



*A Name for a
Kobold*

A Tale from the Storyroom

Mike Longmeadow

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Karmic Publishing

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I know I am but a lowly Kobold, but to be granted a name would fill me with undescrivable Joy. I would carry it with pride until it became synonymous with honor.

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."

A Name for a Kobold: A Tale from the Storyroom

This tale is among the first 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

My editor Jill, Whose comments and suggestions helped raise the story to another level.

From Mike with Author Academy Elite

Cosmic Consciousness



A Name for a Kobold: A Tale from the Storyroom

Welcome to the tale I never tire of telling. It is one that tells of how I came to be honored with a name. But worry not, I will not spoil your pleasure and let you read it to find out how it all happened yourself.

Let's start by going back in time. One day, I was sitting on the edge of the field I called home during my time in the human realm, watching the first rays of the morning light reach out from beyond the horizon to touch the tip of the trees. Among the things that brought me joy during my nameless years, this one was most certainly at the top of the list. The way the sun's rays burn off the night dew, creating wisps of condensation that evaporate into the air and float away to wait for the next nightfall, made my heart flutter. Having the privilege to witness the arrival of a ray of light that travelled through space for millions of miles filled me with indescribable joy. I still remember the feeling as I sat and watched the sun rise higher, soon covering the whole ground with its warmth, chasing away the last nocturnal beings to their lairs while the diurnal creature arose to poke their heads out and start anew for another day.

My gaze remained focused on the horizon when a crow flew across my line of sight, cawing loudly. I watched it circle the farm, and worry began to fill my heart. They came for death or decay, which meant something had happened, and it wasn't good. The crow continued to circle for a minute, then turned away and flew off. I pinpointed the spot it had circled and promised myself I would check it out later. I returned to observing the morning's arrival, but the magic had passed. The energy surge from the first rays of light had dissipated into the day, already well underway.

I was happy when my days started like this and motivated with a sense of joy mixed with gratitude, I got up, stretched, and went to pick up the milk the human family left for me at the back door of the house. A new day had dawned, and I was satisfied with my life. The humans I served were generous—although if I was completely honest, only one of them was generous—and the tasks bestowed on me were simple, perfect for a Kobold like me. The Fairchilds produced hay to help local farmers feed their cattle. My only tasks were to sweep the barn and put the pitchforks back up against the

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wall when the workers left them on the ground. All the credit for the work I did went to Clarence—the generous human—but I didn't mind, he deserved the praise for having such a good heart.

At that time, everything about my life in the human realm was simple, eventless, perfect. If I were to be pushed into a corner and forced to reveal what issues I had with this place, I would talk about the fence in the far field. It touched another land, one that I couldn't see, and I've always wondered if another Kobold lived there. For a time, if I had a moment to spare, I would try and see past the veil that obstructed my view, but to no avail. I concluded there was a spell that stopped me from seeing anything beyond my nose when I got close to the fence. I spent some time studying how I could circumvent the issue, but as a Fey against whom this spell was clearly designed, there was nothing I could do, and I eventually decided to ignore it.

The new day was now well underway, the sun had risen and was now fully visible on the horizon, a huge yellow ball of light filled with heat and vital energy. I often wanted to show my human the indescribable sensation it was to see the photons entering the atmosphere one by one, how they coalesce to form the wall of light that we see from the ground. I would love for him to see what I see, but then again, he was a human—his mind would be unable to understand what it saw and explode.

To celebrate the new day, I climbed up to the loft in the barn and settled in between two bales of hay with my bowl of milk. As a Kobold, I understood quantum energy. I could consume my food in a variety of ways, but my favorite method was to absorb the essence of the milk by dipping my finger in it and letting the primal energy penetrate my body a tiny bit at a time. Feeling the milk's essence slowly spreading from the tip of my finger, through my hand, up my arm, then coarse through the rest of my body brought tears to my eyes every time and filled my soul with delight. Once I absorbed the milk's essence, I usually took a nap, but when my human added butter or a cookie to the menu, it became overwhelming. I was never able to refuse the offer and ate it all, which usually meant I took the following day off to digest.

Before I go any further, I don't want to hear you complain about my presumed laziness. Remember that if I do take a day off, I double down to catch up the day after. Clarence, my human, knows this, and he doesn't bother me about it, so neither should you. More than that, all this is beside the point, I've gone a little off track and please accept my regrets for taking time away from your

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life. Let me share with you the events that led me to be the Shadow Queen's servant. It's been quite a trek and I believe it's worth every moment of your time.

