



# SEARCHING FOR FORREST

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A Tale from the Storyroom

MIKE LONGMEADOW



# Searching for Forrest

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In the previous episode, Jasper and Stephen managed to speak with Forrest, but did not know if he needed help. In this episode, follow our two homeless heroes as they go out to look for Forrest after finding he was not at school.

## 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."

## Searching for Forrest: A Tale from the Storyroom

This tale is the next one to come out of the Storyroom. More are to come, stay tuned.

## Dedication

To my cat, who has supervised every moment of this endeavor with  
zeal.

To my wife, who never judges the chaotic process I go through.

To my son and his family, who are true inspirations and fill me with  
pride every day the sun rises.



## Acknowledgments

To all who still believe in a simple dream.



From Mike with Author Academy Elite

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### 1

The early light of a new morning had pierced the horizon as it slowly dissolved the darkness, coloring the sky with hues of purple and pink that never failed to amaze Jasper. He looked up at the sky through the small opening left by the broken zipper on the tent door. As was the case each morning, his mind was filled with a mixture of worry and hope about the coming day. Stephen was snoring with abandon, which did take away from the magic of the early dawn light, but Jasper didn't mind. He had gotten used to the vibrations produced by the loud snore, using it as white noise to help himself fall asleep. Plus, the sound of his snores was so intense it had stopped the rats from entering their tent at night to warm up.

Their tent was supported by a loosely built wood frame to reinforce it in case of bad weather. It had been their home for a few months now. Outside their tent, Jasper heard the rustle of a slowly awakening village—one that was composed of makeshift structures that served as residence to any and all who were now unable to afford to pay for a roof over their head. The village was growing by the day, with more Individuals, couples, and families joining the mix, creating new and more complex layers in the social fabric. As Jasper gave himself a moment to be sufficiently awake to face the world, the sound of zippers and people moaning and groaning as they stretched drowned out Stephen's snoring. Jasper was still groggy from the previous night's dreams. It was about Delphina, the woods Nymph who stole his heart. In the dream, he thought she had returned, but whenever he wanted to get closer to her, she would evaporate, which tore his heart apart each time. He was relieved to

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open his eyes and awaken, but he also knew it was only temporary. If she really was back, he had to make sure he would find a way to stay at her side.

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His first dream of her wasn't that long ago. It was a time when Jasper actively participated in the ultimate dream of making money, looking to be a good citizen by feeding the machine that is known to all as the economy. He worked full time in a grocery store, managing the produce section. The main part of his job was to ensure that the profits kept pouring in and that there were no complaints about produce freshness. The money wasn't that bad, and his work life balance was decent. He could go see a concert from time to time and had a series of subscriptions to ensure quality television—it all seemed perfect. Except those days were weighed down by a deep seeded sense of despair that followed him everywhere. Something was missing, and he plodded through each day hoping he would find a way to fill the growing void in his soul. At work, he studied non-stop to learn everything he could about fruits and vegetables, hoping to find a sense of purpose for his life. He never said no to a teammate in need and had a generally good relationship with just about everyone in the store. Despite all that, not only didn't he find his purpose, he never knew what it was that he should be looking for. Then things changed for the worse, and he began to be forced to cut back on his extracurricular activities because his rent and utilities were rising faster than his paycheck was growing. That's about the time a creature named Delphina the Nymph of the woods became a part of his life.

Jasper could still recall the first dream as if it just happened. More than that, his memory of it was so real he couldn't decide if something real had happened or not anymore. It happened some years ago, too many to count, and marked the beginning of a slow decline into a madness that was impossible to satisfy.

In that first dream, it was the middle of the night. The full moon was the only source of light, yet the heat on Jasper's skin felt like it was

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the sun. He was surrounded by translucent trees that revealed a flow of luminous energy that coursed through the trunk and branches like blood. The trees cast long shadows on the ground, which told Jasper they were physically present. He could hear the trees breathing—it sounded like the creaks and moans of an old wooden floor supporting a multitude of people. He realized his mind was fully conscious he was in a dream. His heart was filled with awe, but his mind lost its ability to line up two consecutive thoughts. He walked along a path which was flanked by the trees on one side and pure darkness on the other.

Jasper made a conscious effort to hug the tree line to avoid falling into the dark abyss—it emitted a low growl that turned his blood to ice. If I keep moving, I'll find a way out. He thought to himself. The fact he was able to have a coherent thought had a calming effect on Jasper. He decided to stop and take the time to look around to try and see if he could recognize this place. The trees were translucent, but he knew they were actually trees, which made him think this was somewhere real, although he didn't recognize it. That's when something caught his eye.

Hidden inside a light wisp of steam rising from a depression hidden between two trees, there stood a being Jasper couldn't quite see. The slim cloud of vapor was barely visible. It remained at a standstill and Jasper stayed where he was, afraid it might evaporate if he moved. He couldn't understand what he was looking at, nevertheless, his heart grew to fill his chest with joy and desire. His mind went blank, and his groin filled with blood as he began to walk towards the wisp of steam without even realizing he was moving. At each one of his steps, a voice that sounded more like a scream rose from the back of his mind to stop and turn back. But the blank void that was his mind swallowed it before it could register in his conscience.

