



"Marius, Magic and Lisa the Werewolf"

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Twelve-year-old Marius and his older brother Martin recently moved to the countryside with their parents. Martin, who is very sociable, has already found a lot of friends, but Marius just can't seem to fit in. Yet when the boy meets Lisa, a loner, at school, the adventures begin with no further ado. Before long, the boy's previous understandings of reality and the fantasy world acquire a new, fascinating dimension.



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[Introduction]

Marius hadn't seen Jacob for what seemed like an eternity. Barely five minutes had passed since he'd left yet the seconds were dragging by. At the pace of a snail. Like honey dripping off a spoon back into the jar. Or the kind of hope that might never be fulfilled.

It felt like a lifetime. Perhaps it was? Perhaps a single second would encompass the whole of Lisa's life?

Or Marius's own. The life that he may never live. If Jacob could not get back with his sister at the right time, or if Jacob's sister couldn't help Lisa. Or if fate were horrifically cruel to them.

Marius had never prayed in his life. He didn't even know how, although he had to try.

Treasure for Bones

That afternoon Marius was sitting at the kitchen table whittling a piece of wood with Dad's knife. He had to admit that it was not going well. The wood looked nothing like he wanted. It wasn't taking on the form of the Native American totem poles or the awesome, horned shapes he'd seen in books. Truth be told, he'd never been much good at whittling and felt really disappointed in himself and all the craft lessons he'd had.

But then something grabbed his attention.

"There're some weirdoes living at Forestback Farm."

The words sparked something in Marius's mind. When his concentration was on his whittling the chatter between his Mum and the woman who'd come round usually went in one ear and out the other, even though they were at the same table as him, drinking coffee.

It was all a jumble in Marius' head: the information about the farm, who was living in this place, who was working on that farm or even who wasn't working, who was whiling away their days window-shopping or hanging around at the bus stop with others

like themselves, or how many children there were on such-and-such farm and which of them went to the village school. He'd long since heard enough of it already.

But now this woman, who had introduced herself as Maia Fox from Rooster Farm, had used the word "weirdoes".

Marius looked up. He noticed his mother's eyes had widened a little in anticipation.

"So are they village idiots or something?" Mum asked.

Maia shrugged her shoulders. "Not the genuine article, I don't think. But they're a bit odd. An old lady used to live there and there was all sorts of gossip about her. Now her daughter's in it, living there with her own family. They're a bit odd."

Marius noticed his mother's disappointment. But her eyes sparkled again as Maia went on, "There used to be a real village idiot here, but he's dead now."

"What did he do?" Mum asked.

"Well, he used to collect rubbish of all sorts. The area around his farm was like a dump. The village children would go there looking for gold."

"Why gold," wondered Marius, "when he collected rubbish?"

"He was real old scrooge. People believed that he had some treasure, supposedly left to him by his grandparents. In the old days the farm was very well-to-do. The word went round that he'd buried the treasure somewhere on the farm. Rumour had it that he might even have had a gold pocket watch."

"Did anyone ever find anything?" asked Mum.

Marius knew that Mum always liked hearing about village idiots, but he was surprised that she was also interested in the treasure.

Marius himself wasn't interested in either one of them – treasure or village idiots. He liked bones. Animal bones. He had an extensive collection of them, although no complete skeletons, he was still short of a few little bones here and there. But he had plenty of animal skulls. Some of them he'd found himself, some had been given to him by friends, some he'd received directly from colleagues of his Dad's who'd been hunting, and some he'd bought online. However he'd come by them, Marius's bone collection was his most precious treasure. More precious than any hidden crock of gold.

"No, nothing," Maia replied.

"Which farm did he live on?" it was now Marius who asked a question.

He was sure that Martin would be really interested in the treasure. Martin was Marius's brother. He was three years Marius's elder and wanted to be an archaeologist. For the time being he was practising treasure-hunting. Marius knew that Martin would dream of finding the crock of gold, brimming with silver and gold coins and adornments. So far he just had a pair of old coins, a few old buttons, a couple of World War II shells and other military bric-a-brac. But despite these setbacks Martin was sure that one day fortune would smile upon him.