Here, let's take a few more steps back. I was so excited to share my story with you that I forgot to tell you how Clarence and I came to meet. Let's go back to when I once found myself involuntarily stuck in the human world. I can still recall the first moments vividly. I had come to the human realm when a mushroom patch opened a passage right next to me, showing me flashes of a vast field filled with lush strands of wheat and grass. My mouth watered at their sight; I already imagined myself rolling in them, picking a strand whenever I was hungry. I dreamed of a life without hunger, a plight that was slowly growing in Feyland. As the images continued to flash before me, a soft melody filled the air around me as the mushrooms widened the opening with a cloud of spores seemingly waiting for me. The image projected became clearer; the field was not only plush with life, but it was also surrounded by forest, which filled my heart with glee. I couldn't resist — it beckoned me to jump in, which I unfortunately did. I placed my foot on the opening and was instantly transported to the other side. It closed behind me as soon as I passed, stranding me there in the thick air and glaring light. I was lost, without a family, and too busy trying to adapt to my physical body and the amount of air around me to find any traction on the next steps I needed to take. My initial idea had been to come and see if a human family would honor my presence in their wake, thus giving me permission to feast on the field's yield. I was bitterly disappointed—when I showed myself to them, they not only didn't react to where I could have come from but gave me new clothes, an unequivocal message that my services were not needed. If you give a Kobold new garments, you're basically telling him, "Here's some clean gear for the road."

I left the land heartbroken and confused to roam the woods alone. Since then, I witnessed so many passages of the sun I couldn't say how many had come and gone. But that was a moot point, my sole focus was to search for an opening so that I could return home. I was lost, the mycelial network never lets anyone pass who doesn't have a task, or a promise to fulfill. I had no idea

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why the mushrooms would open a passage to this realm for without a clear reason. They were not known to be benevolent, nor did they carry a nefarious reputation. They were neutral, the connection between all living and non-living beings on the planet. They created a passage only when the situation demanded it. Whatever our desires, the situation always had precedence. If there was a situation that demanded my presence here and now, I still had not come across it.

Days, weeks, or months passed, I couldn't say—I don't understand the passage of time in the human realm—I decided to stay put and wait for the mushrooms to let me back in. They had to, there had certainly been a mistake, and my presence here was not required. I settled in a quiet part of the forest to bide my time, where I hoped there would be as little activity as possible. In order to keep myself occupied; I decided to spend my days getting to know the local fauna. A playful squirrel quickly became my first friend, and he convinced me to let loose and have some fun by playing tricks on humans that passed in my part of the woods—untying their boot laces, spilling the contents of the containers they carried, things I found amusing but had no real negative impact. Except it was rare that people passed though, and the loneliness I felt from having no one to serve weighed heavily on my heart. As a Kobold, my presence in the human realm should have translated to serving a human family and feasting on their food. But here I was, alone in the forest, waiting for an opening that could come at any time, in any place, I had to be ready. That's when everything changed.

It was a cloudy day, which created the perfect backdrop to let the colors of the forest shine. I was sitting at the base of my favorite tree, daydreaming and having a good, eventless day, when loud noises suddenly disturbed my peace. It was a low rumble that made the ground shake a little, and I my forest friends immediately scattered, in a panic, to hide. Then the rumble stopped, and after a short moment of silence, it was replaced by a shrill scream that carried a sense of foreboding that froze me to the core. The screaming multiplied, I think they were coming from small motors that make a chain turn really fast to main and destroy. Its destructive power is unfathomable. It didn't take long before there were many more screaming chain machines. Within moments, my ears were assaulted with the sound of the trees who were shrieking bloody murder as they began to fall, one by one. The sound of the tree's screams mixed with their branches breaking as they fell made me sick to

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my stomach, and I bent over to throw up. My stomach muscles contracted without anything to expulse, cutting off my air. I tried to find the courage to approach the sounds of destruction, but their shrill motors tore my ears to shreds and froze me at each step. I could only watch as all my tree friends fell to their death.

The murderous rampage went on relentlessly for days, and within ten passages of the sun, my part of the forest had been reduced to a line of trees bordering a large field filled with death and decay—the result of a savage attack by humans equipped with monstrous tools designed to maim and destroy. I personally knew each leaf on each branch on each tree as well as all their inhabitants. Now they were lying on the ground, already starting to decompose. A mother squirrel was frantic as she tried to find access to her tree to get to her babies, who were stuck inside, the opening they normally used facing the ground. Two cardinals were mourning the death of their infants as they stood next to their nest, destroyed when their tree was cut down. Their cries were unbearable and filled my soul with hate. My mind, my soul, and my body filled up with rage, and I headed for the camp where those responsible for this tragedy were sleeping. Ideas of revenge swirled in my head, but the anger was calm, cold. I entered the shed where they kept the tools. On one side, five giant saws were lying on the ground. They were made of iron and gave out a foul smell that almost held me back as I swallowed my urge to throw up. I placed one arm over my mouth and grabbed a piece of rock on the ground with the other. I rubbed the edges of the saw and dulled each tooth down to a nub. Happy about ruining their main tool, but still brewing with hate, I turned my attention to the humans holed up in the camp. It seemed very fragile. It was made of unequal planks of wood with holes in the wall where a window should be, held together with metal spikes that protruded out at every corner. An oil lamp was lit on the front porch, its light flickering under the impulse of a light breeze, sending rays of light out to a field where trees once stood. The feeling of emptiness I sensed from the field convinced me, I decided I would bring on the camp's destruction.