As he drew closer, Jasper could see two eyes peering out from within the cloud hidden behind a transparent veil. He was submerged by a wave of fear that was quickly replaced with a powerful desire that was both carnal and emotional. Both eyes seemed to float in the air independently, ignoring the laws of gravity as they moved. A breeze

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passed which bothered the cloud and revealed more to Jasper, who found himself more confused than ever despite the strong desire he had to keep getting closer. The eyes continued to defy gravity, changing colors each time they blinked, going from blue to brown, or green, and back to blue, creating an enchantment he was unable to pull away from. Each variation made Jasper's heart jump a little higher in his throat. Mesmerized by the spectacle, he found himself edging ever closer despite himself. With each step, Jasper found his mind, heart, and soul were soon aligned with one single desire, to find out who was behind those eyes.

"Hello, my name is Jasper." he said, his voice crackling like a pubescent teenager.

A strand of steam split from the small cloud and moved toward Jasper, floating on an invisible thread of air. Unable to control his movements, he watched as his arm extended forward to touch it. He believed it might be solid and tried to grab it, but all he did was disturb it before it evaporated. Jasper immediately felt a surge of pain at the sight of the steam dissipating in the air. Panic took over his mind and body, and in one bound he jumped to the cloud of mist and dropped to his knees.

"Don't go. I didn't know I needed you to exist, but now I do. The only thing that can help me is if you stay close." He said, surprised by the words coming out of his mouth.

The following moment, the eyes reappeared in the cloud. It appeared as though they were smiling. Jasper was overcome by shivers of joy and his body trembled under its power. His mind tried to pull him back towards a state of normality, but the attempt was bulldozed away from his mind by the sheer power of his desire for those two eyes.

"Are you here for me?" He asked, his heart simultaneously filled with hope they would say yes and fear they would say no.

The cloud of mist then began to break apart, and a creature, both feminine and masculine, appeared as if drawn with charcoal. The vision filled every particle of Jasper's body with sexual desires. He had no idea where this desire could be coming from and had no time to dwell. The thing that stepped out from the mist was more and



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more present, and her energy was pure, unadulterated desire. Jasper's mind, already in agony, found a way to shut down even more. The cloud was almost entirely dissipated, and as the now fully formed figure emerged from its mist, Jasper knew he had lost all control over his mind and body, and he didn't care. Before him was his ideal woman. She was the perfect representation of beauty Jasper had ever desired—a soft gaze, a permanent smirk, a display of quiet confidence—yet she wasn't quite human. She wore wings, and her skin seemed made from layered leaves that seemed so soft Jasper had to use all his energy to restrain himself from leaping at her to touch it. For a brief moment, his mind had a moment of clarity and he tried to understand how it was possible for something to be so perfectly aligned with his most profound yearnings. Never in his life had he seen anything as beautiful, anything as enthralling. Then the creature smiled, and he almost fainted. He didn't know why and had no intention of fighting this feeling. Whatever his life had been to this point, whatever dreams were still in the making for the future, all of it was gone. From that moment, all he wanted was to be with this creature. It filled his heart with love, his soul with purpose, and his loins with desire.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, I answer to Delphina."

Her voice was soft, sensual. Within a short moment, hearing her speak filled his mind with a lifetime spent at her side. If he had a powerful desire to be close to her before, it had now turned into an all-consuming passion. He stepped in to hug and kiss her, but she evaded his attempt and flew up to a branch above them.

"Ah, ah, we must not consume what is nothing more than a tease." She said with a chuckle in her voice.

Jasper felt his blood pressure rise.

"Why is your skin so red? Am I the one causing such discomfort for you?" She asked with a wry smile.

By now, Jasper was unable to respond, or even breathe. His vision was blurred, and he felt as though he was about to faint, and it felt sublime. All he wanted was to be close to the creature—perfect, beautiful, and his only reason to live.

"I can provide solace, but you must respond with a gift of your own."

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Delphina said as she descended slowly under the impulse of her wings.

Jasper nodded vigorously, elated that she was willing to pursue a relationship with him but unable to utter even a sound.

“When I visit the human world, it is of my responsibility to find humans that could be useful to my Queen’s cause. This is why I showed myself to you. I need the energy created by your desire to function.”

She spoke in a whisper. The sound of her voice created a soft melody that filled the air and instantly enchanted Jasper. Ignoring the fact he couldn’t move, pride filled his chest at the idea he could be useful to such a perfect being. A question did manage to rise from the depths of his mind, and he opened his mouth.

“Delphina.” Hearing the name of the one who had become his only reason to live come out of his mouth made him dizzy, and the next moment he found himself lying on his back. Delphina took advantage of this and repositioned herself to stand over him.

Seeing her from this angle only exacerbated Jasper’s desire, and he had to make a conscious effort to just breathe. She gave him a serious look, one that could be perceived as intimidating. To Jasper, this was but another layer of the many Delphina had for him to discover. There was no other place he wanted to be than where he was at that exact moment. Now and forever.