"He lived at Crossland Farm and was known as Crossland Fred, but his real name was Alfred Bogcat," Maia explained.

Marius nodded. He was definitely going to talk to Martin about it. But for now he focused his full attention back on the unyielding piece of wood. Maybe he would be able to whittle it into an idol or other awesome form after all.

* * *

"There might be gold buried on Crossland Farm."

Marius hoped this news would distract Martin and give him an easy chance to take the ball from his brother. Marius was already trailing by seven points – more than his pride could allow and the three-year age-gap would warrant.

Marius was twelve and Martin fifteen. Sometimes Marius thought there was an eternity between the two of them, but at others the three years were almost nothing. But not right now. Within a few days of moving here Martin had found a couple of friends and as a result was spending far less time with Marius than usual. By contrast, Marius had not immediately hit it off with any of his classmates. There were a couple of boys he would chat to, but he didn't think he'd fit in with all the boys in his class.

To Marius's surprise, Martin stopped bouncing the ball completely. "How do you know?" he asked, suspiciously.

"A woman who came round today was talking about it."

"What exactly did she say?" Martin was now grasping the ball and was looking at his brother eagerly.

Marius shrugged. With disappointment he realised that his trick would not be good enough to gain possession of the ball from Martin. "Not much more than that really. Apparently an old scrooge who collected junk used to live there."

"And he had gold?"



Marius shrugged. "That's what people said." Seven points were still hovering between them.

"Well then, we'll have to go and investigate," remarked Martin. He twiddled the ball in his hand for a while and then scored with his next three-point shot. "Where is this Crossland Farm place?"

Marius shrugged again "No idea." Ten points between them. He'd lost.

"So why bother mentioning it at all if you didn't find out?" asked Martin, disgruntled.

"Find out yourself if you're so interested!"

Marius tried to push through under Martin's arms with the ball although it was insanely difficult because his brother's long arms were everywhere. "I'm not interested in gold," Marius pressed on through gritted teeth. "And there's probably nothing there anyhow." He sent the ball flying randomly towards the basket, but it didn't even hit the hoop.

"But what if there is?" Martin asked.

Once more, Marius shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't imagine what use treasure would be to him. And because of that he had no desire to find it.

"OK," said Martin. He played a simple dummy that Marius always fell for, and the ball was back in the basket. "If I thrash you by fifteen points you'll have to carry the spade."

"Forget it," said Marius. "I'm gonna play properly now. And I've got no plans to start doing that sort of dirty work."

"But you might find a skeleton!" teased his brother.

Ooh, I might, Marius thought for a moment, but then let the thought go. Martin would have to cope on his own; he'd definitely come up with some other way of amusing himself during the summer holidays that were just around the corner.

Another Girl

/.../
pp 37-42

This time Marius moved with utmost care and memorised exactly where he'd come from. He no longer had any intention of dozing off or meeting Lisa. His plan was in fact now to explore the forest a little more deeply. Undisturbed.

But nothing came of it this time either.

Once again he was startled by a girl, but it wasn't Lisa this time.

In fact she was nothing like Lisa. He found this new girl rather elfin in appearance, and what's more, she was smiling at him. Although she had long, almost coal-black hair and a dark complexion, she looked somehow fair and pale. Was he imagining it or was she being friendly?

After they'd said hello, he asked her what she was doing in the forest.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Same as you, so it would seem. It's so lovely here."

Marius nodded. The forest was magnificently beautiful today.

Although paler and lighter than on his earlier visits.

Maybe the very fact that he'd found the forest gloomy before was why he'd lost his way the first time and then the next time just fallen asleep?

"Do you live round here?" asked Marius, who had now learnt that the girl's name was Esme.

Esme nodded. "In the town near yours."

"How do you know which town I live in?" wondered Marius.

