishly settled himself in his corner of the room, visibly exhausted by the excitement procured by the pine nuts. Wind Sparrow felt a tinge of worry at seeing her Story guard fall prey to sleep, but then thought about Cornelia. Having a Cryptid, even a young one, on your side was always a strong advantage in most situations. It was always prudent to have some protection for Storytime, children were an easy target for ill intended Fey folk, even during the Grand Celebration. Having a Cryptid child as a guard was not ideal, but it was better than leaving themselves open and vulnerable. A Mare is never far, and they rarely partake in the Grand Celebration.

Soon, the children were back in their freshly made beds, and the Storytellers had returned their positions. Just as before, Wind Sparrow gave the signal and soon images from the next chapter began to emerge through wisps of shimmering steam – the sounds, the sensations of another place filled the room. Every child was fixated on the growing cloud, which developed a fully immersive décor. Under the impulse of the children’s focus, the cloud stretched out to fill the room until a clear image of a fruit tree orchard in the human realm appeared.

Wind Sparrow had kept part of her focus on the ceiling and Cornelia, unsure of what would happen to the Tale. She worried that it could escape. The children’s connection to the Tale was unperturbed, and that included Cornelia, whose focus on the Tale pulled the story’s fumes up through the ceiling to surround her, but otherwise stayed

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put. Reassured, Wind Sparrow turned all of her attention back to the Tale and her team of Storytellers, ready to dive in.

At this moment of the Tales, the children were to choose how they wanted to transform to fully integrate the Tale. Some choosing to become butterflies, others opting for more earthbound creatures to follow the story from a different vantage point.

The air then became still. The room had dissolved and everyone in the room was completely transported to a fruit tree orchard, leaving no indication they might be anywhere else. A pond sat in the middle of the trees, where the water was ruffled under the impulse of a soft breeze. Two humans emerged from a house that loomed large over the orchard and began walking towards the pond. At this time, the children all tensed up, aware that they would soon be fully immersed in the Tale and disassociated from their bodies. Then a loud yawn rumbled through the room. It was Alea. Wind Sparrow immediately raised both hands, closed in a fist, and all the Storytellers stopped, which caused the orchard to dissipate instantly. "Aww." Complained one Fey child. "What happened?" Asked another. A murmur rose in the room as the children all began whispering to each other.

Wind Sparrow turned to Alea.

"What causes you to display such crass, young one?" She said.

Alea looked to Quamarra for support, but he turned his gaze away. She turned back to Wind Sparrow, her head low.

"Such was not my intention." Began Alea. "I await the Tale with great anticipation. My desire to see it all is such that I secretly dream to become a Storyteller someday. But I fail to understand why we must begin in the human realm. The reason I yawned is that humans make me drowsy. And please accept my regrets for my outburst. It is just that I enjoy parts where the Fey folk are present more than that of humans. It feels like we have begun a human story in the human world and I couldn't hold my yawn."

Wind Sparrow smiled; a deep blue flame danced in the back of eyes. "I understand your impatience, my dear. I was once an eager listener as well, only interested in the Tales of the Fey Folk. I know how you feel. Yet you must listen closely, there may be breadcrumbs of truth

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in the Tale we share that will touch the Land of the Fey.”

Alea’s eyes widened.

“You mean clues for a treasure hunt?” She asked, sitting up in her bed.

“Yes, exactly like that. Now keep your yawns to yourself next time.”

Alea nodded. Wind Sparrow looked to the Storytellers and gave them a knowing wink, to which they chuckled. All throughout the history of this place, there had rarely been a time when the Tale could be told with no interruptions, and this year was no different. She raised her right hand to give the command to resume the story. The Tellers resumed their positions, ready to continue.

The imagery grew once again, revealing the orchard and the pond, except this time, the Storytellers had trouble rebuilding the orchard, there was a glitch in the room. Trees would pop in and out, the humans walking down the path from the house switched places randomly. After letting out a loud sigh of exasperation, Wind Sparrow made a fist with her hand, prompting the Storytellers to stop once more. Cornelia took a breath, ready to say something, but she managed to stop herself and exhaled towards the sky. Wind Sparrow gave Cornelia a quick smile to let her know she appreciated the effort, then walked over to a young Phoenix who was sitting up in his bed. His skin glowed red, pulsing with each heartbeat, which created wisps of orange around his eyes. His feathers seemed to float freely on his skin, ready to take the air. Flames danced in his eyes, which could hypnotize humans but had little effect on Fey Folk. Wind Sparrow sat on the side of his bed.