She stayed on top of him without saying a word, and a new question rose to the top of his mind. Why does that thing have such a big impact on me? He asked himself. The creature’s face immediately contorted into an angry stare, sending shivers down Jasper’s spine. Surprised by his reaction, he reveled in the fact there was more lust than fear in his shiver.

“You dare call me a Thing?” She emphasized the last word, which flooded Jasper’s mind and heart with fear and doubt. “Do you not feel the lust I ignite? Do you not feel the desire to be alone with me forever? I am not a thing, I am Delphina, Nymph of the woods and seductress for Queen Milucra. You will learn to show me the respect I more than deserve.” As she spoke, her voice boomed in Jasper’s head, each word penetrating his skull like a blow from a hammer. A

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moment later, she was gone, and Jasper awoke in his bed, in his home. He was back in the human world and felt emptier than ever. Before he could realize what he was doing, he had his phone in his hand to call his job and quit. Soon after, he found himself walking the streets, hoping he could find a way to reconnect with Delphina. His thoughts, his soul, and his heart all had one focus, to find her.

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Stephen's snores brutally pulled Jasper back to reality. He took a moment to give his mind time to assimilate the idea that he would spend yet another day without Delphina before stepping outside. The encampment where they lived had grown a lot recently. It was enough for the media to seize the story and declare it was officially a shantytown. In the past, the residents went to great lengths to hide their presence to avoid being forcibly evicted by the police. But since, the population has grown, with families and minimum salary workers joining the homeless and disenfranchised, turning the place into a small town of makeshift homes. The police kept a close eye on the place, but only from the outside. They wanted to avoid being tagged as the instigator if they intervened, and the bigger issue was they had nowhere to put these people even if they did expulse them. Patrols circled daily around the public park that had become their new neighborhood, with the officers taking copious notes as they walked the perimeter. Within the limits of the camp, the people worked at policing themselves to try and keep things as civilized as possible. It was far from perfect, but as long as all were open to keeping the lines of communication open, it was always possible to find peace.

In recent days, someone had moved in and put up their tent right next door to Jasper's and Stephen's. It seemed large to Jasper, which made him think this was for more than just one person, but he had yet to meet anyone of its inhabitants. Today, a man was checking the tent's lines, making sure they were still tight, so Jasper jumped at the chance.

"Good day to you, new neighbor. I won't bore you with awkward

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questions pertaining to your presence here, but I am curious to know what composes your family unit?" Jasper said, using his most amicable tone and carrying a smile as he spoke.

The man stopped to look at Jasper. His mouth was smiling but his eyes were not.

"Good day." He looked at his tent and sighed. "Family unit, that's a laugh. Apparently, one needs to have a roof made of wood and concrete over their head to be allowed to see their children." His voice began to tremble. "This polyester behemoth is all I have left. It's designed for four people, but easy to fit six." His eyes filled with water and his tone became angry. "I work, you know, I give a lot of my time and get a salary in exchange. Except I still have to choose between eating every day or having a roof over my head." His teeth were clenched, and tears were now streaming down his face. "I chose to eat."

Jasper lowered his head. He was far too accustomed to the man's story—it was the same as the majority of the inhabitants. "A wise choice." He said to the man. "Proper nourishment has no price." He added, trying to be supportive.

The man chortled. "Yeah, well don't take this personally, but I've got some stuff to do before I go to work." he said as he crawled back into his dwelling before closing the zipper behind him.

"No worries, dear neighbor. If time permits, we can pick up our conversation later."

"Sure, maybe." Responded the neighbor from inside his home.

Stephen popped his head out of their quarters—a mishmash of polyester canvases held together by some strategically placed shoelaces and some two by fours installed in a triangle. His face was still swollen by the night's sleep. "What's his story?" He asked.

"Another victim of the relentless pursuit for profit." Jasper responded.

Stephen furrowed his brows while looking at the new neighbor's tent. "Let me guess, works full time but has to choose between eating or having a roof."

"Exactly. His only flaw is the salary he's pulling in in exchange for his time." Jasper said, almost in a whisper. Life in the city had split into

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those who are able to pay the outrageous prices to buy or rent and those who cannot. There was no middle ground.

“Fuck that.” Stephen said, slipping back into the shelter. Jasper waited, aware his friend would reemerge within seconds, which he did. “You know what? Nothing is keeping us here, we gotta go find that Forrest kid and tell him everything.”

“You know that’s not possible.” Jasper sighed. He had stopped counting the number of times he had to say it, and felt some empathy for his friend, who was unable to let go of the idea.

“You keep saying that.” Stephen stood up to face Jasper. He had a look that said he was ready to fight, but Jasper was immune to his antics and stayed put. Stephen, now just a few inches from Jasper’s face, continued. “I’m starting to think you don’t have anything for the kid. Sure, we had that weird dream that told us to follow him, but that’s all I got. For you, I know it’s more about following him until you can find your way back to her. I see you sleep; I hear you calling Delphina’s name, I hear you crying when she doesn’t respond. I know your dreams are haunted, and I believe what you are seeing is based in some sort of truth. All I can tell you is no one thing is worth so much sadness in this world.”