I entered without any issue, relieved to see they hadn't placed any protective spells. The blood began to boil in my veins as I stood over a sleeping human. I was ready to take action, I placed my hand out flat in front of me and called. Come now; a task awaits you. Instantly, a legion of ants appeared at one of the windows and began pouring into the camp, straight to me and the human.

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They climbed up my leg and gathered under the palm of my hand to await my order. I placed them delicately on the cushion above his head and gave them the silence signal by placing my finger over my mouth. They responded by staying perfectly still, focused on me, ready to act. I went back outside. I call upon the Mares. A buzzing sound slowly rose in the air. It was coming from all directions, its intensity rising until the camp was surrounded by wasps and hornets—each one of them carrying a Mare on its back.

Here, let me take a quick pause. If you do not know what Mares are, let me give you a quick explanation. They are the artisans of what humans call the night-mares, those horrible dreams that happen during sleep time, scaring and scarring us. They feed on the fear they produce in our souls—they are to be avoided at all costs.

“I’m hungry for fear,” one Mare said with a thick slab of drool hanging on both sides of its mouth.

This was perfect. I could feel the wind they created as they flew in from all directions. They formed a circle around the camp, and chills went down my spine, thinking of the horrors to come for the humans inside. I took a moment to wallow in the feeling of satisfaction growing in my chest, which reinforced the idea that I was doing the right thing. The Mare carrying wasps kept their position, being constantly fed little balls of pollen by the Mares they carried to remain energized.

My conscience made one last attempt to stop me, sending light pangs of guilt and remorse up through my stomach, but looking at the empty space where all the trees stood—even in the dark, it was easy to sense their absence—only reinforced my resolve. I walked to the window and peeked my head inside to give the ants the go-ahead with a thumbs up. All gathered near their ultimate goal, they immediately started for the human’s head holes—the eyes, the nose, the mouth, and the ears—quickly getting to work digging inside the bipedal devil and eating its brain. On cue, the wasps and hornets closed off any exit by filling the windows and doors with thousands of their brothers and sisters, each one eager to place their dart into anyone that tries to come through.

My rage was beginning to mutate into unbridled joy; I could see my vengeance come into physical form, and it was beautiful. The oil lamp was still burning, certainly because humans only really use one sense, that of sight, and can’t navigate in the dark without some light. I tipped it over and gleefully watched

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the camp catch fire in seconds. The blaze spread quickly, dancing their way through each nook and cranny with grace and ease. The wasps were deftly evading the flames as they kept guard at the exits, managing to keep their wall intact as they moved around.

A scream came from inside the camp. It sounded muffled as if a human's mouth and air vent were too full. I smiled and thanked the ants for their quick work while the screams slowly tapered off to a low whimper of pain. The other humans in the camp ran out through one of the openings, into an army of wasps just waiting to welcome them. I laughed out loud as I watched them being subjected to thousands of stings while the Mares stood by, seemingly idle. In fact, they were busy feeding on the human's fears, supplying them with their deepest fears and feasting on the energy released by the terrors. As the humans staggered and fell one by one, I called one last time.

"Come, feed."

Almost instantly, the ground was covered by flesh-eating insects that all converged on the dead, and dying, bodies. A murder of crows, who didn't need my invitation, flew in and pecked away at the meat sacks before the insects could get their fill. One crow poked an eye out and flicked it in the air with its wing before flying up and catching it mid-air, cawing happily. Within an hour, or at least before the next sunrise, the insects and crows had erased the humans from the world, and the camp was a pile of ashes, but the trees were still gone. The joy I had felt watching the humans die was short-lived and left me emptier than ever.

When the sun peeked out from beyond the horizon, I sat with my back to the pile of ashes, looking out into the field that would soon become my new home. Where there once was an abundance of life filled with color and music, I now saw an empty field devoid of any activity besides the low vibrations emitted by the scavengers feasting on the decay. Then a new group of humans arrived. I stayed put, curious to see their reaction and secretly hoping it would give me back some sense of satisfaction. Don't get me wrong; I didn't regret what I did, but the pain I felt at losing my friends didn't go away. As the humans reached the pile of ashes, I sneaked in closer. There were two tall ones and a smaller version of them. That last one didn't look at the ashes; it looked at me. It was clear this young human was as curious about me as I was about them. He squinted his eyes as if trying to see if I was really there.

"I wonder if it I can communicate with it," thought the small human, which I

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heard in my mind as if it had spoken out loud.

I risked a response. “You can, but only in the silence of the mind,” I said, hoping the small human wouldn’t freak out.

I was pleasantly surprised when he pulled away from the two taller ones as he discreetly sauntered in my direction, keeping his gaze firmly on me. I felt a surge of contrasting emotions rise—had I found a family to serve and killed them all?

“Did you do this?” he asked with his thoughts. “If so, why?” Before I could answer, he added: “And where are the workers?”

