

ANYTHING IS TOO MUCH

A TALE FROM THE STORYTROOM



MIKE LONGMEADOW

Anything is too Much

A Tale from the Storyroom

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Taking a step back

Join Lugh as he recounts in detail the moment his human friend - and father to Forrest - was taken.

This Tale is a true example of taking heed to the saying: "Be careful what you wish for."

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"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."

Dedications

To my father, who's recent passing has reminded me we have but
one life to live.

To the crow that has started to hang around near the house,
seemingly spying on me.

Acknowledgments

To all the peace fighters battling daily to make this world a better place.

From Mike with Author Academy Elite

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1-

As you can probably recall, in a recent Tale I've spoken to you about a man called Clarence. One of the only, if not the only human, to have the capacity to see me and accept me as I was. What I haven't told you about is how everything happened when I lost him to the Shadow Folks.

If I may, while we wait for the two Queens to finish preparing for their meeting, I would use this time to fulfill the promise I made to tell you about the last moments of Clarence Fairchild, father of Forrest Greene, in detail. And if you have no memory of me talking about him, this will be your chance to get to know Clarence and what crazy promise he made to save his ailing wife. And condemn his yet to be born child.

To give you the chance to fully appreciate the sequence of events that led to what is probably the true beginning of this group of Tales, I need to go back in time to get us started – to when Clarence had grown to the point that big responsibilities were imposed on him. Undaunted by the change, he put his shoulder down and started to learn about farm management and did it with panache.

A period of time passed during this exercise. It could have been a few weeks, months, or maybe days. Years could have passed for all I know. I wish I could be more precise on the time lapse, but it all was a deep mystery for me. One thing I can share is that the sun crossed the sky more than a few times during this period. Was it three, fifteen, or sixty? I don't know, I always lose count after the first one. What I do know is that he spent his mornings in a room he called a class, reading a lot, and then his afternoons were spent on the farm where he was learning how to properly use the available equipment. His goal – and obligation – was to find the resource that could

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generate something called a revenue from this land. By then, I came to understand humans lived in a system where having money was essential to survival.

The one thing the Fairchilds were trying to do was not overstep on local farmers by producing the same thing as them. At the same time, they needed to find what their land was willing to give.

This is why Clarence went to class and worked at learning his craft. It was during this time that he made a discovery that would change all their lives, including mine. Through extensive experimentation with the land, Clarence found that the only thing that grew with purpose on this land was wild grass with spots of legumes like alfalfa and lupine. The last spring season was super warm and combined with the fact the earth had been left untouched of any machinery, the wild grass grew to unparalleled heights. This is when Clarence proposed they start producing hay for the local farmers that needed to feed their cattle. Within two passings of the sun on the sky, he had made arrangements with three different farmers and arranged a deal that included some money, produce and meat in the farmers' payment for the feed.

For those who are wondering what happened with the meeting of the two Queens, they are still busy preparing – Milucra is resting after her arduous trip, and Celeste is observing her surroundings, as always looking for nature's poetry. The Catshees and Nymphs both seem to be in relaxed state of mind, which means I should have enough time to share this Tale with you.

Memories are a funny thing. They continually change over time, remodeled by our life experiences, or worse, simply vanish. But there's always that one memory that stands out and remains present in our mind forever. For me, it was a summertime that has remained at the forefront of my memory bank as a single moment in

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time when being in the human realm was pleasant in every aspect. That summer was spent watching the grass grow until it was tall enough to become hay bales. There was nothing more exciting for me than to listen to the field creak and moan as the blades of grass and alfalfa sprouts grew under the impulse of the sun and rain. Adding to the pleasure of that time, each day I received my portion of milk, or butter, or both, and had nothing to do in exchange — it was, as I believe the humans like to say, heavenly. During that blissful time, Clarence also worked on the household, building an addition for him and his soon to be wife, Madeleine, that included a room for each of them, a kitchen, and a den where they could rest. I helped by walking the nearby woods with him to help select the best trees.

“Who shall offer their core and become a structure to the benefit of the human?” It was better to not sugar coat it when dealing with the trees and state the cold truth.

“I offer mine.” Said one oak with a clear crack. “And mine.” Said another by shaking its leaves.

A few more of the older oak trees also came forward to offer their core and Clarence was ready to go. As soon as the decision was reached on which ones would be cut down, the mycelial network disconnected the oaks and started to trace new paths of connection before we even cut down the trees. This informed the birds and squirrels that inhabited them that they had to find new housing. A nest of ants living at the base of one of them immediately began a relocation to a nearby rock, while all other inhabitants did the same and moved to trees that were still connected to the network.

“I’ll accompany you during the cut to show you which ones you can take.” I told Clarence.

He went to work, carefully cutting them down by disturbing the immediate environment as little as possible. After that, work advanced quickly. Clarence transformed the trees into wood planks, and a solid structure ready to house some humans came to be. Then summer was over, and it all began to change. One day Clarence was waiting for me with the bowl of milk. It seemed as though he was smiling, but his mouth was spread so wide I was a little worried.

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His smile was so contorted, it twisted his face in ways which were rather disturbing.

“The addition is done. Do you know what comes after that?” He asked out loud.

“Please do tell.” I thought in his mind.

“I asked Madeleine to marry me. And she said yes.”

Seeing Clarence so happy filled my heart with joy. But one thought stayed at the forefront of my mind. The promise.