Stephen’s gaze was heavy on Jasper, who took a step back. “She is not a thing, she’s one of the most complete and complex beings I’ve ever met. And she’s not of this world.” Jasper paused. “And you’re not wrong. However, please believe me, if you ever have the chance to set your eyes on Delphina, you’ll understand. For me, I must accept that my reunion with her will need to wait. I do want to go find her, and I do believe that supporting Forrest will help my cause.”

“Sounds more like a curse than a chance, but ok.” Stephen said.

“Shut up.” Barked Jasper, smiling. “Forrest is starting school soon.”

The two men grabbed their bags and headed out to wait for Forrest at his school. Their makeshift village had developed two gates to protect its inhabitants from unwanted infiltration, with one on each end of the park. There was always someone standing guard, keeping an eye on police and gang activity around the camp, and making sure those who entered weren’t undercover cops or gang

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members—something that had become less and less frequent but still possible. Their main role was to alert the population if a police raid was to happen. Interestingly, it was rather easy to negotiate with the gangs as they saw no upside to infiltrating this place, although that didn't stop some from attempting to pass some illicit products inside.

As soon as Jasper and Stephen left the camp, they were immediately followed by two people who were sitting on a bench across the street. They were clearly plain clothed cops—they had their notebook in hand and wore an earpiece—and they made no effort to hide. They kept pace, barely a few steps back, but Jasper couldn't care less. He actually made a conscious effort to walk slowly. He would welcome walking side by side with them so they could open the lines of communication at some point. Stephen, on the other hand, was jittery. He kept looking back every few steps, to see if their followers were still there. When they reached the main boulevard, the light turned red.

"Look at them." Stephen said, his attention now on the cars driving by. "In each one of these cars, there's enough stress to power entire neighborhoods in the densest cities. Most of 'em are medicated and live their life in a haze, waiting for the reaper to come for them—but I worry about the others."

"How so?" asked Jasper, happy to see his friend had turned his attention away from the police. Plus, he was curious to see where Stephen wanted to go with this.

"In some of those cars, the stress is eating some of them from the inside. The kind that works at creating darker and darker thoughts." He pointed to a car. "That man might kill his wife and children if he doesn't get the promotion that was promised." He pointed to another. "That one has had enough with life and will commit suicide by natural gas poisoning, which will result in the explosion of a whole block of houses." He turned to face Jasper. "Do you want me to keep going?"

"Please don't, I get the idea." Hoping to brighten Stephen's mindset, Jasper then pointed to another car. "And how about that one? Could it contain someone who has learned to accept who they are and is

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living their fullest life?”

“Be serious—look at them. Chipping away at their lives with a plastic chisel hoping to find a castle made of marble.” Stephen said bluntly. He turned his attention back to the plain clothed cops, who both grabbed their phones in a weak attempt to look as inconspicuous as possible.

“And you guys... I mean, seriously. What do you think I can do that’s sooo dangerous?” The two cops ignored him. “Hey! I’m talkin’ to you!” Stephen barked, his voice rising. “Why do you waste your time with useless pawns like us?”

“Whoa, my friend, let’s try to avoid getting locked up, stay calm.” Jasper said, grabbing Stephen by the shoulders.

The light turned green, and he pulled Stephen along, who followed by walking backwards, keeping his eyes locked on the two cops. The officers stayed where they were, both of them typing messages on their phones.

“That’s it, tell your boss we have nothing.” Then much louder: “Tell ‘em!”

Jasper pulled harder.

“Shut up, man. Let’s just keep our heads down.” He said, trying to accelerate their rhythm to get Stephen out of his mental block. Jasper knew that if he didn’t get the cops out of their sight, Stephen would keep getting angrier. If left unchecked, he would end up physically confronting them—which meant a minimum of twenty-four hours inside the police headquarters hotel, which wasn’t known for its high level of comfort.

Jasper turned at the first street they crossed, hoping to get the cops out of their line of sight and help Stephen come back to a more manageable state of mind. A crow was perched in a tree, looking at them with intent and cawing some mysterious message. The bird was so fixed on them that Jasper felt a surge of hope rise from his soul. The crow might be here to watch them for Delphina. But he had no time to dwell on that, as he continued to usher Stephen away from the cops. The crow seemed to take offense at being ignored and started cawing loudly, following them from tree to tree as they moved along the street.

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“The fuck, man, what does that bird want?” grumbled Stephen, who was slowly coming down from his burst of anger.

Sensing that Stephen had calmed down, Jasper focused his attention on the crow. There was no question it was trying to tell them something, and Jasper knew if there was any animal on this earth that could communicate clear intentions, it was a crow.

“Don’t know, guess we should ask it.” Jasper turned to face the crow, who stopped cawing, seemingly surprised by the human’s audacity.

“Hello, dear.” Jasper said. He waited for a reply, but the crow remained immobile, its gaze fixed on him. Although his constant blinking betrayed a high level of mental activity, he remained silent. Jasper continued. “Is there something we can do for you at this moment?”