His attitude was one of curiosity, not accusation, which generated multiple pangs of guilt emanating from my soul. It was not in my habit to be so violent. I had fun guiding the birds so they could poop on a human’s head or drop some chestnuts on people walking in the woods, but I never had any inclination to destroy and much less kill before today. Although I stand by the fact the circumstances befitted the level of my actions.

“I know not of the worker’s whereabouts, but I know they are not to return,” I thought, trying to keep a straight face. Feeling some of the anger return, which cleared out some of the guilt, I added: “I know they are responsible for destroying my part of the forest.”

The small human lowered its head.

“And they have been punished,” he said, clearly beginning to understand the depth of my actions. He began squirming in place. In the background, the tall humans were busy sifting through the rubble. “I understand. But we’re only trying to start a farm, and the land under the trees is very fertile.”

My heart sank. All they were doing was transforming the land. Because of my actions, the decaying trees might be left to rot in the field. I had done what I had done, it was useless to wallow in the guilt I felt in my heart and my mind; now I knew I needed to begin to atone.

“I can help. It’s my role as a Kobold to help any family that enters my territory. In return, all I ask is for a daily bowl of milk.” After a pause, I added: “Or any milk product.” Now that I’d committed myself, I had to go all in. “Should the milk be served, I shall help with clearing the field and help with any menial task you may have for me in the future. If you accept, you must hold your part of the bargain. Otherwise, I shall leave. But not after causing some trouble.” I felt that wouldn’t be enough to convince him, so I went for something more menacing. “And If any of your actions bring harm to me or my friends, your

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fate will meet the same end as the tree-cutting men.” I was almost shaking from nerves but managed to keep a straight face.

The small human smiled. He seemed unperturbed by my warning.

“Thank you, I will announce your offer to my father—”

“No! You can’t say anything to anyone about anything that we spoke of,” I said, cutting him off.

“Clarence! Get over here!” It was a tall human calling the smaller one, who immediately reacted to the call and left.

During my first days with the humans, who called themselves Fairchild, I spent most of my time looking for friends who might still be trapped in the decaying ruins of the forest. I focused on one tree at a time, looking for any survivors with the assistance of my diligent squirrel friend, who helped me every step of the way. It would start at the base of the tree and begin looking for any and all openings it could find, each time digging in to see if anyone was on the other side.

I stayed one step ahead of my friend, knocking on the tree to alert anyone inside we were near, hoping it would prompt them to make some noise or try to reach us. Once the squirrel and I were sure that the tree was empty, I raised it from the ground using the energy vibrations of the earth and carried it to a corner of the field to form the pile of wood that would soon become the main household.

To accomplish this task, I had convinced my young human to tell his father to avoid the field for a few days and focus on cleaning up the burned-down camp, which he did with a level of confidence and maturity that his father had no choice but to comply to his son’s request. And true to his word, each night, the young person I spoke with left a bowl of milk, or some butter and cookies, at the exact spot that would become the backdoor to the house. After some time had passed, and the days returned to melting into one and other, I could say I felt no regret or remorse for what I did to the workers. Had they politely asked and explained their plan, I would have even put my shoulder to the wheel.

Over time, Clarence Fairchild, the young boy I became friends with, was being groomed to become the head of the Fairchild farm. My life could not be better. Fifteen human years had passed since our first meeting, and I had all but forgotten to look for a passage back to Feyland—this was my home now. One main reason I appreciated him so much, more than the milk he delivered,

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was that I am the only creature from the Otherworld he can see. Still, he honored my presence and accepted the existence of my kind. He never talked much about all of it, but his actions spoke volumes. He leaves food out for me every day. He has kept his word and remained silent about my existence. Most important of all, his etiquette is irreproachable. When we meet, he never forgets to salute me with a friendly gesture and never asks a question without permission. Furthermore, my bowl of milk is cleaned between each use, and Clarence always clears a spot in the barn loft for me to sleep in, even in high season when the loft is used for extra storage.

I mean, what else could I ask for . . . besides maybe a name? I know I am but a lowly Kobold, but to be granted a name would fill me with undescrivable Joy. I would carry it with pride until it became synonymous with honor. I would cherish each time a person called me by my name. There are days when I want to ask Clarence to honor me with such a responsibility, but I never follow through. And even if I did ask, a name must be given; it cannot be requested.

On one fateful day, it all changed. I lost Clarence to the Shadow Queen after he committed himself to an impossible promise. His wife and child moved away, and I was alone. Someday I may talk about what transpired on that day, but I'm not ready to do so now. The trauma is still vivid — meals were no longer served, and all I had left were the crumbs of food in my pockets and the clothes on my back. I had to go back to Faylandia to look for Clarence. I started my journey by going to the neighbor's fence, where some spell had been placed to obstruct the view for my people. I had asked Clarence to tell me what was there once, which he did; saying he saw a fruit orchard and a pond, but all I ever saw was an opaque white veil.