2-

For you to know how this promise came to be, and for me to tell this Tale correctly, it's important that you know that all humans have a colored hue that wraps itself around them. It floats like a bubble around a person and reveals their true sense of self. It can be of any color; some people wear it close to them, while others try to expand it as far as they can extend it, even if they don't know it's there. Someone once told me they call this their aura, but I've never heard any human speak of it, so I don't think they actually know it exists. Since I'd known him, Clarence's hue was blueish in color and very thin. He was quiet and never searched for attention, and the lightness of his shade confirmed this was his true intention. The blue color told me he was generally not unhappy, but nothing more. Then he met a young human named Madeleine, and his hue of energy exploded to become fiery red and expanded to double its original size. He walked with pride, began making his opinion known to his human counterparts even if it wasn't requested. This lasted for some time — although I couldn't say how long, as you know my grasp of human time is tenuous, I can't for the life of me understand how linear time works. I've never understood the human need to count every moment as a marker on some imaginary measurement stretched out to infinity. Think about it, humans actually counted seconds — that still blew my mind. But I digress, let me continue. One morning, his hue had changed again, except now it wasn't blue, it was black and opaque. He wore it like an armor. Not one to push someone to speak if they didn't want to, I waited for him to share his

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feelings. He didn't say anything. His dark black envelope was telling me he lived with his anger at each breath, which began make me worry.

One day I went to fetch my bowl of milk earlier than usual so I could get it directly from his hands and maybe get him to speak. I had to know what could be causing my human friend to close himself off the way he was. I sat leaning against the wall and barely had time to relax that Clarence came to bring the milk. He absent-mindedly set down the bowl of milk and turned to go back in the house. I couldn't let him leave without asking.

"Speak, my friend. What ails your soul?" I thought, directing my energy at him.

Clarence stopped and turned. He tried to open his mouth to speak, but instead broke down and started to cry.

"It's not fair!" He sobbed. The fact he was so loud worried me, we were very close to the house, someone could hear, but I didn't see how I could stop him.

"What isn't fair?" I asked.

"My girlfriend is sick. At first, I could be by her side, but now I'm told I'm not even allowed to see her. All I know is that she has a terrible infection, that she's contagious." He then lowered his voice to a barely audible level. "And it might kill her."

My heart sank. My human friend had found true love and now it was going to be taken from him. I could see his mind was filled with darkness and death — his love's and his. I couldn't let him wallow in this state.

I couldn't help myself. "I cannot promise anything since I have zero authority or credibility in Faylandia, but I can ask is there's a way to help."

Clarence's face lit up. "Yes! Do that, please! Tell whoever you speak to I'll do anything in exchange."

When a human offers anything in exchange, it is customary for a Fey to take full advantage, but this human was my friend.

"Offering anything can be dangerous." I said, hoping to encourage him to reconsider.

Clarence shook his head. "Anything at all. I will walk to the moon and

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back for her. Barefoot.”

I understood there was no changing his mind, so I bowed my head to signify I understood and left with my bowl of milk. After digesting the milky goodness, I went to the field to sit down near a patch of flowers. It was a windy day so I couldn't find any flies or mosquitoes to send them on a messenger run with Clarence's offer. I laid myself in the field to wait, confident someone would come by sooner or later. It didn't take too long for a bee to show up and start filling its legs with pollen on the blooming flowers. I approached the bee and waited. It finished working on its flower and turned to me, telling me I had its attention.

“Greetings, life giver. If I dare approach, 'tis for a human request.” I said while giving her a noble salute. Bees were of Royal descent after all.

The bee briefly buzzed its wings but stayed put, which meant I could proceed.

“The human who bears the name Clarence Fairchild wishes for assistance. His human love, who recognizes the name Madeleine Greene, is very sick. It is said she has an infection — alas I have no healing powers.”

I left it at that, hoping that would be enough for the bee to call on the healers. It stayed put and gave me a stoic look, slowly cleaning the pollen away from its face, storing it in her fur to take it back to her Queen. I knew it was waiting for the rest of the request. The part that states what the human is offering in exchange. I felt nauseous. I knew there was nothing he could have to offer to satisfy such a big demand since saving the life of a human always carried a high price tag. If I were to lie and they found the offer insufficient, that would make me responsible for the death of Clarence's love. If they accept my lie and Clarence is unable to repay his debt, I would be responsible for making his life miserable. I had to tell the truth.

“He offers... anything.” The bee stopped cleaning itself and flew to my shoulder. I mumbled the last part, it wanted to be sure it heard.

“You understood correctly, he offers anything in exchange for the life of his love.” I said, looking at the bee straight in its many eyes.

The bee stayed there for a moment, rubbing its hind legs, emitting a

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vibration that penetrated the ground in waves to connect to the mycelial network. The vibration carried my message to the four corners of the forest in a fraction of a second. Watching the bee communicate with the network rekindled my desire to one day find my way back to Faylandia, which I now felt would be sooner rather than later. The bee and I stayed there for a second or an hour — again, I never know how to count time in human terms. Then the vibration returned. The bee absorbed the incoming message by buzzing its wings with its eyes closed, then it took off without saying another word.

The sun rose and fell a number of times after that meeting and soon Clarence was once again joyful. His hue was no longer black, nor had it returned to full red — it now carried a shadow inside it. I was happy my message made it through, although I still felt nervous about what would be asked of him. In the end, he looked much happier, and that was enough for me.

