

# THE BIRTH OF A PROMISE



A TALE FROM THE STORYROOM



MIKE LONGMEADOW



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A Tale from the Storyroom

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“What promise?”

“The one your father made to my Queen in your name.”

“What is the promise?” I asked, certain I wouldn’t get an answer.

“You’ll need to find out on your own,” Asteria replied.

“For now, you must prepare for a life in the human realm until the time comes.”

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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."

## The Birth of a Promise: 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**

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I didn't know it then, but I was the only person, or at least one of the very few, who remembered being born. I could even recall an event before I left the womb—when a strange creature came to see me. It floated just outside my bubble. I didn't understand what I saw but felt no menace, no ill intent. The creature was smiling, or at least that's the impression I had. I couldn't make out how it could exist, but it floated there, in front of me, smiling and waiting. Its body was a collection of small twigs woven together to form a roundish body, with tiny dots where the eyes, nose, and mouth should be.

"Greetings," the voice boomed in my head. "It's time."

I didn't know how to build a coherent thought yet and just stared at it blankly. Until that day, I was alone and in constant bliss, living under the heartbeat of my mother. I felt no urge to leave, although space had become a premium.

"Do you ken my speak?" The voice spoke, taking the time to articulate every word. I saw its mouth move, except I heard it in my head.

I furrowed my brows, trying to think of a way to respond. I wasn't sure, but it seemed she had a particular speech pattern.

"Good," the voice said, clearly satisfied with my reaction. "Your presence here has become unsound. You must enter a new existence. Your body will know what to do, let it perform its duty, and you shall become. We await your arrival to fulfill the promise." The moment she stopped speaking, I felt the walls try to close in

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around me. I started by trying to hold them back, which led to violent spasms, which only exacerbated my situation. I was lost, certain to die crushed or suffocated—or both. A powerful urge to find a way out flooded my mind, heart, and soul. I began to thrash at everything around me, which quickly led nowhere. My body took over the fight, and I let it take the lead. My mind was screaming for me to find an alternative, but I knew there was only one solution—leave this place.

The creature extended her hands and popped a hole in the outer layer of my bed of bliss while giving me a knowing wink. The liquid that had supported me since the beginning began to pour out. I heard screams coming from outside my nest while the walls closed in instantly and wrapped my body, forcing me towards an opening so small it couldn't possibly be a passage for me. The cozy environment that had been mine—that had been my bliss, my home—was now participating in expelling me. Muscle spasms were getting more and more violent and powerful, and were pushing me towards the small opening, and I soon came to the conclusion that was the way out. I followed my body's prompt and placed my head in the small opening, allowing myself be carried along by the spasms. Breathing was getting harder and harder; all I could do now was hope I could make it out before I passed out. I felt like I was moving forward, but the lack of air had reached its peak, and I was ready to faint. If this moment was going to be my end, I was happy to have lived the time I did—it was good.

Then, in one fell swoop, I was out—in a starkly lit room that was cold and had way too much air. I came from a place where you live inside a tight pocket of tenderness wrapped in a warm and appeasing liquid. This was a vast room made of cold air and glaring lights. A masked individual approached me with a large piece of cloth. I remember all I was able to do was scream bloody murder as the individual wrapped my body in a soft fabric. I was instantly comforted by the warmth it produced, which calmed me enough to let me look around to try and understand what had just happened. The masked individual carried me to a person lying on a bed and handed me over. As the person pulled me close, I immediately

recognized my mother's heartbeat, and a wave of relief fell over me. I couldn't understand what had just happened, but at least I was still close to my haven of bliss.

After that moment, a deep fog fell over me, leaving only sprouts of dismembered recollections of the creature coming to my dreams or my mother chasing away throngs of dragonflies. The first memory that is clear—it still feels as if it happened yesterday—was my first, and last, day of school.

