



**The Land
Between
Days**

Jordan T. Hariel

Note from the author:

Hi, I'm Jordan! You may or may not know me, but I am an aspiring, seventeen year-old author trying to get my book, with working title *Project Fire*, published! I've created short stories like these in the meantime for readers like you to enjoy. I'm so glad that you've taken valuable time from your day to read my work, and I'd like to personally thank you for doing so. It means the world to me. I had a lot of fun writing "The Land Between Days," as I drew much inspiration from Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland*, one of my favorite books of all time. It is my hope that as you read this story, you smile, laugh, and let your imagination soar into the Land-between-Days.

With love,

Jordan T. Hariel

THE LAND BETWEEN DAYS

There is a place to where neither maps nor roads can lead--a land beyond the bounds of space. For just a blink, as the clock hand moves between 11:59 P.M. and midnight, when it is neither the day prior nor the day following, time takes a momentary respite, and this land takes its place. This realm can be reached, but not easily so; hence, few have ever seen it. Its name is the Land Between Days, and Morgan Pearson is about to discover it.

Morgan strolled down a dim Cincinnati alleyway, yawning as he went along. He was typically a rather grounded fourteen year-old, never staying out past nine o'clock, but his mother had permitted him to go to a gathering of his friends from school that night. The party had endured much longer than anticipated; and, after a while, being the straightforward thinker he was, he decided it would not be beneficial for him to stay past midnight on a school night. Thus, he departed despite his companions' objections and began the long trek back to his apartment in the heart of downtown. The time notwithstanding, the air had an unusual chill about it and he fancied the idea of climbing into his warm bed.

Before he reached the fire escape at the end of the alley, however, he tripped on a crack in the sidewalk, in part due to his weariness. Before he could react, he hit his forehead directly on the concrete right as the clock hand was shifting to midnight. All went dark.

When Morgan awoke, he found himself not in the light of an orange, flickering streetlamp in the shadowy alleyway, but, instead, in the morning sun's golden light in the middle of a wood. Instead of cold concrete, he lay upon a soft bed of fallen leaves. He shook his head, sending a dull pain down his face. Gingerly, he rose, not fully realizing the peculiarity of his sudden appearance in a forest. The shush of leaves in the towering trees was the only noise around him, and the fresh air the only smell. As he surveyed the imposing trees, he noticed a strange sort of pink luminescence that traveled between them like fireflies and seemed to breathe

a vigorous new life into their leaves. He shut his eyes and opened them a few times, but he did not wake. He did not recall such a wood anywhere near Cincinnati, and he certainly was not dreaming--so, where was he?

“What’s your name?” a voice behind him said unexpectedly.

Morgan whirled his head around to find a squirrel perched on a low branch, nibbling on a nut, but found no sign of any humans around. However, much to his shock, the *squirrel* opened its mouth and spoke. “Don’t be rude: I asked you a question. What’s your name?”

“M-M-Morgan,” he stuttered, for he felt rather uncomfortable talking to a squirrel and was not entirely sure how it was possible that he *was* talking to a squirrel in the first place.

“Mm,” replied the squirrel, twirling the nut in his speedy hands and taking another nibble of it. “That’s a strange name. It’s backwards.”

“Backwards? No, it isn’t.”

“Indeed it is. It’s Nagrom spelled backwards.”

Morgan would have protested, for that statement was nonsense; however, considering he was speaking with a squirrel, nothing presently made sense anyway. “Well, what’s your name, then?”

“Lerriuqs,” answered he.

Morgan mulled his name over for a moment and replied, rather indignantly, “That’s ‘squirrel’ spelled backwards!”

The creature shook his head and gave a *tsk-tsk*. “Not actually. It’s Lerriuqs spelled *frontwards*, mind.”

Morgan huffed with offense. “Look, I’d just like to know where I am.”

Lerriuqs tossed his nut aside and scampered up the tree to retrieve another one. He soon

returned, took a couple of bites of his new nut, and said, “The Northern Wood.”

Morgan rubbed his chin. “I don’t remember any place with that name near Cincinnati,” he thought aloud.

“Cent see gnat e,” the squirrel repeated. “What an odd place you come from! Never heard of it.”

“It’s in Ohio.”

“You needn’t say hi again: we’ve already met.”

“Ohio is a state in the United States of America.”

The creature chuckled and shook his head rapidly. “You and your silly talk! I’ve lived in these woods for a long time, and there isn’t a place within a million nutshells of here by that name.” He giggled again, whispering to himself in amusement, “What in the world is a merica?”