After the medical scare, some time passed in a quiet bliss. One day, he came to the barn with the food, and I wanted to ask him if anything had come of his promise. Before I could speak, he called out to the house. “Come here darling.”

I immediately scampered away to hide, but Clarence waved me back with a smile. The human named Madeleine walked into the barn, wearing a quizzical look on her face.

“What is it?” She asked.

“I want you to meet someone.” He said, extending his hand towards me.

“Ok, and who is it?”

Clarence hesitated. He placed his arm on my shoulder. “I have never asked him his name. He is a Kobold, from the Land of the Fey. But they call it Faylandia.”

My heart jumped to my throat — this was the moment I might get a name. Madeleine squinted her eyes.

“What are you talking about, Clarence? There’s no one there. Why is

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your arm extended like that, what are you trying to show me?" She huffed a loud sigh. "I have a lot to do in the addition, maybe you're done building, but I'm not done decorating. Gosh, you have the imagination of a child." She added, before turning her heels, and heading back in the house.

Clarence took her reaction in stride.

"Oh well, guess it's still just you and me, bub." He said.

I didn't much like the name Bub, and sincerely hoped that wouldn't become official. But I didn't have time to dwell on that. Butterflies were beginning to gather around the barn, which worried me. Their pitch-black wings which told me they were here on behalf of the Queen of the Shadows, Milucra.

Waves of nausea came crashing to the edge of my throat after seeing the butterflies. The promise Clarence had made to gain access to Faylandia's healers would soon come to a head and there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't want to lose him, but he had been so vague with his promise that anything was possible. But if he is taken, who will provide my nourishment?

"Have you settled on the price you will have to pay?" I asked him as he followed me in the barn.

Clarence looked at me with a serious gaze. "Yes. I was told my child would be available to the Fey Folk, and it seems I'll also become servant to the Queen."

My heart sank. "Which Queen, if I may ask?"

He looked around, as if making sure no one else could hear. "I don't know, but that doesn't matter because I won't have a child. That way they can't take me. Without the child, I have no value."

I admired his logic but didn't know how to tell him his plan was doomed.

"A child is not required for you to fulfill your obligation." I paused, letting the information sink in. "If you are marked as a Queen's servant, it will happen, child or no child." I added, emphasizing the last part.

Clarence gave me a wry smile. "That's where you're wrong." He settled himself on a wooden bench. "They came to me in a dream on the same night Madeleine beat her fever. We sat at a large wooden

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table. The kind of table that could welcome at least thirty people in one sitting, know what I mean? The statement I was asked to agree to was clear. The child needs to come first. Without the child, our deal is null and void. So, like I said, I shall not be a father in this life. Oh I just remembered, it's Queen Milucra."

He had clearly thought this through, and to my amazement, he was right. But it also made me wonder why the Shadow Queen would make such a peculiar offer. I've been in the human realm for a while now, maybe something sinister is brewing in Faylandia?

"I must admit, you surprise me." I told him. "It pleases me that you will stay among us, in this realm."

Clarence bowed to an imaginary audience.

"There are two things I'm sure of in this life. You are essential to the farm, and I want to spend my life with Madeleine." He left the barn, waving goodbye. "Take care, see you tomorrow."

Watching him walk back to the house, I noticed his demeanor had changed. He was holding his head higher than usual. His back was straight, his shoulders square. This was a confident human. After he entered the house, some of the black butterflies fluttered away, all in the same direction, and seemed in a hurry. A few stayed back to observe. I couldn't shake the feeling Clarence had misinterpreted something about his deal. Most humans do.

3-

The Kobold knows something. I can feel it. Thought Clarence as he walked back in the house. Something felt off, but in the end, he felt he didn't need to worry, his Kobold friend was always a little strange. As he walked in the house, the apples sitting in the bowl on the kitchen table beckoned and he grabbed one. They were bright red with patches of luminescent green, as if someone had inserted a light inside. The first bite he took was juicier than any apple he'd had in his life. The juice exploded in his mouth and flowed down his cheeks. It was especially delicious today – a perfect blend of sweet and tart. He sat at the table to finish it, feeling a need to celebrate each bite. He turned the apple in his hand and went for a second

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bite – that was just as intense and joyful as the first. Before he could attack his third bite, he heard Madeleine running to the bathroom, followed the gut-wrenching sound of someone violently throwing up. A bright light shone in a flash at the same moment, as if someone had taken a picture just from outside the window. He heard Madeleine cleaning up and went to bring the apple to his mouth for another bite. Except it had gone bad. It had turned brown and mushy and started leaking through his fingers. A shiver of fear shook him. He tossed the apple and it landed with a splat on the ground, spreading worms on the floor as it exploded. He went to see if Madeleine was ok, ignoring the powerful sense of impending doom that hung in the air. She walked out of the bathroom. Her face was pale, and she wavered with each step.

“The flu is still holding on I see.” Clarence said, trying to hide his worry from her.

Madeleine looked at him and her shoulders slumped. “We need to talk.” She said solemnly.

His heart sank. No one ever liked hearing those words in that order with that tone of voice. Madeleine was looking at him with intent, which pushed Clarence to look away. He peered out the window and saw that a group of butterflies had massed around the window. He wondered if he’d ever seen black winged ones. In fact, they had no other color. Their wings, body, and legs were all pitch black.

Madeleine didn’t sugar coat it. “I’m pregnant.” She said.

Clarence’s mind exploded. Multiple scenarios appeared in his mind, and none of them were good. He had hatched the perfect plan, but it was now worthless.