The crow turned its head to look at Jasper with one eye, shinier and darker than ever. Jasper was instantly paralyzed, and for a brief moment, too short to count in real time, his mind was filled with images of a lush fruit tree orchard. He could see trees beyond the horizon, with a large pond at its center. He saw Forrest there, lying on his back with his hands behind his head, his gaze lost in the clouds. Before Jasper could register what he was looking at, the crow flew away silently, cutting the ties that briefly united them.

“Satisfied?” Stephen said, now much calmer. “You stay and play with the birds if you want, but the sun’s rising, we better get to our spot.” He added, walking away at a brisk pace.

“It was about Forrest, I think.” Jasper said, running to catch up to his friend.

Stephen paused, causing Jasper to run into him.

“All the more reason to seize our spot.”

They got near the school in time, but it soon started, and they hadn’t seen Forrest.

“I think we might have missed him, let’s wait till the first break and take it from there.” Jasper said.

Stephen shrugged, then sat down before going through his pockets and pulling out a bunch of one and two dollar coins, which he gave Jasper.



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“Get some coffee.” He said, his tone leaving no place for discussion. Jasper returned with fresh coffees and they settled in to wait. The bell to announce the break rang, but Forrest was still not there. After waiting for lunch time to pass, still without Forrest, Jasper proposed they go and see what he was up to.

“Let’s go to his house, maybe he skipped school. We might get lucky and meet him at the park.”

“If he skipped school, he’ll want to stay invisible. If anything, he’s home. Inside.” Stephen replied.

Jasper agreed with a quick nod and they walked the rest of the way to Forrest’s home in silence. Jasper was walking with a purpose, in a hurry to get to Forrest’s house. Stephen was taking his time, checking discarded candy bar wrappers or shaking empty cups of coffee laying in the public trash bins in hopes of finding himself a quick snack. Yet somehow the distance between the two never wavered, with Stephen always staying no less than five paces behind Jasper. A squirrel was jumping from tree to tree between them, following the two men’s rhythm.

“We should have been clearer with him.” Jasper said aloud. “He needs to know more.”

“You’re the one who told me it’s bad to talk about it.” Stephen replied sharply. “And what can we really do when it comes down to it? If he’s called to cross over, he’s doomed. Look at you, you only dreamed of Delphina and lost everything.”

Jasper stopped and raised his eyebrows.

“It was more than a simple dream, but what you say makes sense. And his mother knows stuff too, she has an air of constant worry that is more than that of a doting mom.”

“Agreed. Now let’s focus on what we can do and go to see him.”

They resumed their trek towards Forrest’s house, this time with both walking at a much more rapid pace. They reached his house, the fourth duplex from the corner, and stopped in front.

“It looks empty.” Stephen said.

“It does.” agreed Jasper.

The second floor of the duplex where Forrest and his mother lived showed no signs of life. The window dressings were down, and the

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chair that was permanently on the front balcony was gone. In front of the house was a large pile of garbage bags, the big brown bags mixed in with a broken mirror and some discarded books. Neither of them knew what to do next. All they knew was they both had vivid dreams that starred a doll-like creature made of twigs and leaves that told them they had to stay close to a child named Forrest Greene, who had a promise to fulfill in the name of his parents. Both accepted without asking any questions—Jasper hoping it could bring him closer to Delphina, and Stephen because he had nothing to lose. Still, Jasper wasn't sure what they could do beyond keeping an eye on the child. Plus, with the demonstration Forrest gave them, it was clear he was in a better position to understand what could be going on. The door to Forrest's apartment blew open, followed by a strong gust of wind, breaking his train of thought. Jasper and Stephen looked at each other, unsure of what to do next.

"Do we wait for someone to walk out?" Asked Jasper, his eyes locked on the open door.

"Maybe we're being invited into some unfathomable nightmare?" Replied Stephen, his eyes also fixed on the door.

Both of them stayed where they were, and nothing happened. The door stayed open, but no one came out. Jasper looked around to see if anyone noticed their presence and was surprised to find there was literally no one on the street.

"No cars, no bicycles, no pedestrians." He said. "And no city noise." Stephen scanned the area.

"Very true, and a lot more dragonflies than what I'm used to seeing." He added, his gaze now scanning the trees around them.

Hundreds of dragonflies had gathered, each one focused on Jasper and Stephen. A few of them flew close to the door, placing themselves on each side to stand guard, while keeping their gaze locked on the two men. One of them flew up and landed on Jasper's shoulder. He didn't dare move, unsure of the dragonfly's reaction if he did. The answer was somewhere in between, as it pointed its two front legs at the house.

"I think they're inviting us to go in." Jasper whispered.

As he said that, a squirrel scurried out from between their legs and

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ran up the stairs into the apartment.

“Do you think it’s a good idea?” Asked Stephen.

Jasper frowned.

“I don’t know. But do we have a choice?”

On those words, the dragonflies took flight in unison and formed a circle around the two men. They tightened their flight around Jasper and Stephen, leaving only a small opening that was directed at the house.

“Looks like we don’t really have a choice.” Stephen said. He took the lead while Jasper stayed back, sweat beginning to pearl at his forehead.