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My life since being born had been as simple as simple can be—almost equal to my time in the liquid nest, I would say. I was pretty much confined to the house to play with my toys. Going outside only happened if accompanied by my mother or Uncle Ralph, and it didn't happen a lot. In fact, if my uncle hadn't insisted as much as he did, I would not have gone outside, ever. Even when I started walking, I wasn't allowed outside alone—even if we had a safe backyard in a safe neighborhood. I never questioned the situation because it suited me fine. I didn't like the idea of going outside in general—it just felt too vast, too full of danger—so staying inside most of the time was comforting. I never complained about it, and for reasons that were known only to her, this was disturbing to my mother, who kept saying: "Please let him be normal" while looking up at the ceiling, her lips pursed. Based on what I saw from the few other children I saw the rare times we did go outside, it seemed having fits of anger might reassure her, which I did, and it worked. I never understood why fits of anger were normal, but when I gave her one, she doted on me for days on end—win-win. The creature who came to me at birth was still around, peeking out from behind the toaster in the kitchen or staring from outside the window. The only interactions I got with her were in my dreams. I say her because I asked her the last time we spoke. It was during a dream so real I didn't question if it was happening or not—I knew it was. We were in an orchard, surrounded by apple trees next to a pond.

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“What’s your name?” I naively asked.

“What do you desire it to be?” she responded.

“I can’t just give you a name. You must have your own.”

“Do I, now? In that case, guess.”

I didn’t understand why she was doing this, but my dream mind went along with it.

“Cecilia,” I said.

She burst out laughing.

“Why, may I ask, possessed you to call me Cecilia?”

“It has a Fairy ring to it; I thought it was appropriate.”

Then the dream changed. A dark cloud formed over her head, which attracted a legion of dragonflies who seemed to be led by some bees. Asteria’s body seemed to pulse under her breathing. The two small dots that made up her eyes turned to the darkest shade of black I’d ever seen.

“Say that again, I dare you.” Her tiny eyes pierced a hole directly to my soul.

As she said this, the dragonflies formed a circle around me, all of them focused on me and me alone. It felt as though everything around us dissipated, leaving us to face each other in a vacuum. Despite all of it, I felt calm and continued the conversation.

“That it has a Fairy ring to it? Did I make a mistake in assuming this?” She took a deep breath. “And would I be making the wrong assumption to state you are nothing but a bag of loosely connected organs?”

“I don’t even know what that means.” I furrowed my brows and sweat pearled at the top of my head.

Seemingly satisfied that I was deeply confused, she waved her hand and the dragonflies immediately relaxed, some leaving to go back to their previous activities while the others took to scanning the surroundings for stray mosquitoes. “What that means is you shan’t call me a Fairy. If you want to give me a moniker to describe my presence, use words that resound as kind representations—good neighbor, Fey friend, dream companion—and there shall be no issue.”

I had no idea what she could be talking about, but I also knew this



was a lesson I had better remember. "I understand, and you can call me Forrest, the Human. I don't like the image of a bag of organs." I waited a for a few seconds, but she didn't respond. "But I still don't know your name."

She burst out laughing. "Your focus is admirable. I concede; my name is Asteria. I tend to the bees. And I also have the task of staying close to you until we fulfill the promise."

"What promise?"

"The one your father made to my Queen in your name."

My mind started racing in all directions. I wanted to say something but found I was unable to speak... or breathe. Until that moment, I was a happy-go-lucky recluse child who lived each day happily in the confines of my home. Now so many things made sense. The way my mother and uncle stopped talking when I would waddle into the room, the way my mother kept scanning the area around us when we went outside, or how my uncle looked at me and said, "It's all going to ok," over and over.

"What is the promise?" I asked, certain I wouldn't get an answer.

"You'll need to find out on your own," Asteria replied. "For now, you must prepare for a life in the human realm until the time comes."