“What?” He screamed, loud enough for a flight of birds to take off outside. “How could this happen?”

She gave him a sideways smile, looking amused. “I think you know, silly.”

Panic started to set in Clarence’s soul. “But we’re always careful, this can’t happen.” He screamed.

Madeleine’s face contorted into an angry stare. “Look Clarence, if you don’t want kids, that’s on you. I don’t need you to raise this child. Tell me now if you’re going to step up or shrink away, I need to

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start planning.” She said, her cheeks turning beet red as she spoke. “Don’t you get it?” He screamed. “They’re going to take me now!” His voice reached a high pitch that made it crack as he spoke. “You know this, how can you be so calm?”

Sweat started pouring out from every pore on his body, soaking his clothes. He began to jump at the sound of every creak and moan coming from the walls. A bird flew close to the bedroom window, and he dived under the bed.

“What are you doing?” Asked Madeleine. A flash of understanding crossed her face and made her eyes round. “Are you talking about the silly promise we made when I was sick?” She burst out laughing. “I thought you did that just to help me focus on something hopeful while the fever passed. You really believed everything we said and promised?” She bent over to speak to him directly under the bed. “Seriously Clarence, all that was fever talk. How could you think it was true?”

Seeing her face upside down almost pulled a smile from Clarence, but a floorboard creaked, and the fear held its ground in his heart. “You don’t understand. The beings that came to us were real.”

“Like the one you were with before? The one I couldn’t even see? I suppose now you’ll say they live in a parallel universe?”

“I don’t know where they live, but they exist. Like the Kobold I tried to show you.”

Madeleine got up and left the room. “All right, I get it, you don’t want a child.” Clarence watched her walk away without another word and didn’t try to stop her.

He stayed under the bed for a minute, trying to gather his thoughts. It wasn’t clear if he was to be taken at the moment of conception. He didn’t know what more he could say to Madeleine, so he headed to the barn to speak with the Kobold.

4-

As I finished my serving of milk, I heard distinct cries of despair coming from the house. It was Clarence’s voice and something bad happened. But I was not one to presume, so I waited for him to

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come to me. It could be he burned himself with a hot cup of coffee, who could say? I went up to my loft, and barely had time to reach the last rung on the ladder when Clarence entered the barn.

“Madeleine is pregnant.” He said in a barely perceptible whisper as he sat on a bale of hay.

I burst out laughing, unable to control my impulse. “That takes care of your plan, doesn’t it?” I said, jumping back down.

Clarence looked at me, dumbfounded. “Why are you being so mean? Did you know this would happen?”

I didn’t appreciate Clarence presuming I was being mean but kept that to myself. “I never know what will happen in the next moment, so no, I didn’t know this would happen.” I said in a huff, feeling a pang of frustration from Clarence’s comment. “But I did warn you to not offer anything. You should have been clear with the Queen. Now you will pay your debt, and there’s no way around it.” Seeing his face contorted in pain and sadness made me regret my initial reaction. “I apologize for laughing, it was unbecoming.” I added.

Clarence looked at me and nodded in approval. Then he perked up for a moment. “I could ask Madeleine to get an abortion.” He said with conviction.

“It’s too late. I saw the butterflies. The black ones.”

Clarence shot me a glare. “I saw them too, what’s that mean?”

“They have gone to announce the imminent arrival of the child in this world. Whether you choose to keep it or not, it is done. Getting rid of it now would only anger the Queen and no one wants that, especially not you.”

Clarence’s shoulders slumped. His face had gone pale. His anxiety had become so strong I could physically feel it. Still, there was a thought that stayed at the top of my mind. “Who will feed me?” I asked.

His face turned red. “Do you really think I know? Jeez, man, I’m going to be taken somewhere I don’t know to serve the Queen of something I don’t understand.” He looked at me with tears streaming down his face. “You’re gonna have to find a way, my friend.”

Despite the gravity of the situation, I had to know. “Maybe

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Madeleine could do it?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Yeah, well, she doesn’t believe you’re real, so good luck with that.”

The black butterflies returned with a murder of crows in tow. They gathered around the barn, covering all the exit points in groups of thirteen. The last ones gathered around the opening on the roof. From there, one raven flew down and landed at Clarence’s feet and cawed at him. My human looked at me, his eyes pleading with me to help him.

“It says it’s time.” I told him. “There’s really nothing else to do at this point but obey. It would be futile to try and hide.”

He broke down and started crying. The crow respectfully stepped back while Clarence whimpered. Suddenly, between two sobs, he looked up.

“I can’t hide, but I can run.” He said. He got up and bolted out of the barn. “Madeleine!” He yelled. “Come quick!”

Except he never made it out of the barn. When he reached the door, a murder of ravens blocked the way. Thinking he could just run through them, Clarence didn’t slow down. The moment he crossed the door, the ravens picked him up as if he was weightless. His feet left the ground, and the crows held him there for a moment.

Madeleine came out of the house at that exact moment.

“Clarence!” She screamed, seeing him hanging in the air. She ran to him, but in vain.