“Why does your focus wander my child?” She asked, caressing his hair.

While she spoke, his attention was constantly drawn to the music coming from outside the room, which was livelier than ever. “Does your heart seek to dance?” She asked, placing a hand on his shoulder.

The Phoenix’s face reddened. His head became a bright red dot on top of his body, to which some children giggled. Wind Sparrow threw a stern gaze in their direction and waited for them to stop giggling, which they did almost instantly. She then turned back to the young

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Phoenix child.

“You mustn’t be shy or feel shame, your desire to join the dance means you are soon to rise and become a full-grown Phoenix. I only ask that you refrain from turning to flame during your time here.” She pressed lightly on his shoulder to force him to lie down, which he did without resisting. “For this year, possibly your last one, you are still with us. I need your mind to join ours, do you understand?” The Phoenix nodded and gave her a crooked smile as his face slowly returned to a more natural shade of red. Outside, the music had become frantic, now accompanied by screams of joy and unbridled delight. The young Phoenix tried to look out a window and catch a glimpse of the festivities, while letting the Air Sprite push him down. “I have an idea.” Wind Sparrow told him as she pulled up the sheets to tuck him in. “How would you like to be a firefly in this Tale? You could be our beacon.”

The young boy’s eyes shone bright red flames that betrayed his excitement at the idea. The firefly was usually off limits because it could interfere with the flow of the story by causing visual disturbances.

“Now, you must be careful. I expect you to use your powers of the flame with the level of maturity I would expect from someone who is allowed to go to the dance.”

The Phoenix nodded so violently he almost started a fire as his hair danced on his head, causing it to spark. Wind Sparrow returned to her position, as composed as ever. She once again raised her hand. The Storytellers went back to their original position, releasing the Tale from their minds to let it flow out of them and connect with the children’s minds. The vapor that transported the room’s inhabitants to far away places once again filled the room, connecting with the children’s imagination as they travelled back to the orchard in the human world.

This time, the children’s connection to the story was in perfect symbiosis with the Storytellers and the orchard’s perfumes filled the room. Both curious to see if their new friend was watching, Alea and Quamarra snuck a peek at each other at the exact same time. Surprised they had the same idea, they smiled at each other; Alea

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was happy to have company for the Tale. It was her first time alone, since her sister had grown past the age of Storytime. Quamarra reached in with his hands under the covers to grab Alea's. They were careful to stay focused on the Tale, but then they saw Wind Sparrow was reacting to a disturbance in the Tale. Not wanting to be the cause for another interruption, they kept their focus and soon they were fully focused on the orchard.

Thunder erupted outside the house. Again, the orchard dissipated in a fraction of a second. This time the Storytellers immediately broke off from their position to form a protective circle around the children. Magmus awoke in a startle and rose to his feet as if pulled by invisible strings. He had one hand on the handle of his sword with his other arm holding an invisible shield. He was crouched ever so slightly and ready to pounce. A combat ready Dark Elf was always an impressive sight, but Magmus had an extra level of intimidation. Most of his kind's eyes were dark, but they were empty and void of mental activity. You knew they could be brutal, but little else. Magmus had deep, dark eyes that told an adversary to be wary, but they also vibrated with life and told anyone who was facing him that there was intelligent reasoning behind the dark gaze.

"What was that?" Asked Quamarra, who's face was glowing with reflections from the Phoenix child's flames, as he floated above his bed, seemingly ready to intervene.

"Fear not children, Magmus will lead the inspection." Then looking up towards Cornelia. "Dear Cryptid child, do you ken anything to explain such noise? And please, answer not with your mouth."

Cornelia nodded excitedly. She stood and began to perform a series of gestures that could be construed as some type of communication effort. Wind Sparrow giggled.

"Um... Cornelia?" She said. The Cryptid child didn't hear her and kept gesturing. "Cornelia!" This time Wind Sparrow spoke louder. Still no reaction.

Magmus stepped outside and jumped up to the roof.

"They can't see you." He told her, after which Cornelia's face reappeared in the ceiling hole.

"Sorry." She said, sending a gust of wind that once again ripped the

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sheets from the beds, trapping some children in a ball of cottony softness. Cornelia slapped her hand on her mouth in remorse. While they fought their way out from under the crumpled sheets with the help of their friends, Wind Sparrow gave Cornelia a reassuring smile.

“Do not worry yourself, just try to remember to speak without using words. So, you said you saw what happened?”

Cornelia nodded, then cupped her hands together before separating them, mimicking an explosion.

“There was an explosion?”