My intuition paid off because when I reached the fence, I immediately heard the distinctive mycelial song. It was a quirky melody that made the air vibrate and separated the particles to make them dance, which eliminated the separation between worlds. I could feel it was coming from a small circle of mushrooms located at the foot of a fence post. It vibrated the same way as the human contraption that emits music—something called speakers, I think. The white veil was still very present, but waves were dancing along its surface, giving me hope this could be the day I go back to Feyland.

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A squirrel came to sit by my side, not my usual partner in crime, but I still felt some form of kinship with it. When I looked down at it, it was looking right back at me, staring intently with a single eye. After a few long seconds, it gave me a nod and sprinted off into the white veil. A ripple on the fabric split open, and for a fraction of a second, I caught a glimpse of what lied behind the opaque curtain. The music's volume rose to fill the air around me, while the ripple was being pulled apart by the butterflies at Asteria's behest. There was no longer any doubt, that was the way back to my old home, and I didn't want to lose my chance. I crossed and walked over to the pond at the orchard. I stepped on a patch of mushrooms and released a cloud of spores. I felt the mycelial connections in all its glory. During that briefest of moments, my body was torn apart, and its particles spanned the world in seconds before returning to me. It was over so fast; I couldn't say if it really happened. Still under the impression I had not yet taken a step, I found myself standing in the middle of a dry patch of land. I looked at my hands and feet and touched my face. All the particles that made up my body and my mind had returned to their original position. Except something was off. I peered into my memories, and as far as my mind would let me, never had I seen a patch of dry land when I lived here. When I left this realm, the energy from the mycelial network flowed into every nook and cranny, like it was dancing on the quantum chaos that made up this place. This dance was primordial for the balance between our world and the unbending reality of the physical world we call the human realm.

One thing I especially liked about this place was the fact that a single note of music could become an entire concert. A place where one seed from one fruit will produce enough food for thousands. A world where there is always something happening, wherever you stood. Except now, I found myself on dry sand that seemed ready to fly away at the slightest movement in the air. The silence was complete, unnatural. A haggard-looking Elf appeared from behind a tree. His clothes were a collection of rags tied together with little more than hope. His eyes were sunk deep in his head, and one of his ears had been bitten—or cut—off. He looked at me, and my fully nourished body, and laughed.

"You stand tall. You can tell the Queen." He said in a barely perceptible cackle. Suddenly, a group of disgruntled residents came out of hiding, each one a poster child for disenchantment and despair. One of them approached me

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more than I liked, causing me to take a step back. I couldn't even say what Fey it could be; the person before me was a dusty and dirty pile of mud. Yet he spoke in a clear voice.

"Follow this map and tell the Queen of our plight. She must know how bad it has gotten." It left a piece of paper at my feet. On cue all of them scattered away, disappearing in seconds.

The silence that followed gave me chills, but I willed myself to pick up the piece of paper to see if I could get some answers, even partial ones. It wasn't a map, it was a message, scrawled in almost illegible writing. It said: Persist; the path will open to you.

The dust that was disturbed by the passage of the unfortunate Fey was still floating in the air, and I had no idea of the direction I should take. Or if I even wanted to answer their request and face the Queen. Their demeanor told me it was Milucra I would be talking to, and that did not please me one bit. I realized then I might be able to ask her about Clarence and found a new source of motivation to get going. I crumpled the note that wasn't a map and tossed it. I looked in all directions, hoping something would call to me and indicate the way to go. Nothing called to me, so I went with my gut and chose a direction that didn't cause my stomach to turn. I began to walk, with the intent to find more information before speaking with the queen. One thing was clear, my surroundings told me something needed to be done. My thoughts went back to my welcoming committee. To them, I must have seemed like an Olympic athlete, with all my body parts intact and my well-fed figure. I needed to find a way to help them.

A few moments passed, and then it appeared. A feeble ray of light peered from between two rocks. On the human side, this was undoubtedly a good hiding place for a spider family, but here in Feyland, it was clearly something else. I took a tentative step towards it, my curiosity far stronger than the fear screaming in the back of my mind. I leaned in and squinted my eyes, trying to see inside the light, but before I could adjust my focus, the tip of my head touched the ray of light that shot out, and I was instantly transported inside a cave. I tried to look back to where I came from, but couldn't see any opening that could have let the light through. There was only one direction offered to me, it was a tunnel that disappeared into darkness. My mind slipped from curiosity to frustration to fear, but decided to push forward and walk down the tunnel, hoping I could find where I was, and more than that, get out. There

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was no way I could accept disappearing into oblivion without a name. As I moved deeper in, I was beginning to wonder if I would find any kind of passage.

Persist; the path will open to you. The message from the note I was given resounded in my head.

If this was my intended path, why did the tunnel I was following continue to get darker and narrower with no end in sight? The only thing keeping me from going crazy was the distant echo of my footsteps; this meant there was a lot of space to explore. I kept thinking that if this was the secret entry of the Queen's lair, I would expect to meet the Queen's servants or answer some sort of security check where I could recite the note I was given to prove my worth before they directed me to her. But I found only silence and this mysterious shrinking tunnel.