The ravens ignored her plea and effortlessly rose towards the treetops. Clarence’s clothes were ripped off his body by an unseen force as he rose and floated back to the ground. Within moments, he was gone. Madeleine stood at the spot where he was taken from as his clothes hit the ground. She was dumfounded and stood in silence. After a moment, tears began streaming down her face and her body began to tremble violently. Sensing I had to attempt to make contact, I approached her cautiously, trying to think of something to make myself known to her. I started by standing next to her in silence. Many times, my presence alone was enough for certain humans to take notice, especially if they were in the throes of big emotions. I couldn’t help but wonder if she would accept my

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presence or lash out at me for what happened if she saw me. I waited for a sign that she could see me, or at the very least, feel me. She didn't give me anything. As I was about to try and speak to her through her mind, she took a deep breath.

"Wherever you are, I'll come get you." Madeleine yelled out.

Then she walked into the barn. I followed her, curious to see where this was going.

"Whoever, or whatever you are, I implore you to help me retrieve Clarence from wherever he's been taken." She waited for a moment, then added: "I will continue to bring milk and butter as a token of my confidence in your ability."

Score! I thought to myself. A sense of relief washed over me — I was happy I wouldn't have to become creative to feed myself. Madeleine went back to the house without saying another word. I admired her as she left. She had gained my full respect. Her reaction following Clarence's kidnapping is one of a strong and resilient human. I knew we would develop a solid relationship even if we would never speak to each other. Although there was a major issue. She asked me to go and look for Clarence. I didn't know where they took him, and I'm not even sure I would recognize Faylandia if I ever returned.

5-

Since Clarence was taken from the farm, the sun rose and fell countless times — enough for the trees to change color — which I believe meant a human season had passed. The sadness, outrage, and worry that was the daily routine in the beginning had given way to fatalism, grieving, and acceptance. A sullen mood had blanketed the household — each went on with their lives with very little enthusiasm. With Clarence gone, responsibilities were split among those present, and no one was happy about that. Relationships grew more and more strained between the remaining residents and that left Madeleine isolated. I observed her tummy as it grew, and noticed its rise in size was proportional to Clarence being relegated to a simple memory — a few sparse pictures on the wall, and a cautionary tale told at Halloween. Yet through all of this, Madeleine

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stayed true to her love for Clarence and didn't forget. She was always thoughtful enough to bring my meal inside the barn, so I didn't have to come near the house. Each time, she took a moment to cry, something that was frowned upon by her mother-in-law. Multiple times, I heard her tell Madeleine to refrain from crying because it would make for a sad baby.

"Clarence, you idiot, why did you go and make promises you couldn't keep?" Madeleine cried out to the empty barn. "Please hear this and come back. The baby's due, I need you." She added, clearly hoping her complaint would somehow reach him.

After crying she would leave, always knocking on the ladder that led to the loft before exiting. I quickly grew to love this human. Her ease at accepting the impossible. Her strength in facing her husband's disappearance. The way she turned the simple bowl of milk into a full-fledged meal. Don't get me wrong, the bowl of milk was plenty satisfying, but I quickly grew accustomed to the variety of food Madeleine had to offer. She brought full plates from the day's main meal in the human home, even leaving clean cutlery for me. I didn't need it, but I loved her attention to detail.

I will always remember the first time that happened. She walked into the barn and left a plate filled with mashed potatoes, Brussel sprouts drenched in butter, and a few slices of roast beef covered in gravy. I was dumfounded. The food's perfume drifted up to the loft and filled the air with luxurious aromas that whet my appetite. I was almost insulted that she believed I had such extravagant tastes, but the delicious smell overcame that emotion in moments. I jumped down and made a vain attempt to hold myself back. I began stuffing my mouth by grabbing the food with both hands. If I used my time ingesting the milk as a one of reflection and calm, feeding on the plates brought by Madeleine were moments of pure carnal bliss. I had come to plan my days around Madeleine's food delivery — more so than with Clarence. I wasn't only getting sustenance — I was getting a feast. Each and every day. Then, without any other warning than seeing Madeleine's tummy grow more and more, it all came to an end.

Madeleine had walked into the barn and left a plate before looking

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up to the loft. “This is the last meal I’ll be able to bring for a few days, don’t eat it all in one sitting.”

By this time, I had come to understand a day is one passage of the sun across the sky. But I didn’t know what a few days meant — it felt like it could be a long time — and prepared for a long wait. With that in mind, I was careful to eat only a little at a time, anxiously waiting for time to pass.

On the morning I ate my last portion of food, there was a sudden flurry of activity around the house. Out of breath humans started coming and going, and people were yelling at other people inside the house. At the same time, Sprites, Nymphs, and Pixies converged, riding on the backs of butterflies and dragonflies. The bees that lived in the barn became excited, leaving the hive in droves and settling in small groups around the different openings along the barn wall. It was comical watching them battle for position when they could just fly outside and have all the space they needed. That’s when I realized this was all related to the new child.

I scanned the Faylandia crowd riding in on their steeds, looking to see where they were from. One Forest Nymph, her body made of twigs and leaves, caught my attention. She was seemingly leading the pack. The butterflies and dragonflies filled the trees around the house and the Forest Nymph flew to Madeleine’s room window. She peered in wearing a happy smile. It felt safe and I decided to approach her, hoping to seize the opportunity to find a clue into Clarence’s whereabouts. The Nymph was radiant, her energy was pure, inviting. I understood — for no other reason that it had to be so — that she was trustworthy, and I relaxed. No one could carry so much beauty in their energy field without being authentic and true. I approached slowly, and to confirm my feeling of safety, no one intervened. I had no doubt this was no ordinary Nymph in Faylandia, which meant I could not speak without being spoken to. I stopped a few feet from her and waited to be given the permission.