Esme laughed. "They talk about you."

"What do they say?" Marius asked.

“That you go into the forest when most people would be to chicken. And that you’re friends with that horrible girl.”

Marius swallowed hard. “What makes you think she’s horrible?”

They weren’t friends! Although part of him wished they were.

Esme made a gesture with her hand. “Everyone knows she is. The whole family’s a bit weird. Some people even believe that her grandma was a witch.”

“A witch?” said Marius in astonishment. “No-one’s been scared of witches since the Middle Ages.”

“People are still scared of them now. Quite a few people have vanished in the forest. And never been found. Know why?”

Marius shrugged. He wasn’t sure whether Esme was trying to scare him or warn him. Whichever it was, what she said had some effect. What if she was right? What if Lisa had an ulterior motive for venturing into the woods? What if she were trying to make people lose their way. Perhaps the reason why she was trying to keep Marius away from here was to stop him discovering some secret involving this place?

“In the olden days people believed that human organs cured disease. Lisa’s grandma believed it too. They say that she managed to get loads of people lost. On purpose. And then, as you know...”

“Can’t we talk about something else?” interrupted Marius. It seemed ridiculous to believe in witchcraft nowadays, although Esme’s words were spine-chilling.

Esme nodded. “Want me to show you the woods’ most beautiful lakeside spot?” she offered.

“Lake?” asked Marius. “Is there a lake here?” When he’d studied the map he hadn’t noticed any lake.

“Yeah, there’s a lake. Come on!”

Esme grabbed Marius by the hand and set off among the trees, dragging him behind her. Some time later they reached a clearing where, sure enough, there was a small lake.

“I usually go swimming here,” murmured Esme. “Come on! Let’s find out if the water’s warm yet.”

Marius tagged along to the water’s edge and dipped his fingers into the water. It was indeed warm. Warmer than he’d expected.

“Let’s go for a swim!” suggested Esme.

Marius shook his head. “I haven’t got my swimming shorts.”

“No need for any. Just go in in as you are,” Esme replied, pulling at his arm.

Marius was in two minds. The water really was lovely and warm, but something held him back.

Esme grabbed him by the wrist once more; her dark eyes looked at him invitingly. Only now did Marius notice how beautiful she was. Even more beautiful than Lisa. Quite uncannily beautiful.

Too beautiful to be real.

As Esme took a step into the water, Marius noticed the edge of her skirt getting wet.

“We can’t really be going swimming fully dressed, can we?” he queried.

“Come on, don’t be afraid,” whispered Esme. “Nothing will happen.” She tugged at him more forcefully.

What might happen to me, pondered Marius and the next instant noticed a large dog bounding towards them.

Esme had seen it too. She leapt out of the water, taking Marius by the hand again.

“Come on, run, it’ll hurt you!” she yelled breaking into a run.

They sprinted about a hundred metres and fortunately the dog didn't follow.

"Dogs shouldn't be let loose in the forest," said Marius.

But Esme was apparently paying no attention to his remark.

"I have to go," she said, to his surprise. "But we will go swimming one of these days, won't we?"

Marius nodded.

Esme then disappeared so quickly that he did not even have the chance to ask how they would meet next time.

I should start keeping a diary, thought Marius on the way home. If he made a note of all the strange things that happened here in the forest then perhaps he might be able to make some sense of it all?



In the Cemetery

/.../
pp 44-49

They stood for a moment in silence. Marius wasn't sure what to say or do. He actually didn't want to argue with her but didn't know how to tell her. He would have liked to ask why he would think her a freak, but it didn't feel like the right moment.

"Want to do something else?" suggested Marius in the end.

"What would you like to do?" Lisa asked.

"Show me the most exciting place in the village," replied Marius.

"OK," she agreed, which made him glad. "Come on!"

After a spell walking they arrived at the place. The graveyard. At first Marius thought it was Lisa's idea of a joke, but in fact she was deadly serious.

"Is this what you think is the most exciting place in the village?" asked Marius in astonishment.