Cornelia nodded. After trying to think of a way to communicate with her hands, she simply turned her head towards the sky to speak.

“It was for the firework display that ends the event. There was an accident.” She said.

“This is unfortunate,” Said Wind Sparrow. Then, thinking the Storytellers help might be needed. “Are all safe from harm?”

Cornelia just shrugged her shoulders, then turned her head away again.

“I only saw the explosion, there was no one close when it happened, but I can’t see anything else.”

The storytellers sat down to relax. Megmus, who had returned to his post, was never one for slacking off and gave them a hard look. The Storytellers grudgingly reassumed their position, but they all knew better than to challenge a Dark Elf. Wind Sparrow, satisfied their help wasn’t needed, scanned the room for any other potential interruption. She took a breath, and gave the signal. The Storytellers once again began emitting the Tale. This time, the orchard came into view in seconds, and soon they were ready to begin the Tale.

The children all laid in their beds, each one witness to the chronicles from their point of view. Depending on their choice of vantage point, each connection led them to be sitting on a branch, or hiding behind a bush, or flying on the back of a butterfly to see and feel the story. The children all had their eyes wide open, focused on the stream of images provided by the storytellers’ minds and souls. Together, they travelled through the orchard to watch Forrest and Clyde tried to understand what was happening to them. The children were treated

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to the entire tale, without interruption, and soon, one by one, the Storytellers began to disconnect from the Tale.

The imagery filling the room slowly dissipated to a chorus of disappointment and childish outrage. Wind Sparrow waited patiently for the wave of protest to calm. The Storytellers each pulled out a pouch from under their garments and began to eat their snack to replenish.

“Why must we stop?” Asked Alea as the protest turned into a quiet murmur of exhausted children.

“Be patient, children. For us to convey the full power of the next Tale, we must replenish.” Wind Sparrow said, causing the protest to simmer down a little more. She scanned the room, taking a moment to lock eyes with each child in the room, which created a blanket of silence over the room. “Little ones, tell me what do you think will happen next?” She asked in a loud whisper.

By now, the children were well ensconced in their beds under their sheets, their heads comfortably pressed on their pillows. One by one, they peered out from under their covers to look at each other, waiting to see who would dare venture an answer.

“One thing for certain, no good will come from the humans.” Said a Kornböcke boy.

Everyone in the room burst out in joyous laughter, Storytellers and Dark Elf included.

“Be wary of your words, young man.” Replied Wind Sparrow after regaining her composure. “In the story realm, everything is possible. You must never accept the impossible, everything is feasible. We all understand humans are incompetent,” She marked a short pause to let the laughter roll around the room. “yet that does not exclude that one of them, and maybe even two of them, could understand our world and participate in a positive way.”

The children all looked at Wind Sparrow with wonder as she stood before them smiling. Alea and Quamarra looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders as they settled back into the bed in a synchronized motion that gave each of them the perfect amount of sheet coverage. Music was still seeping in from outside, but it was much more subdued. The party’s mood had shifted after the

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explosion. Wind Sparrow gave the Storytellers a quick nod. They covered their heads and began to leave the room one by one, the same way as they arrived. Wind Sparrow stayed where she was, waiting for the children to stop shuffling around in their beds.

“Let sleep enter your minds and hearts, children. You need the rest; the next part will be important.” Wind Sparrow said.

Wind Sparrow waved her hand in an arc in front of her. One by one, the children succumbed to sleep in seconds. Wind Sparrow then followed her Storytelling compatriots and left the room last. Before closing the door, she gave a nod to Magmus who was to remain with the children in case any other distraction caused any havoc. Despite her ever-growing trust in Magmus, Wind Sparrow still felt a little uncomfortable leaving the children with a Dark Elf. As a group, they had taken their fair share of children to force them into slavery. But she knew she could trust Magmus based on one specific element. As brutal as Dark Elves could be, they lived by honor. Magmus accepted to be here to guard the children, that’s what he would do. She extinguished the candles with a quick flick of the hand, sending a brief but strong whiff of air across the room. She then closed the door amid the sound of sleeping children’s deep breathing.

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THE END

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EPILOGUE

It has been a pleasure to invite you inside the Storyroom. In the future, you now know where the Tales come from.

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About the Author

Mike Longmeadow is an author fascinated by the invisible realities that permeate our lives. He is a curious bookworm who's constantly looking to learn, discover new things that will augment his outlook on life.

This has led him to read and learn about a variety of past cultures and beliefs, which he then introduces into the here and now.

In the meantime, let's Connect:

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