She didn’t notice my approach, or at least I don’t think she did, so I made sure to not surprise her. As I waited, I kept to myself and took a moment to observe the activity around me. The power of her energy pulse, the way the butterflies and dragonflies placed

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themselves in a circle around her, how her arrival excited the bees. Everything pointed to the fact I was in the presence of highly regarded member of the Court of the Fairest. That knowledge gave me hope the child's destiny would be a positive one. In most cases, when a child, or any human, is taken, it's done by changelings. They will work for either court so it's hard to know what fate awaits them when they are taken. To have a Fairest Royal Court member directly come to the birth is surely a sign this child will have a happy life. As I waited to get permission to speak, my thoughts went to Clarence. He was not taken by changelings or members of the Court of the Fairest. Soldiers of the Shadow court came for him. This meant his life had become a living hell and my heart sank. I couldn't begin to understand why the newborn was under the Fairest Queen's protection, but I had no doubt Clarence would be happy to know his child's destiny is a positive one, that his sacrifice was worth it.

The Nymph turned her gaze away from the bedroom window to look in my direction. Her eyes, two tiny points of a perfect blue, glowed, while she continued to emit energy pulses that danced around her like smoke coming out of a fire. The air around her was murky, as if she was displacing the elements around her to move around. She extended her hand towards me, and I could hear the bees start to buzz loudly in the barn, excited by whatever would happen next. I extended my hand to welcome her invitation to shake. Her touch was pure vitality. I felt myself get filled up with an energy I never even knew existed. I had to hold back the rising sobs that were pushing up from the pit of my stomach, hoping she would give me the permission to speak before I broke down.

"Dear Kobold, servant of the Fairchild family, what is your query?" She asked me.

Her words spread over me like a blanket, and I broke down sobbing, slumping into a heap.

"Now, now. Dear Kobold," She said, extending her arm to caress the back of my head, "do not overstate my presence, I am but a single being. Regale me instead with tales of your experience with the family."

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She sat beside me. As I tried to regain some composure, I noticed her escorts also turned to me, eager to hear what I had to say.

Somehow, it helped me to focus.

“The Fairchilds are not my family; I exclusively serve Clarence and Madeleine.” I was surprised to hear those words come out of my mouth, but I still added, “And the child.” hoping I wasn’t pushing this too far.

Tears continued to flow out of my eyes, but I managed to control the sobs enough to speak. The Nymph’s eyes changed color when I spoke of the child, going from a deep blue swirl to flame red which sparked the fear in my soul.

“Rare are the Kobolds that choose whom they serve. What, may I ask, gives you that power?”

The Nymph was smiling as she said this, which helped me stay calm. The redness of her eyes was still very present, but I now saw it was more akin to curiosity than anger. I took advantage of the moment and continued my explanation.

“For many human years I have served this family, yet Clarence was the only human providing my sustenance. He is now gone, taken by the Shadow Folks, now Madeleine is the lone provider. The other Fairchilds live in ignorance and act as most humans do, which is to say, vile and shameful.” Silence greeted my declaration, which meant they expected more. “My love for Madeleine is grand, as she provides yet cannot see.”

That last comment sparked a festive outburst. Some Pixies jumped down to the ground and started dancing in circles. “She provides yet cannot see.” They chanted over and over in a chaotic melody while they danced hand in hand.

The Nymph watched them celebrate and smiled. The bees left the barn and surrounded the Nymph. They formed a circle above her head, buzzing their wings in unison which created a strange, enchanting melody, filling the air with pure joy — pushing the pixies to dance with even more abandon.

“You are of a lucky breed – rare are the humans who accept without sight; yet that doesn’t give you a reason to withhold your name.”
Said the Nymph.

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“I cannot bear the Fairchild name, it would be a lie. I was named Kobold by my human, and so it shall be.” I said, hoping my attitude towards the family wouldn’t be misunderstood.

The Nymph remained silent for a moment. “The name I answer to is Asteria. I am the guide to all pollinators and a personal messenger for Queen Celeste. I bring a message for the mother, yet as you say, she cannot see me.”

“Tis true. She cannot see. I once stood before her at dusk and still, she did not see.”

“In that case, I shall attempt a dream message. I can only hope she will understand.” On those words, the Nymph lifted herself to the sky and disappeared in a flash, quickly followed by her small army. The butterflies and dragonflies filled the sky for a second, casting a long shadow, then flew away, after which a heavy silence fell on the farm.

I watched the sun fall off the edge of the horizon every day after that, wondering how many more suns would pass before we reached a few — and get my next meal. I wondered if the child would be able to see me like Clarence did. It would be nice to establish a relationship right from the start, young humans are always so much more open to our existence and it’s the perfect time to build a strong foundation. But time only moves in one direction in the human realm, which meant I would need to be patient.

I spied on the household and learned that she gave birth to a human boy and named him Forrest. To my great relief, a couple of days is not a long time, and she resumed the meal ritual not long after his birth. Something had changed though. She brought the meal, but dumped the plate without saying a word and left as quickly as she could. Her head was on a pivot as she glanced left and right at each step. I didn’t make much of a case about that mostly because my understanding of humans is very limited. I usually tend to assume a state of mind that is completely false. Like now. Madeleine seemed distant, even trying to avoid me. She could just be tired and running back to get some rest. Plus, it’s quite laughable to try and avoid something you can’t see.