“Wait, shouldn’t we try and see if there are other options?” Said Jasper.

“Stop hesitating. I know you know it’s dangerous. But it’s also true that you desperately want to go to the land of the Fey, permanently if possible. I get it. With what you’ve told me about her, Delphina would tear you apart if you appeared before her without warning. Besides, what do we really have to lose?”

Jasper was now sweating profusely. “Let’s just be on alert, that’s all I’m saying.”

Stephen nodded and kept moving towards the house. Once they were close enough to the entryway, the dragonflies released their pressure and returned to the trees, keeping their focus on the two men. Their wings were twitching in unison, and Jasper was surprised to see he understood what they were saying.

Their wings repeated: “Go in. Go in. Go in.” over and over.

The squirrel ran back down the stairs by bouncing off the walls and stopped on the doorstep. It was standing on its hind legs, its arms crossed, a clear signal of impatience if there ever was one.

“I’m not sure I’ve ever told you this, but no human is allowed there without permission, musician or not. If we do transgress, we become tradable commodities.” Jasper said, trying to gather enough courage to go into the house.

Stephen scoffed. “And we’re not tradeable commodities already? Have you forgotten about the guys following us earlier? Or the village that’s growing exponentially each day? Let’s just go in the

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house and see what's what." He turned and headed up the stairs without another word, followed by the squirrel, who happily hopped up behind him.

Jasper stood at the foot of the front porch, looking up to the balcony above. He turned to the dragonflies. Many had already left but a small group stayed close.

"I say this with a light heart and a clear mind. We are not looking to interfere with your plans, we are only here to try and understand what has happened." He said.

The dragonflies twitched their wings three times in unison. It seemed too deliberate to be an accident.

"So... we're good? We can go in?" asked Jasper.

Again, three clear wing twitches. Jasper took it as a good thing and turned to go into the house. Just before he stepped in, he turned to the dragonflies one last time. This time one of them took off and headed straight for his head. Jasper crouched too fast and tripped backwards, into the home, falling on his back in the stairs. The squirrel immediately ran down, bouncing from wall to wall until he kicked the door closed. Jasper jumped up to reopen the door, but the squirrel started squeaking and barking at him while perched on the door handle.

"Ok then."

Jasper started up the stairs.

"Find anything interesting Stephen?" No answer. "Stephen?" This time louder—still no response.

Jasper felt his stomach tighten. At the top of the stairs, he could choose between going to the living room or to the kitchen. He chose to stay put.

"This isn't funny, Steph—."

Jasper felt all the air leave his lungs. Stephen was lying on the couch in the living room, the only piece of furniture that stayed behind after Forrest and his mother left, with one arm stuck under him that suggested he was unconscious before he landed on the couch. Jasper wanted to run back outside, but his legs ignored him and began to move towards Stephen. Music filled the air, chaotic, soft and inviting all at once, and it was coming from everywhere around

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them. Once close to the couch, the music stopped, and Jasper's mind went blank. He felt himself falling face first into a thick cushion, his mind already inside the dream state.

### 2

Jasper woke up in a startle. He had some vague memories of being surrounded by a group of dragonflies in front of an empty-looking apartment, but everything was out of focus in his mind. He still felt the pressure of the couch cushion on his face, but he was standing in front of a dark and unconscious mass that occupied the space on the couch. He was in the middle of a room that seemed too big for the size of the apartment. His feet were ensconced in mud that shone like a mirror which ebbed and flowed, carried by an unseen current of energy. Jasper looked around him for anything he could recognize, anything real. Where the walls of the apartment were supposed to be were blocks of pure darkness. He didn't move, afraid the darkness would suck him in. All the light in the room was coming from tiny openings on the wall which flooded the room with light, acting like lightbulbs in the fog.

A powerful feeling of solitude took hold of Jasper. He couldn't see Stephen, and for brief moment, he wondered if they had been trapped. Although he did get excited at the prospect that this could give him the chance to see Delphina, he also knew they might be in for something far more sinister. He fought the rising feelings of anger and anxiety, and soon transformed that into a sense of urgency.

"Stephen! Do you hear me?" He yelled out. "Give me a sign, please." "Right here, man, stop yelling." Stephen said, standing right next to Jasper. "What happened, we dead? Because I feel ok, if only a little outside myself. Like when we take mushrooms."

"I don't think that's it." Jasper said, still catching his breath from being surprised by Stephen. He turned to face Stephen. "Let me welcome you, my friend. What we have around us looks a lot like the energy fields I saw when I met Delphina. We are on the other side." Stephen looked around with a puzzled look on his face.

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“Why would they let us in without a good reason?” He said. “Unless they want to use us to fulfill some nefarious plan. Or harvest our bodies for the energy.” His eyes had become perfectly round. He locked eyes with Jasper, “You did say that was a possibility.”

Jasper smiled, reassured that his friend was trying to find the darkest detail of the situation—this meant he was present and in the moment. “No, it’s none of those. Look at us, we’re just energy fields too.” He stuck out his hand, which looked translucent and almost seemed to be on fire with long strands of orange flames dancing around his skin. “It’s like in my dreams, but not quite the same.”