I looked back to measure my progress, but the opening I came through had disappeared, masked by the darkness. I thought of going back, but at the moment that thought came to me, I heard rocks crumbling in the darkness from where I came—I was sealed in. I stood where I was, unable to comprehend how I could have gotten myself into this situation. The darkness had become pitch-black and surrounded me like a shroud. I looked down but couldn't see my feet. Now I'm lost. A useless life, coming to an end in a dark corridor under a mountain. Thoughts about my impending demise flooded my mind. The Queen won't be alerted. A wave of panic flooded my heart, and it was menacing to submerge me. I held the wave at bay with thoughts of the farm—my life with Clarence—and tried to figure out what to do next, not sure which way to go in the pitch-black darkness.

I was fairly certain my feet had remained pointed in the same direction since I stopped walking, so I decided to follow their lead. I took a few steps with the panic hammering away at my mind—screaming that I would spend the rest of my life wandering in the unrelenting dark until I died of exhaustion or hunger or maybe both at the same time. For a moment, my muscles froze. I couldn't move and briefly thought that maybe staying put was the only viable option to die with some sort of dignity. With considerable effort, I managed to push out the fears enough to force myself to take one more step, keeping my focus on that action alone in hopes of preventing the terror from overtaking me.

Out of nowhere, a glimmer of light flashed in the pitch-black darkness. Then it was gone. Had I seen that, or was my mind playing tricks on me? Was this

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going to be my life from now on, chasing improbable glimmers of light created by my imagination? Ignoring my doubts, I took another step, and it appeared again—this time staying long enough for me to see it clearly. I ran toward it, tripping repeatedly along the way, hoping with all my heart it could be a way out. I reached the spot where I thought I had seen it, and there it was, hidden between two rocks. It was wonderful. The moment I set my eyes on it, the glimmer transformed into a clear source of light that peered through the smallest opening. Its light flooded the dark cave, and I looked around, trying to see if there was any indication of where exactly I might be. As I turned, I accidentally placed my foot on the beam of light. For the briefest moment, I was back in the darkness, left to wander as a forgotten soul, but before falling into despair, I was inside a grand hall.

I couldn't see much, but something told me this was of Royalty. I was profoundly relieved to be elsewhere than that infernal tunnel, but the reprieve left me exhausted and weak. My legs felt like jelly and if I didn't find a place to sit, I would fall down. This day had been the single most gruelling day of all my existence, and I feared it was only beginning.

I found a seat and rested for a moment, looking around, I determined I was definitely in a royal hall, that I had found the Queen's lair. I cursed myself for not thinking to ask the disgruntled Fey for a better garment to be presentable for the Queen. My clothes were so dirty and worn, it could be enough for her to repudiate me without granting me an audience. Then again, their garments were worst than mine, so I don't think they could've helped me.

I tried to figure out where I needed to go in this place. Except I couldn't—shadows cast their darkness over everything, which exacerbated a dormant feeling of unease that was lying in wait in the pit of my stomach. My eyes and ears were open for any indication my presence had been noticed. There were two questions dancing around my mind—Should I move in further? Should I leave?—alternated randomly between yes and no, giving me no time to react before resetting. And even if I did pick one, neither gave me any confidence whether I chose one response or the other, even for the briefest of moments. The circling questions in my mind were occasionally interrupted by a windy silence in the room and the sound of dripping water—a single drop falling every few seconds that created an echo that reverberated forever. But they returned, tirelessly alternating between yes and no, and I knew I had to break out of this infernal loop.

A Name for a Kobold: A Tale from the Storyroom

Mustering up all the Kobold courage I could, I got to my feet. At the same moment, a giant chandelier lit up in the middle of the hall, revealing a room filled with lush draperies and luxurious furniture, each piece seemingly molded out of the wall it leaned on. I stood where I was, afraid to continue.

A large, rectangular table sat under the chandelier. It was large, massive even, with thick legs that looked like stylized tree stumps. It was enormous but barely occupied any space in the vastness of the gigantic room. I looked around, unsure about moving forward. I knew I was in the right place, aside from the luxurious draperies embroidered with broken crowns, glorious frames depicting the History of the Shadow People adorned the walls. This was the Shadow Court of Queen Milucra, the one I was tasked to meet. Reassured I was at the right place, I let myself relax and began to admire my surroundings with fresh eyes.

I decided to cling to the walls and began moving towards the table—the draperies seemed so soft, so inviting; I wanted to feel them on my skin. I walked with my hands outstretched, taking a moment to feel each piece of fabric. I was somewhat disappointed; the fabrics were soft and luxurious, but they didn't create the sensation I thought they would when I touched them. They felt good but not worthy of my time and effort. Some were too firm, and others were even a little harsh to the touch.