The dream ended there, but my night wasn't over. Just before dawn, something scratching at my window awakened me. I tried to go back to sleep, but the tempo and rhythm made me think this was more than just some random tree branch scraping against the glass. At first, I stayed in my bed and tried to stretch my neck out to see what was there. I could see shadows dancing but couldn't make out where they could be coming from. It wasn't from the tree in front of my room; I'd learned every variation it could produce, and more than that, I didn't know of anything that could create this kind of shadow. "We know. Everything. Where's your daddy, kiddy-boy? What promise do you carry? We know." The voice seemed to come from everywhere in the room.

I pulled the covers over my head, leaving just enough space to see. The scratching was persistent and louder now. I refrained from calling my mother; all she would do was scold me and tuck me back in without checking if anything was amiss in the window. I decided

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to count down from ten, and if there was still scratching at the window, I would get up. 10... 9... 8... the scratching kept getting louder. 7... 6...

“Whatcha waitin’ for kiddy-boy? Come see, come see what we have prepared for you.”

5... 4...

“You can count all you want, kiddy-boy. We exist outside of time, far from the human mind.”

3... 2... 1... the scratching stopped. Silence filled my room, and I felt the urge to jump out of bed and run to the window. The only thing was that Asteria had warned me about others from her world who might try to scare me or worse, take me with them. Everything that just happened fit perfectly with what she told me. But I had to see for myself.

I pushed down my sheets and laid there, half-expecting something to happen. The room stayed quiet, so I slipped my feet out of bed and let them hang on the side. Still nothing. I felt my heart beating hard in my chest, but I knew I was in control. If someone was to ask me what I was in control of, I couldn’t have answered, but I felt it was the case. I stepped down from the bed and slowly walked towards the window, ready to bolt out of the room at the first sign of trouble.

How naïve I was. The moment I saw the shadow in the window, I lost control of my motor functions and stopped where I was. The shadow covered most of the window, looking like there could be a sheet flapping in the wind on a laundry line. But that wasn’t what stopped me. I was instantly hypnotised by two red eyes located at the top of the shadow. They shone a bright red but were filled with a darkness, and when I locked my gaze with them, they filled my mind with images of a trail in the woods. I stood alone before a thick wall of fog.

“We’ll be waiting, don’t you worry your little human brain.”

Soft music then arose, filling the air with a melancholic melody that awoke something inside me that I couldn’t recognize. Suddenly, the eyes grew bigger and redder until they filled the window, before evaporating and letting the tree in front of my room go back to being

the view. I refused to let this affect me and went back to bed and slept a dreamless rest of the night.

I woke up the next morning, and unlike most times, I remembered everything about the dream in vivid detail—as I would remember what happened after. It has remained present in my mind ever since. That’s also when things started to change in my life. It started with new clothes and a new backpack.

“What’s this for?” I asked my Uncle Ralph when he presented me with it.

“It’s so you can carry your things around. Like books and stuff.”

My mind was blank. I had no idea why I would carry around books and stuff for no good reason. Then I looked inside the backpack.

There were notebooks accompanied by pens and erasers that were contained in some small bag. Was this the “stuff” he talked about?

“I can show you where you’ll be spending your days soon. It’s a nice school, actually. I think you might like it.”

“What do you mean spend my days? Are you sending me away?” I felt my eyes filling with tears as I spoke.

Uncle Ralph chuckled. “A chip off the old block, kid. You’re as dramatic as your mom. We’re not ‘sending you away.’ You’ll go to this place on weekdays to learn to write and read, but that’s it. And when it snows too much, you won’t even have to go. Come on, let me show you; it’ll help you wrap your mind around it.”

We walked to some large brick building where other children were coming and going.

“Maybe some new friends of yours,” said Uncle Ralph.

I looked at the building and felt nothing. It was big, red, and ominous but was nothing more than a structure near my house. As for making friends, I had already learned that other children—and

adults—didn’t see the same things as me, and it bothered most of them that I did see what they didn’t. The only thing I was certain of was that I didn’t mind the walk, my uncle was always fun to be with, and I never felt he held anything back when I asked questions; he just answered to the best of his knowledge.

“Uncle Ralph, are you my father?” I asked him once.

“No, I’m not, my boy, but I am happy to help out while we hope . . .”