Then came the day. Without any warning, there was no meal. One

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day. And another day. Then another. Exposed to the physical pressures of the human realm, hunger was gnawing at me with growing insistence. At the end of the third night with no meal, I went to the house and peeked in. No sign of Madeleine or the child anywhere. I waited for the sun to pass three more times in the sky, but by then, the hunger had grown past discomfort and I had begun to waste away, digesting my own body to survive. Desperate for food, I decided to take the risk and entered the house. As I crossed in the entryway, I was relieved they had not placed any protective spell on the house. Then again, I wasn't much of a threat and the Fairchild's attitude towards everything Clarence believed in was dismissive, so they didn't even think to do that.

I barely took a step inside that a wonderful aroma filled my nostrils. I followed my nose and wound up in a kitchen. On the table was an impressive food spread, and the underlying smell of butter told me everything was drenched in it. A wave of anger rose to my throat. How could they indulge in such fancy meals and not bring me at least some milk? The rising anger prompted me to throw all the food on the ground by removing the support from one leg of the table — after I took a few mouthfuls to gratify my hunger. The table crashed with a bang and the matriarch of the house came running.

“Abelard, you moron! You didn't fix the legs right!” She screamed. Her crackling voice made me shiver.

The matriarch started to try and salvage what food she could. I watched her and understood this had never been my family, and never would be. Clarence was my family, and he was gone.

Madeleine had tried, but clearly, she wanted nothing to do with me, since she left with no warning. I helped myself to some of the fallen food by stuffing my shirt to the brim, then went outside. Although I felt perfectly calm, I walked over to the barn and threw all the hay down from the loft. I couldn't believe they thought all this was done by Clarence or Madeleine alone!

Before saying my final goodbye to this place, I opened the barn door and called out to attract rodents and other pests. I left precise indications for them to infiltrate both the house and the barn. Once I found my way back to Faylandia, I would try to find a Wendigo to tell

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them about this place as well so they could come and inflict whatever horrors they thought best. The Fairchilds had not been supportive of Clarence, nor Madeleine and the child, nor I — they had to pay.

With nothing more than the food in my pockets and the clothes on my back, I walked to the fence that connected with the neighbor. The one that was protected by a spell. In my previous Tale, I will admit I was stingy with the details on my passage back to Faylandia. A lot more things happened than I let on during that day. One thing you do know is that the air was filled with the soft melody of the Mycelial network, which told me this was a way to go Faylandia. I sat with my back leaning on the fence and waited with my squirrel friend.

I was nervous about returning home. How would things have changed? Would they accept me back? I nibbled away at my food without any activity on the other side of the fence, save the light music that floated in the air. The squirrel constantly ran back and forth, causing ripples on the opaque curtain to open for a fraction of a second, revealing a lush orchard, but not enough for me to pass. If anything, it was clear this place was well protected from my kind, and I needed help to make it through. I was rewarded for my patience as a bee came to visit a few times. It would land on the fence post next to me, stay there for a moment, its gaze focused straight on me the whole time it was there, as if gathering information. In those moments, I tried to keep my mind open so it could easily read it in case it was trying to find something in my thoughts. I knew I was in the presence of Nobility, as it always came with five dragonflies who flew around us in circles, clearly acting as guards. Then the bee would then leave without saying anything, leaving me to ponder its true intentions.

Then came the day I had hoped would happen. Each time the bee came the sun was always in the same spot in the sky and I felt a surge of anticipation just before its arrival. Except on this day, it was not my bee friend coming to see me, it was Asteria the forest Nymph. To my surprise, she appeared suddenly, passing through

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the opaque curtain that was created by the spell. Asteria fluttered down to my side and sat in silence. The sun continued its travel across the sky and returned to the ground. Despite the passing time, we sat in silence. I was waiting for her to ask me what I was doing here, or why I was sitting next to the fence. I wanted her to ask me anything just to break the silence. My mind was spinning with more and more questions, but speaking unless spoken to could be perceived as an act of human barbarism so I kept to myself. The silence kept growing louder and louder in my mind. I'd grown accustomed to speaking my mind with Clarence, but that was only because we connected as equals when he was young – plus he was only a human. Now I had to keep in mind I was on the lowest rungs of the Faylandian hierarchy. The sun pierced the horizon to start another day. Asteria still didn't speak, her contemplative gaze lost on the horizon. That's when I broke.

"Asteria, overseer to the bees and other pollinators, forgive my bluntness, but I must know. Will I find my human friend if I am allowed to pass?"

Asteria said nothing. I was worried I might have overstepped by speaking out of turn, but her demeanor didn't change, her gaze still lost in the stars that were being extinguished by the rising sun. I didn't dare say anything else but felt a sense of relief that my question was out there. That's when she turned and fixed her gaze on me. The two round dots that made up her eyes seemed even deeper than the last time we met. They had a shimmer to them, but there was some sort of veil, as if she was hiding something. Once the sun had reached its peak in the sky, she took a breath and spoke. The squirrel perked up as well, ready to receive its orders. "I can guide your return. Yet there is something you must know." Her gaze returned to the horizon. "The man you seek is fulfilling a promise he made with a clear mind. If you dare reach him and try to pull him back, I cannot fathom what will happen to you. Now come, the mushrooms awoke this morning."