“Maybe we’re inside a moment frozen in time.” Proposed Stephen.

Jasper nodded, looking pensive. “Maybe. Whatever the answer is, I think we can explore safely.”

Stephen looked back to where their bodies should be, but they had dissolved into dark patches of emptiness, with no discernable shape.

“Sure seems like we’re dead.” He said, looking back to where their two sleeping bodies should be. All they could see were two blobs of misshapen darkness. He turned his attention back to the light sources. “And this might be the light that welcomes us in the afterlife.” He said, walking up to look closer. Without hesitation, he leaned in.

“Looks like a window.” He said, after which he stuck his head outside. Jasper flinched, expecting the worst. Stephen’s head disappeared in one of the light enclosures.

“Whoa, that is intense.” He said. “It’s like I can feel everything around me, not just the air.”

Relieved, Jasper imitated his friend and stuck his head through one of the openings. The onslaught to his senses was instant and powerful. The perfume of a million different flowers filled the air. There was a powerful attraction to get pulled away from the window to ride on the back of the smallest of particles through the air. A twinge of worry appeared, and he tried to pull himself back inside, but found he was unable. His heart was racing, and panic started to set in. But before it could seize him up, a distant melody caught his attention, soft and reassuring, and he turned his focus to that. The

panic stayed away, and now he could focus more on the music, that was growing louder by the second. Stephen, unaffected by the situation, pulled back from the window to say something.

"It's so weird, the air tastes like the gum I always stole when I was a kid. You know, the one that tastes like soap?" He looked at Jasper, whose head was still poking out the window. "Hey, you hear me man? What's it like for you?"

Jasper didn't respond. His head was completely severed from his body, barely attached by a light strand of translucent smoke. Stephen didn't hesitate and jumped toward his friend.

"Stay with me!" Stephen grabbed Jasper by the shoulders and pulled him back. Jasper fell on his ass with a thud. He looked frazzled but was smiling broadly.

"I know where they are." He said, "we just need to wake up."

"Fine by me, if this is death, I'm not a fan." Replied Stephen, who sat down where he was with his legs crossed. "And how do you plan on this happening?"

"It'll have to be the old wait and see." Jasper said as he imitated his friend and sat down. They got comfortable and waited for time to pass.

"The sun hasn't moved since we got here, that would confirm that time did freeze." Stephen said, breaking the silence. "Do you happen to know how to unfreeze it?"

Jasper chuckled. "I would have already done something if I knew what to do. I think we're ok. I couldn't say how long we've been here, but I have the impression we're inside our dream mind, so it shouldn't be longer than a normal night's sleep."

Something caught Jasper's eye. He turned to look and his face went blank.

"My dear Jasper," Delphina's voice rang like a million church bells in Jasper's soul. "Let me reassure you; I have no ill desire. Please believe my plea, I come in peace."

Jasper waited for her to continue, but the room remained silent. He couldn't feel Stephen near him, and ventured to look around the room and try to see where his friend could be. Delphina was now sitting on the windowsill, but Stephen was nowhere in sight. Jasper

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was surprised to realize her presence had no other effect than that of the honor of being blessed with her beauty.

“Where’s Stephen?”

“He hath awakened.”

“Did you touch him?”

“He will have no memory of me, I chose not to show myself to him. His heart is still his own. Now go, we’ll meet again soon. I have things for you to do.”

The next moment, she was gone and the room around Jasper began to dissolve. He was excited that Delphina needed him for something, but he felt himself getting pulled back to where he first fell. He tried to fight the movement, but his consciousness slipped into darkness, and he could only hope he would be ok.

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Jasper opened his eyes with Stephen standing over him. They were back in their world, the sounds of the city coming from the windows confirming that.

“I think I know where they are too.” Stephen said. “Remember that Ralph dude that was always with Forrest?”

“Yeah, his uncle.”

“Right. Well, he’s got a place outside the city and that’s where we’re going.”

Jasper looked at Stephen, to see if there was any indication he might be going through any withdrawal symptoms a meeting with Delphina could cause. Stephen was standing there with his usual stern gaze and crazy grin, which helped Jasper relax.

“Let’s do this, we’ve got a long trek ahead of us.” Jasper said, reaching up for Stephen to help him up.

Jasper was happy to see his friend in such a positive mindset. “You almost look excited, I’m not sure how to react.” Jasper told him with a wry smile as he was pulled to his feet.

“I feel totally refreshed.” Stephen said as he quickly descended the stairs to go outside.

Jasper looked around for any sign they might still be in a dream



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state, but everything was where it should be. The walls looked like walls, and the city sounds kept pouring in without interruption which was enough proof they had returned to the physical world. He stepped outside to join Stephen.

They headed back to their camp in a hurry to clean up their space and leave it for anyone else who might need it. Jasper focused on gathering the equipment they would need for their trek while Stephen got the place as clean as possible. Both worked in silence, with Jasper taking a pause every now and then to decide what he wanted to bring and what could be left behind. Stephen was shaking the dust off a small carpet when he turned to Jasper.

“We’re gonna need some camping stuff, not just food. No way I’m going outside the city to die from hypothermia.”