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he hesitated “. . . wait for him to come back.” I never pushed any further because I felt he was telling me the truth.

The fact he was so bluntly honest contrasted with my mother, who would shut me down before I even finished asking my question. She would tell me: “Leave it be and forget about it,” or “Asking about him won’t bring him back. Now stop it.” I much preferred my uncle’s direct approach.

We were walking back from the brick building, and I felt the need to ask a question that kept popping in and out of my mind. “Uncle Ralph, be honest. Are you planning to leave me at that building with the other children?”

He burst out laughing. “Of course not, Forrest. That building is a school. Your mother or I will come to pick you up after each day.” I felt his gaze fall on me. “We’ve been through this; I explained what you will be doing during your days there. Weren’t you listening?”

I had not been listening. I did hear him talking, but I didn’t register any information. A giggle attracted my attention, and I looked around to see who was there.

“Forrest, I’m talking to you.”

I made a conscious effort to look him in the eyes while keeping all my focus on the giggling.

“You know, you’ll have to be a lot better when in class. If a teacher asks you a question, you answer. Even if your answer is, I don’t know.”

Dragonflies began to appear in larger numbers around us. I couldn’t see Asteria, but I could hear the melody that floated in the air when she was around. Except I couldn’t focus on finding her because there were two homeless men looking at us intently, and I couldn’t be sure, but I felt like we’d been crossing paths a lot lately. When I asked my uncle about them, he just said they probably have their campsite nearby, that our comings and goings are similar to theirs, but I felt it was more than that.

Uncle Ralph continued talking, and seeing I wasn’t listening, he stopped walking and placed himself in front of me. He bent down so we could talk eye to eye. “Listen, Forrest. School can be a magical place, but it can be hell. Keep your head up and be aware of your

surroundings, got it?” He shook me by the shoulders. “Got it?”

“Ye-yes, I got it, Uncle Ralph. Keep my head up.”

“And be aware of your surroundings. That one is most important.”

We walked the rest of the way home in silence. What I didn’t know was that the next time, he would leave me at that place for the day. The melody had dissipated, and when I looked around, there were no dragonflies. The two homeless men had maneuvered their way into our path but kept to themselves. When we walked by, one of them gave me a knowing nod, which only reinforced the idea they were watching us.

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My mother walked with me in silence. The morning was cold—too cold for this time of the year—and my body was in constant shivers. We were still accustomed to a certain level of heat, and despite warming a little from the walk, my shivers turned to full-blown trembling when the school came into view. The building was only three stories high, but it loomed over the street as if it had fifty. I didn’t want to go in. There was nothing good for me there; I could feel it in my bones.

“Mom, wait,” I said, desperately trying to find a reason not to go. “I can’t go today; I might be carrying a virus.” Then I coughed, hoping to convey some level of sickness. I’d heard about some dangerous virus that seemed to scare my mother and uncle recently. Maybe it could work.

Except my cough was weak, too cautious. I should have gone full-blown violent coughs and wheezing from the moment I awoke.

“Please, Forrest, don’t start,” she said abruptly. “Just go in there and be normal. It’s all I ask.”

Then, a melody—soft, nostalgic, and filled with love—filled the air. I heard a giggle. Asteria was behind my mother sitting on a fence post. The fact I knew she would be nearby gave me some courage. “Ok, Mom, I’ll go,” I said, giving her a brief hug before running into the schoolyard.

I ran across the front lawn to get to the yard as fast as I could so I

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could disappear into the crowd.

“Hey, you! On the lawn!” someone yelled.

I turned and saw a man coming out of the school, looking directly at me.

“You can’t be on the lawn. Get off now!”

He didn’t seem very intimidating, but his tone left no place for discussion, so I skipped and jumped to the asphalt, not sure if I was allowed to walk.

“That’s better,” he said, much calmer now. “Just remember to stay off the lawn, kid.”

