

Green Man

From the Celestial City

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It was a clear, warm evening in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and it was nothing short of enchanting as Brigid meandered along the winding path toward the city's Botanic Gardens. Each step filled her with a sense of tranquility, for the garden was her cherished sanctuary, a vibrant tapestry of nature that seemed to stretch on forever with its close vicinity to the downtown core and UNB.

Brigid is a resolute individual whose strong physique reflects her commitment to fitness and the countless hours she has dedicated to training at the local gym. For the past six years, she has passionately served as an instructor at the local Jeet Kune Do dojo, and last year, she achieved the prestigious title of one of the dojo's lead instructors. In addition to her martial arts pursuits, Brigid is currently working towards a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Biology at UNB. This academic challenge not only enriches her knowledge of botany but also deepens her appreciation for the intricate beauty of the natural world that surrounds her.

As she descended the gentle hill toward the mixed perennial bed, her favourite spot in the gardens, she paused to admire the Fern Trail, another beloved area. Here, rows of diverse fern species thrived, each in various stages of growth, creating a vibrant tapestry of green.

Brigid had just paused to capture a photo of some native Canadian ferns when a tremendous cracking sound echoed

through the forest, followed by a crash reminiscent of a large tree toppling. The noise emanated from deeper within the dark section of the forest, directly in front of her. Driven by her adventurous spirit and keen intuition, she felt an undeniable urge to investigate the source of the unsettling sound. Was it merely a tree falling, or could it be the work of poachers attempting to steal timber from the park? Regardless of the cause, Brigid was determined to uncover the truth behind the disturbance.

She gracefully leaped over the patch of ferns and glided through the clear wall of trees with remarkable ease. Once she entered the tree line, the forest floor opened up, making her journey much quicker than she had anticipated. This part of the park was adorned with old-growth maple, ash, and oak trees, interspersed with a few struggling pine and spruce, all vying for sunlight beneath the towering hardwood giants that dominated the landscape in the park.

As Brigid pushed deeper into the shadowy forest, she felt a noticeable drop in temperature, approximately 10 degrees Celsius. The air grew thick with humidity, clinging to her skin as the forest felt like it was enveloping her very essence. Soon, she stumbled upon a peculiar clearing, roughly 20 meters in diameter, framed by a lush row of ferns of all different styles. In this enchanting space, an astonishing variety of fungi flourished; there were mushrooms and toadstools of all shapes and sizes, some towering high with light brown colours, while others remained low to the ground, their vibrant red caps standing out against the earthy tones of the forest.

What captivated her most was the way these fungi formed a perfect circle around a magnificent, ancient oak tree that dominated the center of the clearing. It was as if the forest itself held this tree in reverence, much like a community would honour a great leader or a revered king of old. The scene was both mystical and serene, inviting her to pause and reflect on the beauty and wisdom that nature

had to offer.

As Brigid wandered through the clearing, she marvelled at the diverse array of species that gathered along its outer edge. Every few steps, she paused to admire a magnificent old-growth oak tree, its grandeur captivating her. She reached out to touch the rough bark, tracing the intricate cracks and contours with her fingers. In a hushed voice, she began to speak as if confiding in the ancient tree. “Wow, you must be at least 300 years old, and you are truly one of the most magnificent trees I have ever seen. But I can’t help but wonder... where did you come from? I’ve never seen you here before.”

Suddenly, the old tree cracked and groaned, as if responding to her words. Startled, Brigid stumbled backward and fell. Yet, in a remarkable twist of fate, the soft grass and ferns seemed to cradle her, gently breaking her fall and preventing any harm. Brigid responded in a startled voice, “What in the mushrooms!” And she could have sworn the mushrooms that surrounded the glade started to giggle.

She lay on her back, propped up on her elbows, gazing intently at the towering tree above her. As she focused her attention, she began to discern what appeared to be facial features emerging from the rough bark halfway up the trunk. To her astonishment, she could make out a large bark-covered nose, and a crack in the tree where a mouth should be, and even a smooth forehead section, as if the tree itself was coming to life before her eyes. Her first thought was that she must be dreaming, or perhaps she was hallucinating due to being exhausted from the three hours at the gym this morning.

Suddenly, two eyes cracked open and blinked several times, as if experiencing the world for the very first time. The massive old oak tree did something extraordinary: it leaned forward

with a series of cracking and snapping sounds, as if acknowledging Brigid's presence in the glade. Then, in a slow, deep, and resonant voice that seemed to echo through the air, the tree spoke for the first time. "Hello, little one. You are a curious-looking mushroom! What family do you belong to?"

Brigid was taken aback by the realization that this tree not only had the ability to move and speak but also possessed a level of intelligence that defied her understanding. Her scientific mind clashed with her senses, creating a whirlwind of confusion. She knew the boundaries of possibility, yet here was a tree—talking to her and moving, albeit slowly, but undeniably alive in a way she had never imagined.