Jasper nodded absent-mindedly.

“You listening, man? I better not find just two pairs of socks and a pile of candy bars in our gear.”

Jasper didn’t answer. He was staring out into the distance.

“Dude, I’m talking to you.”

“All we know is that he lives outside the city, how do we find him?”

Jasper asked.

“Good point. We’ll go to the internet café to try and find an address.”

Luckily for them, Ralph Greene was the owner of an orchard in the Eastern Townships, just south of Montreal, and a quick search at the café gave them an address. Before the day was out, they were riding along with someone who picked them up near the highway, where they were hitchhiking. Stephen seemed to be in a good place, so Jasper decided not to talk about the strange looking wasps that seemed to follow them earlier.

They travelled without saying a word, but not in silence—the person who picked them up kept the radio at high volume, cancelling any chance of a proper conversation. Jasper took advantage of this and let his mind wander as he gazed at the fields that hugged the highway. When they reached their exit number, Jasper tapped the driver on the shoulder.

“We’ll be getting off here, thanks for the ride.”

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The driver slowed down and stopped on the highway shoulder before lowering the volume on the radio.

“Happy to help, hope you don’t have too far to go from here.” The driver said. “Make sure you have everything; I won’t come back.” He added with a chuckle.

Jasper nodded while looking around. He had no idea which direction to take. “Any idea which way we should go to find Greene’s orchard?” He asked the driver.

“No idea, but if you stay on route one thirty-nine south you should find it, most orchards are that way.” The driver didn’t wait for a response and drove away, raising a cloud of dust and gravel, waving his hand through the open window.

They loaded up their gear and went to route one thirty-nine. They started walking south and it didn’t take long for someone to stop and ask if they needed a lift. Jasper congratulated himself for insisting they take the time to change into clean clothes—this had dramatically cut travel time down—he was sure of it. This time, their driver was much more talkative.

“Greene’s orchard huh? You guys are early for the harvest.”

Stephen’s response was to look out the window, which told Jasper he would bear the responsibility of keeping the conversation going.

“Well actually, we’re headed somewhere near there. We want to take a look at an abandoned farm and see if we can bring it back to life.” Jasper said, desperately hoping there was an old farm nearby that could fit the bill.

“So you’re going to try and bring back the Fairchild farm, are ya?”

Jasper relaxed. They had come here without a plan, but things seemed to want to fall in place with little effort.

“Yeah, that’s it, the Fairchild farm.” Jasper said.

“And what’s your plan with that place?” Asked the driver. “The fields should be in great shape; they’ve been resting for a long time now.” He added.

Jasper took a moment, hoping he could be coherent enough to be credible. “We haven’t made a final decision on that. We want to see the place first and see if it could be feasible.”

The driver nodded and looked in his mirror to peer at Stephen, who

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was staring out the window in silence.

“Let me guess, this is your agricultural engineer?” He said pointing back with his thumb. “These guys are a special breed; all they do is think about the fields and nothing else. You can even talk about them right to their face and get no reaction.” As if agreeing with the driver, Stephen had no reaction to the comment.

“Yup, that’s what he is.” Said Jasper holding back a chuckle. “My agricultural engineer.”

Jasper was beginning to hope they would make it soon. He was afraid they would be discovered if the driver kept pressing them with questions.

“You’re almost there.” Said the driver, stopping the car. “I’ve got to keep going on this road, but you can walk along the dirt road right there,” He pointed in front of him. “And the Fairchild farm is just a few minutes away.”

Jasper smiled at the man and jumped out of the car before he could ask them anything else. Stephen, as if he wanted to add a layer to his newfound title, jumped out and immediately started looking at the plants growing on the roadside, playing the part of an agricultural engineer to the tee.

“Thanks for the lift, maybe we’ll meet again soon.” Jasper said as he picked up his backpack.

“It was my pleasure, stranger. And if you want a little tip, get yourself a car, you’ll need it in these parts.” Said the driver, who then drove off.

Jasper watched the car disappear over the hill, then went toward the dirt road indicated by the driver.

“I think we’re at the right place.” Stephen said. He was looking towards the tree line.

Waiting for them was a crow, sitting in a tree, looking at them.

“Here’s hoping we are.” Replied Jasper, who began to walk towards the tree line. “And thanks for playing along.”

“How so? What did I miss?” Asked Stephen.

“It’s nothing, let’s go.”

They started walking, and as predicted by the driver, after a few short minutes, they were in front of an old farm. The house looked in

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bad shape, but that was nothing compared to the barn that was seriously beaten up and looked like it would soon crumble. Jasper took the lead and started to explore. Once at the top of the mound that supported the house, it was easy to see the orchard across the field, and Jasper let out a loud sigh of relief.

"This is going to be a nice place, I think." He said as he dropped his bags to the ground.

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THE END

## EPILOGUE

This was the first of many stories I have for you. I can't wait to share details about my life on the orchard, how we founded the village, my adventures in Feyland, and how I found what the promise was. All of it is coming soon, stay tuned for more Storyroom installments soon.

Mike Longmeadow

## 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.

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