He walked back into the school without another word, but by that time, my predicament had become public knowledge. A bunch of kids were looking at me. I didn’t know what they were thinking, and no one said anything, but I knew I had been stamped as being different, that this moment would follow me throughout my life in this yard. A legion of dragonflies flew over my head, and I waved at them, aware they were carrying *Asteria* back. I realized too late I was still being watched, and I had, without a doubt, propelled my newfound differentness to a whole new level.

After a moment of awkward silence, everyone turned back and headed for the yard, where friends gathered to play and laugh and form social protection bubbles around them to keep strangers out. I hung out near the fence to observe. A growing feeling of loneliness was taking root in the pit of my stomach. I was going to spend my foreseeable days here, along the fence, alone.

Two dragonflies came to join me and sat on each side of me. They sat quietly, not interested in anything in particular, just hanging out with me. That gave me the sense I wasn’t going to be alone after all, and the growing ball of lead in my stomach began to dissipate.

A loud bell rang, and the chaos I observed morphed into disciplined straight lines of children waiting to go into the school. The two dragonflies flew up and hovered, seemingly waiting for me. I got up, and they both headed for the line with the shortest children, which was already moving to go in. Once I reached the tail end of it, they both made a loop and flew away. This was it; I was going in.

We walked into a long corridor that seemed to go on forever. There

was a straight line of lights that went on further than I could see. Big brown doors adorned the walls every few feet, each with a tiny window over top of it. But before we could explore this cavern of unknown wonders, we were steered into a small room. I was disappointed I couldn't go deeper into the mysterious corridor, but at least I would find out what was behind one of the doors.

An adult was standing on one side, and on the other, there were small desks with chairs attached to them. Some sat right away at a desk; others squabbled over a preferred spot while I stood in the doorway, unsure of what to do. Soon, all that was left was a back corner desk next to the window. Everyone was already in their seat, looking at me. I could feel the same weight of judgement as earlier when I established my role as different when I waved at the dragonflies. I sheepishly headed for the last available desk, tripping twice over my own feet and knocking over someone's backpack. The adult began to speak, but the rest of the day turned into a blur. Why would my mother and uncle leave me here, alone? Did I do something to deserve this punishment? Before I knew it, I was headed outside to find my mother. Except she wasn't there, and neither was Uncle Ralph.

Eager to get far from this place, I started walking down the street back to my house. Since my uncle and I had done the trek a few times, I thought I'd be ok. I half expected to meet my mother or uncle along the way, but I also felt confident I could find my way home easily if I didn't.

As I turned a corner, I saw the two homeless men we kept meeting lately. They were standing to face me, clearly waiting for my arrival. I decided to advance, hoping I could walk by without any incident. I was alone, after all, and had no idea what their intentions could be. As I got closer, one of them spoke.

"Good day, young man." one of them said, smiling.

"We know," grunted the other, his frown pulling down his whole face.

A wave of anxious fear rose in my throat, cutting off the air. But before it could materialize into panic and make me faint, Asteria landed on one of the men's shoulders—the one that was smiling.

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“They are good of heart. Fear and doubt will only cause trouble for yourself and no one else,” she said in my mind. “And it is customary to respond when greeted,” she added, waving her head in the direction of the smiling man.

Asteria’s calm presence helped me get some air in my lungs, and I opened my mouth, unsure of my capacity to speak. “Good day, homeless man,” I replied to the first man, following Asteria’s prompt. I felt a wave of confidence fill me and turned to the other man. “What do you know?”

The first man laughed while the second grunted.

“We know you know and see them,” the grumpy man said in a gruff voice. “About those from the other side,” he added, looking directly at me.

The more jovial of the two looked at his friend. “We talked about this. Establish a relationship first. Talk about the alternate truth second.”

“You said hello,” snarled the man as he looked at the sidewalk beside him. “And he needs to be aware,” he added in a barely perceptible mumble.

My heart was beating hard and fast. But Asteria’s calm demeanor convinced me to stay put and try to understand what these two were talking about, although I had a good idea what it could be. “My name is Forrest,” I said.