Brigid gathered herself and responded to the tree. "I am not a mushroom but a person, I mean a human being, not a mushroom." She said as she sat up and brushed off her clothing. The tree leaned back, now standing straight and tall, replied, "Well, this is strange. After all these years, I have never talked to a human being before. Are you sure you're not a mushroom or perhaps a chipmunk? They do love to walk on my branches."

As Brigid began to rise, she asserted, "I am neither a chipmunk nor a mushroom. I am a human being, and my name is Brigid." After a brief pause, she looked up at the tree and inquired, "Do you have a name, or should I simply call you Tree thing?"

The giant oak tree pondered the question for what felt like several minutes to Brigid before finally responding. "Over the years, I have been known by many names: Creature, Hallow-Man, Tree-Spirit, Green-Man, Tree Shadow, the Soul of the Forest and the Green Knight. However, it has been some time since I was called the Green Night. I prefer the name Green Man. It symbolizes the vitality of the forest, the arrival of the new year, and the rejuvenation that follows the long winter slumber."

Brigid was amazed at the response, “Wow, that’s a lot of names. I will use the name Green Man, or perhaps Greeny suits you better. How long have you been alive?” She asked.

The ancient oak tree let out a deep, resonant sound that could be interpreted as laughter—or perhaps a touch of indigestion. “Greeny, I quite like that name! Since I choose a new one each time I return, I shall be known as Greeny this time around. And to answer your question, I have existed since the dawn of time, little mushroom named Brigid.”

Brigid replied, “Please, just call me Brigid. I have another question: why are you alive now?”

Greeny rumbled thoughtfully, “We awaken when Gaia needs us. When growth falters and life struggles, we bring forth new vitality. Each time Gaia calls upon us, we respond.”

Brigid’s eyes widened in surprise at Greeny’s answer. “What do you mean there are more of you? How many are there?”

Greeny cracked a warm smile. “As many as Gaia requires—typically one or two for every large forest. It takes considerable time for a Greeny to move.”

Brigid took a step back, her gaze fixed on Greeny’s intricate root system. “You can move?”

Greeny nodded. “Yes, we can move, think, and communicate over long distances with one another,” he explained, pausing for emphasis. “We use the mycelium network. I can converse with my brothers and sisters all around the world.”

Brigid took a step back, ready to speak, when a high-pitched

voice suddenly called out, “Hey, watch where you’re walking Stretch! you almost stepped on me!” Startled, Brigid bent down and scanned the outer edge of the glade. To her amazement, she discovered that the ferns, mushrooms, and toadstools were all alive. Her instinct was to retreat toward Greeny, but her curiosity quickly took over. “Wow, this is incredible! A talking tree and now a talking forest!”

One little red-capped mushroom stepped forward, actually it was more of a sliding effect, if you could call it that. “I need to correct you on a couple of things,” it said. “First, my name is Tom, not Wow. And second, not everything comes to life during each cycle of the Green Man, or as you call him, Greeny. It’s just him and us,” Tom explained, glancing around the forest edge. “You see, we help Greeny nurture the forest with every cycle.”

Brigid held back a giggle as she conversed with a red-capped mushroom that bore a striking resemblance to the Fly Fun-gus species. Despite its small size, the mushroom had an unexpectedly cheeky personality. With a playful tone, as if speaking to a puppy, Brigid smiled and said, “Aren’t you a cute little fellow!”



Tom, the mushroom, responded with surprising enthusiasm. “I’ll have you know I’m four days old and nearly fully grown! And I’m not alone, there are hundreds of my friends in this glade with me. Over there is Dave, Kim, Tim, Tom1, Alvin, Jay, and beside them is...”

Brigid raised her hand to gently interrupt. “I appreciate the introductions, Tom, but you don’t need to tell me all their names. Thank you, though!” With a smile, she stood up and turned to face Greeny once more. “So let me get this straight, you are here to help

the forest grow and heal itself, is that right?”

Greeny cracked a smile, “Yes, I am here to help the forest grow. I know nothing about healing, I just simply nurture and grow the forests along with all their creatures, large and small. We are called upon by Gaia to walk the forests and bring life.”

Brigid now considered what Greeny and Tom had said. But several things disturbed her as she thought to herself. “First, why now? Was it because we are so horrible at planting new forests and taking care of the old trees? Second, am I going nuts...I am talking to a walking tree and a mushroom with a cheeky attitude. I must be nuts.”

Brigid raised her hand and gestured toward Greeny, Tom, and the other creatures gathered in the clearing. “Alright, I need some time to process all of this,” she said. “I’m going to head home for a bit to relax and clear my mind. When I return, if you’re not here, I’ll know I’ve come back from my mushroom trip. But if you are still around... Well, we can figure things out from there.”

With that, Brigid turned and made her way back the way she came without stepping on any mushrooms or ferns. It was time to think this out.

Coming soon Chapter II