Then I came upon a red, opulent, velour curtain and stopped. The sensation on my fingertips was like nothing I'd ever felt. I continued to caress it at arm's length, with my full hand at first, feeling a need to confirm my fingertip's sensation. A wave of joy travelled from my hand to my whole body in an instant—emptying my mind of all worries—and I dove in. I worked at feeling as much of the curtain as I could on as much of myself as I could touch it with. If I was going to die today, it would be in this newly found garment. I wanted nothing else; the Queen would have to wait, I needed this velour curtain. My eyes darted nervously around the room, reaffirming that I was alone, then I began tugging on the drapery. There had been no better occasion for me to replace my tattered clothes in a long time, and it would be a long time before I had another chance like this one. I pulled—the drapery didn't budge. I peeked over my shoulder, but still, no one was around. This time I grabbed the curtain with both hands and pulled hard. It worked. The curtain let go of its mooring and fell over me.

Its weight was surprising and made me crumble to the floor. It was all over me.

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I could feel the velour on every part of me; its lush softness felt so perfect it made me weep. I tried to find my way out from under the drapery but couldn't help rubbing myself all over it to feel the joy of its softness instead. After battling the piece of fabric for a solid five minutes, my head emerged from the crumpled pile. It felt like my hair was more scruffier than usual, but I didn't care and couldn't help not smiling.

"Hath one ceased frolicking?" The Queen's angelic voice resonated like thunder in the room.

It touched me to my soul, and suddenly, I was awash with shame—I was caught stealing and would have no name to give her if she asked. I sheepishly turned my head in the direction the voice came from. It was Queen Milucra. She was sitting at the table, her hands crossed in front of her, waiting for me. She was smiling and seemed calm, yet her gaze was so penetrating it caused shivers to run through my body. Her sole presence overpowered everything in the room. Her calmness, her royal demeanor, captivated me. She wore a crown adorned with a large medallion on the front. It was shaped like a flower, with the center made of a shining piece of ruby or some sort of shiny rock. Her hair was twisted in knots that hid most of the crown's structure, giving the medallion a magical feel as it seemed to hover in mid-air. As I got closer, I noticed that although she was smiling, her eyes carried a weight of anger. Her brows were furrowed, and her gaze was strong, making my heart flutter with fear and amazement.

"Come now, sit." The Queen gestured toward a chair opposite from her as she said this, to which I agreed by running to the table without hesitation.

I tried to slow to a walk to give myself a more dignified allure but could only look at my feet, taking one step after the other of their own free will. Although I was running to my seat, it felt like the longest part of my journey, yet I was in the same room as the Queen. My pace was quick, yet it took me an eternity to get to the table. I finally made it and had an oppressing feeling in my gut that these were to be my final moments. During my approach, my fingers caressed the curtain I had wrapped around my body like a cape to keep me calm. It didn't work. Tears welled up in my eyes and anxiety wrapped me in a heavy coat. I've been caught stealing by the Queen. She won't hear my message before she punishes me, I thought as I reached the table. I tumbled into my seat and crumpled the ill-gotten drapery around my knees, facing the Queen. Queen Milucra leaned forward. Her face was a picture of pure beauty and

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sheer pain, which drove any human—and some Fey—who saw her true physiognomy mad. Her smile was a blend of comfort and joy, rage and grief. The human brain could not fathom so much beauty and pain in one place and generally broke down when seeing Milucra. This was also true for some residents of Feyland. For a Kobold like me, her gaze was intimidating but not dangerous. But intimidating. Really intimidating.

“For what cause do you invoke my presence by penetrating my lair without an invitation?” The weight of her gaze made me cringe. “Gratify my curiosity. What name afflicts you?”

She aspires to know me! That was the first thought that popped into my mind. Feelings of hope washed over me, fighting with the sensation of fear that had been dominant since my arrival in this place. What could I tell her? I was caught without a name to share.

“I have no such afflictions, my Queen. I am a nameless Kobold with no family to serve.” I thought about telling her about Clarence and saying I was of the Fairchilds but believed she would not accept a name of human origin and kept silent.

The Queen’s eyes stared down to my soul. I couldn’t tell if she was planning on destroying me or wanted to share some deep secret. The way she was able to be both menacing and benevolent at the same time was truly unsettling. She was clearly thinking about what to do with me, and that suited me fine. Now that I had time to sit in her presence, I was overcome with a sense of ease even though kept her gaze on me without blinking once.

I was getting lost in her eyes, so black they were almost blue, but I was alert enough to remember that I should not speak unless spoken to, so I waited for her to ask me to continue. I kept my mind focused by discreetly caressing my velvet curtain. Its lush softness lifted the weight of my fear, making it slowly float away one stroke at a time. The fact that I found some new clothes made the whole day—nay, the recent long months in the human realm—no, my entire life—a success. Whatever happened after this, I had found happiness. Even if I die today, I will die with fresh clothes on my back. That thought alone made me happier than I’d ever been in my life.

“Speak,” the Queen demanded. “Lest you dare visit with no message to share.”