"Don't you think so?" she replied. "You said you were looking for bones. There's loads of them here."

"I collect animal bones, not human ones," replied Marius.

Lisa began to laugh. "I didn't think you'd start digging them up. That was just me kidding you. But I really do like this place. It's been the burial place of people from our village for centuries. I like reading the names on the headstones and crosses."

"Do you come here a lot then?" asked the boy.

Lisa nodded.

"Why?"

"My Grandma's here."

That must be who Esme had been talking about,



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thought Marius. But he then noticed the sadness on Lisa's face.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know," he said, wanting to comfort her somehow.

"That's OK," whispered Lisa. "You couldn't have known."

Marius saw her eyes were brimming with tears.

"Would you like to show me her grave?" he asked.

She nodded.

They walked from one end of the graveyard to the other until they reached a sand-covered plot. Adele Marie Rimmelgas, read Marcus on the gravestone. Under the name were the years of her birth and death: 1945-2015.

"What happened to her?" he asked. "She really wasn't very old."

Lisa shook her head. "No, she wasn't."

"Was she ill?"

"No, it was an accident."

"What happened?"

Lisa was silent. The tears were flowing down her cheeks and she wasn't even trying to wipe them away.

Suddenly it dawned on Marius. "It happened in the forest, didn't it?"

She nodded.

"Tell me what it is with the forest! Why's it dangerous like you say?"

Lisa shook her head. "I can't."

"Why?"

She wiped her tears with the back of her hand. "You wouldn't believe me."

"Try me," he begged.

Lisa sighed and sat on the grass next to her Grandma's grave. "You mustn't breathe a word! Promise?"

Marius nodded. "I won't." He sat down next to her.

"You have to swear on something that's precious to you."

"I swear on my jaguar skull." Marius's uncle had brought him the jaguar skull from Brazil and it was unquestionably the treasure he most prized.

Lisa snorted. "Not pulling my leg are you?"

Marius shook his head.

"Right," said Lisa, and said nothing more for some time.

"What's wrong with the forest?" asked Marius a little impatiently.

"This forest has a lot of very powerful energy points where people can see visions, all kinds of visions. Some see fabulous, beautiful things, but most see bad ones. Nightmares. The things and creatures that they are most afraid of but intrigued by. And then there are the places where people fall asleep. Just like you did. But not for a few hours - for days and weeks, even years."

"How do you know all this?" asked Marius. He thought that places where you could have nightmares and your greatest fears come to life sounded completely horrific.

"I just do," she said. "And because of it you must never go there, OK?"

Marius nodded.

"And if ever someone in the forest calls out to you, you must never reply," she went on.

"Why?"

"That's dangerous too. Loads of people have gone missing in the forest over the years. That's why it's

feared. People think that the caller is fishing for the soul of the person they're calling. Sometimes the person escapes, but not always."

"And the ones that disappear are never found?" wondered Marius. So he'd escaped.

"Never."

"Not even their bones?"

Lisa shook her head.

"What about your Grandma? What happened to her?" asked Marius.

"A forest animal attacked her. What exactly it was we don't know," she added somberly.

"I'm sorry," mumbled Marius.

Lisa nodded. "I know you are."

"But if the forest's so dangerous, why do you go there?" he asked. He had a feeling that Lisa was keeping something back.

"I want to be a biologist," she replied.

Marius suspected that this was a lie, but didn't show it.



The Truth

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pp 71-77

"What do you want?" asked Lisa aggressively.

"Why are you so angry?" asked Marius, shocked.

"It was wrong for you to come here," was her frosty reply.

"You mustn't judge me."

"I won't. But all the same you have to make your mind up once and for all."

"What about?"

"Them or me. Choose them, that's easiest for everyone."

"What if I choose you?"

"Why? You don't know anything about me!"

"I know who you are," Marius confessed. I saw you. When it was full moon," he said, his voice faltering a little. "But it doesn't matter. Not to me."