“Nice to meet you, Forrest. I am Jasper, and my grouchy friend here is Stephen,” the pleasant one said as he gestured to his companion with his head.

“So, do you see her too?” I pointed to Asteria, now sitting comfortably on a tree branch.

Jasper squinted as his gaze tried to follow what I was pointing to.

“See what?”

“Asteria. She says she’s a Forest Nymph who guides the bees and other pollinators.”

Asteria looked at them, making no effort to hide. “They cannot see what they cannot recognize. They are blind,” she said with a shrug. Stephen had suddenly perked up and was looking intently in the direction I had pointed, his eyes round from the desperation to see



something. “The pollinators are good people. Without them, we all wither and die. Tell us what she says.”

I looked at Asteria. “Show them what you showed me. You know, with the bees.”

“Your candor and blunt manners don’t appeal to me,” she responded, crossing her arms.

She had taught me plenty about asking the right way, and all I had to do was apply her teaching. But I was still a young boy and sometimes forgot the rules. I tried again. “Dearest Asteria, could I bother you to demonstrate your prowess to these two men? I understand if you cannot.”

Asteria smiled. “You’ve grown so much! My pride for you is growing each day.” She raised her head proudly. “Yes, I will gladly show these two humans some of my powers.”

She looked up toward the sky and rubbed her fingers together. A bluster of wind appeared out of nowhere, carrying with it the scent of a thousand flowers. The air had that magical smell of the first aroma of pollen from early spring, mixed with the thick and heavy scent of summer and some wisps of late fall when the last pollinators go to sleep and leave behind the silence and a sense of dread.

Jasper and Stephen were frozen in place, their eyes wide and mouths agape. Asteria looked like a music conductor as she controlled the rising dust, lining up the colors to form strands in the rising funnel. Soft music began to fill the air, melancholic yet filled with hope. The air vibrated, calling on the bees and other pollen seekers to come hither.

Asteria then began to spin. Slowly at first, soon, she was turning fast. Holding her balance on an invisible pin, she rotated so fast that she seemed to expand into the dust and pollen funnel. As she rose toward the sky, a cloud of almost invisible glittery dust started coming out of her, immediately picked up by the wind to be carried away.

Asteria reached the top of the houses—her spin became a whirlwind, creating a funnel of glitter dust that reached beyond the sky. I was worried we would start to attract unwanted attention, but

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when I looked around, people were walking by, oblivious to the spectacle. However, one woman did stop and wonder what a young boy was doing with two homeless men. I gave her the most awkward smile I could, trying to convey this might be some family member or something uncomfortable like that. Thankfully, she walked away, putting her finger to her mouth to say she wouldn't tell anyone of my shame.

Then Asteria took a deep breath and began to sing. Or rather, she held one single note, letting her voice rise gradually after starting almost in a whisper. The waves of her voice caused a distortion that danced along the body of the funnel down to the ground. As her voice grew stronger, she contracted her body into a spinning ball, still holding her note. For a fraction of a second, the vibrations from her voice stopped, and time stood still. The funnel froze in mid-motion, but it continued to buzz with energy, clearly ready to explode. Throngs of bees gathered and formed a circle around her. Asteria suddenly stopped spinning and gave one simple order. "Go." In seconds, the bees scattered, and the dust turned to water that fell back to the ground.

Jasper looked at me with wide eyes. Stephen sat down, overcome by emotion.

Asteria gave me a wink. "Do you believe they will now better understand?"

"I'm certain this will help them see more. I greatly appreciate your actions."

Asteria placed her hand on her heart and fluttered away, trailed by a few dragonflies, her guards.

"Forrest! Forrest, where are you?"

It was my mother. She was backtracking from school when she saw me.

"Forrest, there you are! Why weren't you at the front gate of the school?" She looked at the two men. "Who are they?" She frowned and pursed her mouth. I knew that face, and it never meant anything good.

"This is Jasper, and that is Stephen," I said, hoping she wouldn't say anything awkward. I cared about these guys; they talked to me like I

was a normal person.