Asteria rose toward the sky with her arms outstretched, spinning like a top. A group of bees arrived almost instantly, forming a wall

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around Asteria. I watched in awe as the bees flew in such tight circles it was almost impossible for them to avoid each other, yet they did. The swirling beehive began to advance to the fence and its opaque wall. The vibration from the bees merged with the mushroom's chant, which disturbed the protection shield. A hole began to open, breaking the opacity. The squirrel dove in with its legs spread open, trying to expand the opening. Following him, the hole kept growing, as if something was peeling it back from the other side, which it was. Dragonflies were pulling on the fabric like it was some sort of plastic cover. Butterflies then came and sat on the hole's growing perimeter, pushing it open for me to pass. I spied a lush land filled with fruit trees and my heart almost stopped — I had wanted to know what was there for so long and now it was almost too strong of an emotion to see it in its entirety.

"Come, nameless Kobold, return to your origins." Asteria said, her voice coming from somewhere inside the vibrating circle of bees. I peered in and felt my chest tighten. Asteria had not asked for anything in return, could I trust her? My kind works in trade. If you offer me something, I offer something back. When something is offered with no demand attached to it, I can't help but be suspicious. As if sensing my thoughts, the wall of bees opened, letting Asteria float back down to me, while the squirrel gave me an impatient look with its arms crossed.

"You were faithful to the father of the promised child. This is the reason I offer this passage to you. Your part of the bargain is complete. You can advance in confidence. But stay away from the father. He is a servant inside Milucra's castle, he is safe if you leave him alone."

Saying he would be safe while saying he was a servant made no sense. It couldn't be both, and that's why I knew I had to find him at some point. The butterflies holding the opening were beginning to flutter their wings with more force, staring at me with insistence to step through.

I stepped in and instantly, the hole closed behind me. The butterflies fluttered away without looking back, followed by the

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dragonflies. I wanted to look back and say my goodbyes, except I couldn't see my old house. The life that had been mine for so long was gone forever, forcing my heart to alternate between wonder and despair with each passing second. I took a moment to take a breath and look around — the orchard that appeared before me was teeming with life and it was overwhelming. I tried to assess my options, but I couldn't think. My mind was flooded by the power emitted by the trees. I tried to focus on one of them at a time, hoping to create a bond of some sort. Each tree I spoke to carried the same message — that of joy and fulfilment. They grew and produced their fruit with unbridled passion and under loving care from the humans in this place. I could only imagine the work I would have to do here and thanked my stars I ended up at the farm next door. I didn't know what to do with all this energy and felt a deep yearning to go back to my simple existence. It became clear I had to do something — I began to feel a compression, as if the air had solidified and was closing in on me. A ball of fear began to settle in the pit of my stomach. Asteria fluttered to my side.

“You cannot stay here, the spell Madeleine created with her brother Ralph is powerful, it will destroy you in no time.” She pointed to a pond in the middle of the orchard. “There is your destination.” She added.

Hearing the Madeleine's name sent shivers down my spine. Then, despite the area's uncomfortable weight, the pond's energy sucked in all my worries, all my doubts, all the sadness, and took it away. This was my way back to Clarence.

I began to feel the pressure of the spell that protected this place. I could feel it working in my mind — trying to cause chaos and confusion. Asteria was still close by and pointed to a circle of mushrooms — I headed there without hesitation. The patch emitted a psychedelic myriad of tiny floating circles made of floor moss and mushroom spores. As I got closer, I saw they were openings to Faylandia and understood I needed to activate them with the mushroom circle on the ground. I turned to Asteria to ask if I needed to step on the patch to activate it, but she was nowhere to be seen.

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I returned my focus to the circles. Without a second thought, I stepped on the patch of mushrooms and released a cloud of spores to which the circles reacted by vibrating with excitement. I scanned the images they sent back and immediately eliminated at least half of the passages. The creatures awaiting me on the other side gave me chills and I knew my life would end as soon as I entered that way, or worse. Then one passage attracted my gaze. It seemed different than anything I could remember from Faylandia. If it was possibly located in what Asteria called a dry spot. I thought I could offer my food to garner some positive reactions to my return. The image I was looking at seemed bright and clear, yet a sinister shadow hung in the air. That said, it seemed to be the best option. I tried to understand how I could pass, as each window showed nothing more than its reflection and I was at a loss. I usually wait for the network to act, but here, it seemed I had to do something. Some butterflies, seemingly aware of the window I chose, flew over and landed in a circle around it. One of them waved one of its legs, inviting me to come closer. I took a step and right away something began to pull at me. Tiny filaments were breaking off from the image, reaching out to grab me. As I got closer, more filaments reached out until I was being pulled in despite myself. I tried to stop but couldn't. My feet left the ground, and my body began to disintegrate. Panic seized me as I watched myself break down into particles that were instantly sucked in by the opening. My shoulders and head were the last to pass through, while my consciousness melted away with the last group of particles that made up my existence. I was going through, and soon, I would be on my way to finding my Clarence... or so I thought.

That's it for this Tale, you know what happened after that, as I was granted a name and chosen to serve Milucra. In case you have missed this one, you can go back to find it on the author's website, under a name for a Kobold. I know I go back to read it often. Of all my existence, it is my favorite moment.

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THE END

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THE FIRST SEASON

Only one more episode after this one!

This is the next to last Tale that will come to be known as season one. To all the readers, you have my deepest gratitude to have taken the time to indulge me in this endeavor. Within the next month or so, the last episode of this season will come out and you will get all the answers pertaining to Forrest's promise, and to what the Queens want to talk about.

Mike Longmeadow

About the Author

It's my goal to help keep wonder alive in this cold, cold world..

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