He was afraid that Lisa would slam the door in his face if she knew he knew her secret. But she just stood and stared at him silently.

"How can't it matter?" she finally asked and sat down on the steps. Her voice was tired and sad. "It does. Sometimes I feel like it's ruined my whole life. I don't have any friends because people talk about it. Even if they don't really believe it they're scared of me."

"I'm your friend. I'm not scared of you because you're a werewolf."

Lisa smiled. "I'm not a werewolf."

"But I saw," mumbled Marius. "I saw you changing."

"I'm a shape-shifter. I can take on the shape of any animal or bird. I like being a wolf best. And on full moon it's hard for me to hold back. Especially in

summer and spring. By the way, I was the white cat who helped you out of the forest.”

“You helped me out?”

Lisa nodded. “You were hopelessly lost, and then there was the phantom.”

“Phantom?”

“The spirit of a creature that died in the forest. If it had got its hands on you I might not have been able to save you. I guess you didn’t spot the nymph then?” she asked, already half laughing.

“The nymph?”

Lisa grinned. “The one that wanted you to go swimming. Nothing funny about it at all actually. That was a close one.”

“Were you the wolf then?”

Lisa nodded.

“A nymph,” murmured Marius. Only now was he beginning to realize the seriousness of the situation. He hadn’t for a moment wondered why it had been so important to that girl, Esme, for him to go swimming with her. Why she’d pulled him so forcefully towards the lake...

“I warned you about the forest,” said Lisa. Her voice sounded tired.

“She looked like a person,” Marius mumbled, sounding even more taken aback.

“Just be happy that she didn’t look like your Mum.”

“Can a nymph take on any person’s form?”

Lisa shook her head. “No, a nymph can’t. But some creatures can.”

“So you didn’t tell me the whole truth about the forest then?” inquired Marius.

Lisa shook her head. “You wouldn’t have believed me. The truth is that my Grandma was the guardian of the forest. I’ve inherited her powers and calling.”

“Why does the forest need guarding?”

“All kinds of creatures live there. The ones that people still remember from the old stories.”

“Who are you guarding the forest from? And how do you do it?”

“From people. So that they don’t find out the forest’s secret. Or disturb the forest dwellers’ peace.” If someone comes I try to scare them a bit at first, and if I need to, I wipe their memories afterwards.”

“Why didn’t you do that to me?”

Lisa shrugged her shoulders. “You were so persistent. I could see how much you liked the forest. And I felt a bit lonely.”

“Can you see all the creatures that live in the forest?” Marius asked.

Lisa nodded. “Want to see them too?”

“Yeah!”

“Take my hand,” she said to him when they reached the forest. “And whatever happens, don’t let go.”

During the walk he realized that the dried bushes and gnarled tree trunks were not in fact trees but curious creatures. There were fairies and forest spirits of different sizes and appearances that flitted silently through the woodland, and nymphs and water spirits by the lake.

“Can they see me?” asked Marius.

Lisa nodded. “They can see you all the time. You can see them only when they let you.”

“Are they letting themselves be seen now because I’m with you?”

“No. It’s because you’re holding my hand. My power to see them is spilling over onto you.”

In the middle of a small clearing Marius noticed a grove of trees that reminded him of a crowd.

"They were people once," Lisa read his thoughts.

"What happened to them?"

"In the olden days there was a path through the forest. It was so narrow that it was very difficult for people to pass each other. Once two wedding parties came across each other but neither one would stand aside to let the other pass. The guests began to fight over who had right of way. During the fight the bride from one party and the groom of the other died. And because of it god transformed them all into trees."

"Who was that?" asked Marius as a large, catlike creature ran past them.

Lisa shrugged. "I don't know. It's not from round here."

"How come?" wondered Marius. "Where's it from then?"

"This forest is linked to other similar forests around the world. Because of it there are sometimes creatures from very far away here."

"You mean that the forest is like a wormhole? A crossroads between different places?"

"Basically yes," Lisa agreed.