“Well, Jasper and Stephen, whatever story he tried to tell you, they are born from a very active imagination.” She added with a softer tone, “I hope he didn’t bother you too much.” She pulled me close to her.

“Dear madam, no worries. Your son regaled us with stories that will populate my dreams for days to come, and I appreciate it,” said Jasper—for my intention—while making a curtsy.

“Your father is doing fine. He’s in a good place,” Jasper said while looking straight at my mother.

“For now,” Stephen added wryly.

My mother looked at them, then pulled me away violently and dragged me home. I wanted to look up to see her face—it would help me know what to expect once we got home—but I was too busy scrambling to stay upright.

When we got to the house, I ran to my room, trying to avoid whatever wrath my mother had prepared for me. I closed the door and dived under the covers of my bed. But she didn’t come right away. All I could think about were all the times she scolded me for having dreams she said I shouldn’t have or that there wasn’t anything or anyone sitting on a tree branch or at the windowsill. All I knew was that I was repeatedly told not to speak of what I saw—ever.

It didn’t take me long to realize that no one else sees Asteria when she comes to me, or more recently, the strange wasps that carry their darts in their hand, but I do know I am not to share when I do see them. Being able to share my reality with Jasper and Stephen was really nice, and I hoped to see them again soon; I had a lot of questions for them.

I heard my mother go to her room, then everything went quiet in the house. I sat up in my bed, not sure what to expect next. The house stayed silent for awhile, so I risked sneaking up to my door and opened it just a bit. I could see across the hall; my mother was lying on her bed, looking at the ceiling. I didn’t know what to do—I’d never seen her like that.

She must’ve noticed me, though. “Come here, Forrest,” she said,

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making me jump back.

I took a step towards her bed with my head hung low, leaning back to avoid any sudden movement.

She remained still, not turning to look at me. "How was your first day of school?"

"It was ok, I guess," I replied, wary of where this conversation was going.

"Did you make any new friends?"

She knew I didn't. "No."

"That's good." She was calm, and her tone was pleasant.

I was starting to feel more comfortable. "Mom, why did Jasper talk about my father?"

Finally, she turned to face me. She seemed so calm it scared me a little. "That's just crazy talk from a person who has no link to reality. If I knew what he meant, I would tell you."

"It's something I've heard in my dreams too. Asteria—" I stopped there. I knew I pronounced a name I was not allowed to speak.

My mother's cheeks turned red. "Forrest, don't go there." she said in a low growl. Suddenly, she sat up and grabbed me by the shoulders. I froze. Her face was somewhere between angry, sad, and happy. I'd never seen her look like this and wasn't sure if this was going to turn into a punishment, an apology, or something else entirely.

"I'm sorry. I don't want to scare you. I like it when you tell me things."

Nice, an apology.

"But now you will have to grow up really fast."

Wait, what is this?

"We're moving to Uncle Ralph's orchard."

I stared at her blankly, her words not registering in my mind.

"I can't afford this place anymore, and there's nowhere else we can go in the city. We're moving to save money, and I need help with . . . " Her voice trailed off. "Let's say I want to be closer to my brother. Plus, country life will be good for you. We leave this weekend." She then fell silent once more and got up to pack some suitcases.

I felt comforted by the fact I wouldn't have to go to that dreaded school anymore, then a heavy pang of regret lodged itself in the pit

of my stomach. Jasper and Stephen—I wouldn't get to see them anymore. I was ready and willing to forget the unfortunate day spent in school, but without that day, without my mother being late to pick me up, I wouldn't have spoken with them. They spoke to me like I was a person, not a silly-minded child. They spoke about the promise, the same as Asteria in my dreams. I wanted to ask them so many more questions, but now we were moving far away to a place where I would never see them again.

THE END

## EPILOGUE

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

Mike Longmeadow

## About the Author

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

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

In the meantime, let's Connect:

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## THE WEIGHT OF A PROMISE