My mind had gone blank. The Queen was looking at me, but I couldn’t line up two thoughts, let alone remember why I was there. Before I had time to

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descend into despair, Clarence's voice appeared in my head. "Stop. Go back to how you got here. Where were you before?" His system helped to clear my mind, and it worked every time. The Queen leaned her head to one side, frowning her brows, which told me I'd better come up with something in the next few seconds. With no time to think, I opened my mouth, hoping something coherent would come out.

"My Queen, I retain dire news. The mycelial network is drying up. I have just returned from the human realm, and never have seen such despair. We require instructions." Thankfully, it worked and I mentally congratulated myself.

She blinked. Once. Then stood up and blinked again. Once. They were so deliberate I felt the fear return to my heart with a vengeance. When the Queen blinked, I could see her truest form for a split second. Underneath the glimmer she used to show herself in public was an old, angry hag whose gaze was pure Evil. Her face was contorted from pain and anguish, with deep lines along her eyes and mouth that pulled her face down, making her seem weary and exhausted. Even though I saw nothing more than a flash of her true nature, the image imprinted itself on my brain and didn't let go. I could see her pain; it was palpable, overwhelming. If she's exhausted and beaten, what chance do we have? I thought.

"I feared this reality would come to pass," she said with such a melodic voice one could never guess her true feelings.

After taking a few steps which one might construe as pacing, Queen Milucra slumped into her chair. A moment prior, she was majestic, intimidating. But now, she looked defeated, tired. Her eyes glazed over, and the strength displayed before was gone. I didn't know what to do. What do you say to someone you thought had all the answers? I caressed my newfound curtain to help me stay in the moment, careful not to look directly at her.

Suddenly, she slammed her fist on the table, making me jump out of my skin. Her hand was bleeding, but she had regained her intimidating presence. Was this to be my end?

"If it pleases the Queen, may I ask for a swift end?" I asked, lowering my head to accept the final blow.

Queen Milucra got up and walked around the table. I braced for her to rip the curtain off my back and tear me apart. To my surprise, she placed her index finger on my forehead and made me raise my head.

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She smiled as she looked down at me. "Thou have come to me with honesty. I have two rewards."

Excited, I forgot the protocol. "And what may they be, my Queen?" As soon as I spoke, I knew it was out of turn and cringed, ready for the reprisal.

But the Queen ignore my misstep and continued. "A name and a task."

I almost melted on the spot. "A name? Oh my . . ." I felt dizzy, the room around me began to swirl, and I had to swallow a few rounds of vomit that sneaked up to the edge of my mouth.

Here I was, over one hundred years a nameless creature of Feyland, about to be given a name by the great Queen of the Shadow Folk. I stood up, took a deep breath, wrapped the curtain around my shoulders as elegantly as I could, hoping I looked dignified enough for the moment. I held myself from jumping up, causing everything to happen in slow motion. It felt like it took me an eternity to leave my chair. I wanted so badly to break out of my slow progress but held myself back out of fear I would somehow trip over my velour garments and fall on her. When my feet finally touched the floor in front of the Queen, I knelt down, my head spinning and my heart beating fast. She wanted to give me a name; she would be my Queen.

"I leave my fate to you, my Queen. Bequeath your orders to me."

Queen Milucra looked at me for a moment that lasted for a second but felt like a lifetime, then smiled. She took me by the chin and pulled my face up to meet her gaze.

"My grandfather, the great king, held his throne with pride and spoke true. I believe you possess the power of truth, and although I cannot attest to your pride, you will now answer to Lugh. You will be my servant. Such are the two rewards."

I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't dare utter a word, afraid this was a cruel joke. One question did rise to the top of my mind.

"If I dare ask, how shall I pronounce my given name? Am I to say Luff?"

Milucra gave me an exasperated look which almost made me laugh out loud.

"Say it as you would speak the name Luke, but replace the K with a hard G.

Now go forth and seize Queen of the Fairest, Celeste, with my request. I seek a meeting. Give her this seal so she knows you carry the truth," Queen Milucra said as she placed a medallion on the table before turning her back and walking away. She disappeared behind two curtains that led to a dark corridor without another word.

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I was flabbergasted. In moments, I had gone from nameless Kobold to Lugh, servant of Queen Milucra of the Shadow Folk. I was given the task of contacting Celeste, Queen of the Fairest. I couldn't believe what was happening, but I also knew I had to get at it; I had a task to accomplish. It dawned on me that I had no idea how to leave this place. I scanned the room from left to right, my eyes desperately scouting for an opening. At the very end of the room, almost hidden by large pieces of furniture, two black and white curtains moved as if pushed by a breeze. I took as the hint I needed and decided to head in that direction. I wrapped myself in my luscious new velour curtain like it was a giant scarf and left to find Queen Celeste.

EPILOGUE

There is so much more I want and need to tell you. How Clarence was taken, my first meeting with Queen Celeste, how I was cast away from the Rade. Let's just say goodbye for now and promise to meet here again soon.

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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