"And here you can come across any kind of creature living in a similar forest anywhere in the world?"
Marius went on. The thought that he might run into a Norwegian troll or the mythical creatures of South America seemed utterly preposterous.

Lisa nodded.

"Even creatures from Africa?"

"From what my Grandma told me some of them came here once but weren't particularly keen on the climate, so very exotic creatures are pretty much a rarity round here."

"Could we go to the other forests?" asked the boy.

Lisa shook her head. "No."

"Can you not go there either?"

"No, I can't. I'm the guardian of this forest. I can't wander round other places while I'm the guardian here."

Marius nodded. That made sense. If Lisa had been somewhere else when the nymph had wanted to drown him, he'd now be at the bottom of the lake swimming with the fish.

The Balance of Nature

/.../

pp 93-96

It was difficult to talk about it. He hadn't even yet been able to say out loud that the moment when he lost his brother was when he realised how precious he really was to him. Is. Whatever. Now he had a second chance. And he really wanted to help. He even wanted to find the treasure with Martin because he now knew how important it was to his brother.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "I don't believe you, but, it doesn't matter." He looked at the clock. "Let's get going in half an hour. OK?"

Marius nodded.

* * *

They stopped abruptly at the edge of the forest, startled, after only a couple of steps. Marius could feel Lisa clasping his hand, although she did not utter a word.

He could not bear the silence any longer.

"What happened?"

Lisa didn't answer. She just looked, wide-eyed, at the forest around them, which had changed almost beyond recognition.

It was much duskier and gloomier than before and



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Marius felt the same kind of horror as when he'd got lost in there the first time. The trees towered ominously overhead and there were no spirit children, whose existence Marius had already begun to become accustomed to, playing happily anywhere. He felt as if forest had been cursed by an evil queen or other similar being from a fairy tale.

Marius looked at Lisa. She was standing as still as a statue and staring intently at a bush.

A moment later a woman with grey-streaked hair stepped out from among the leaves; she looked more like a gnarled tree than a nature-spirit. Her clothes were woven from leaves and plant stems and Marius would not have been surprised if there were birds' nests in her hair.

From Lisa's reaction Marius realised that this must be the chief spirit, or Forest Mother, Iris.

The spirit did not even glance at Marius. She took a couple of paces forward and stopped in front of Lisa.

"Do you know what has happened?" The spirit's looks belied the youthfulness of her voice.

Lisa nodded.

"I knew your Grandmother. She was a clever woman. I'm astonished that she taught you nothing." The spirit's voice was tinged with reproach and concern.

"She did," squeaked Lisa.

The spirit shook her head. "Yesterday you made a serious mistake; you overstepped a line that no mortal may cross. In so doing you disrupted the balance of nature."

Lisa stood, hanging her head, and said nothing, but the spirit carried on.

"It made the spirits angry. And because of it we must now all live in darkness."

"I beg forgiveness," squeaked Lisa.

The spirit shook her head. "What is done cannot be undone," she said. "Remember that you now owe a

debt of one soul to the Forest."

Lisa blanched. "A soul?" she whispered in terror.

The spirit nodded. "Yes. In place of the one you took back yesterday. The souls do not ask; they take. Only then will the Forest be itself again. Be mindful of these things in future."

The spirit vanished as quickly as she had appeared.

"What did she mean by that?" asked Marius when they reached the meadow beyond the forest.

In all that time Lisa had not uttered a single word. Now she gave Marius a troubled look. "I returned Martin's soul to him. They want a soul in exchange. And sooner or later they'll take one."

"You mean that someone will die?" asked Marius. "Here in the forest?"

"Promise me that you won't come here without me! At least until..." Lisa replied.

"Until someone else has died?"

Lisa nodded. "I disrupted the balance of nature. It's my fault. Now someone will die because of me... And I can't do anything to stop it. Do you understand?"

"When will it happen?"

Lisa shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. Soon perhaps. Or perhaps a little while longer. But it will definitely happen."

Translated by Susan Wilson