Morgan was becoming quite irritated with the beast, and, gritting his teeth, answered, “Well, if *you* can’t tell me how to get there, do you know someone who could?”

“Mm. Go that way,” the squirrel said, pointing northward, “and find The Road. You can’t miss it--it’s very road-like. Follow it to the City of Towns. Someone there might be able to get you to your merica.” The squirrel covered his mouth, apparently trying to keep himself from laughing; for he found “merica” a rather hilarious word, though he had not the foggiest what it meant.

“Thank you,” Morgan said, bowing slightly.

Lerriuqs smacked a couple of times, and said, “Mm. It wasn’t my pleasure. You interrupted my nut gathering, you know.”

Morgan might have retorted but held his tongue; for he had no time to start another conversation with the beast. He turned about and began walking north. The wood did not last for

very long that way, and thus, he soon emerged from the woods into a sprawling, hilly meadow whose air was imbued with a general happiness. Springtime had sent the bees lifting up a joyous chorus of buzzing as they bustled about amongst the dancing white petals of the blooming daisies. The sun above shimmered jovially in a pale blue sky. In the distance, a sliver of what Morgan presumed was The Road could be seen. Despite the gleefulness of the picturesque scene before him, he sighed. For now, he would have preferred to see the twinkling lights of high-rise buildings, the blaring of a hundred car horns in unison, or a food cart wafting the smell of grilling franks through the air. He missed his dear mother, whom he was sure was fretting about his whereabouts. He, too, would have liked to know where he was; and thus, his longing to return home sped him toward the Road.

As he trekked, he found the landscape rather odd; for, at one moment, he might be walking downhill, but the very next walking uphill, as if the land were constantly shifting. He peered into the distance, watching as the hills became flat, paused, and rose up again. This changing landscape appeared tumultuous, but whenever the hill upon which Morgan happened to be walking shifted, he was not thrown off course. The pink luminescence, the talking squirrel, the undulating hills--all these peculiarities gave him the idea that he were in some sort of fantasy, but how? He had read many stories of children being suddenly and inexplicably swept into a strange world, but was there not always a way back to earth? He hoped that this world was not an exception.

Now, after about thirty minutes of walking, he made it to The Road. As he followed it, he found that it wound on for quite some distance in one direction, before it looped around and meandered on in a different direction. Morgan found these unnecessary loops and twists in The Road in several places, a fact he found rather strange; however, not much seemed to make sense

in this world anyway.

At one point several miles from where Morgan had begun, The Road intersected another road paved with cobblestone. This second road was congested with myriad bizarre sights. For the first time since he woke, he saw people: some people riding horses, some horses riding people (which seemed quite a struggle for the people), some people riding in coaches, and some people walking on their hands. While the horses riding people and the people walking on their hands were curious in themselves, the coaches in which some had chosen to ride had a most unusual design--they all had square wheels and were drawn by ostriches. On top of all this absurdity, Morgan looked just past the traffic jam to find that the rest of the road was unobstructed. "Why are they stopped?" wondered he.

Just then, a blond-haired woman in one of the coaches nearby leaned out of the window and shouted at him, "Yoo-hoo! Boy! Come hither!"

Morgan looked all around him, but found no one else near him that she could be talking to. Approaching the carriage, he said, "Can I help you, ma'am?"

"Well, certainly, you *can*, but you'd be wasting your time: I've nothing for you to help with. On the contrary, I believe it is you who needs help. You look rather lost."

"Well, I don't think I'm lost, exactly. I'm trying to get to the City of Towns, and I was following the Road to get there."

"Ah!" the woman cried, pulling out her crimson fan. "Dear boy, you'll follow the Road for *days* before you reach the city! I'm on my way there now. Ride with me--it will be far quicker than walking!"

Morgan knew what his mother had told him about riding with strangers, but he was not sure that the same rules applied to a fantasy world; at any rate, his feet were beginning to ache,

and she seemed like a cordial lady. Therefore, he accepted her offer and climbed into the carriage, finding it rather lavish. Plush velvet seats, silk curtains, and gilded handles adorned the interior. The pomp of the coach seemed appropriate for the woman who sat across from him, for she was clad in a bejeweled blue dress with blue gloves on her hands. An excessive amount of makeup covered her face, and her blond hair was crowned with a dainty white hat with a feather in it. She fanned herself a few times and asked, “What’s your name, boy?”

“Morgan.”

“That’s strange! Your name is backwards. You must be from the Mountain Country-- those folk are an odd bunch.”

That everyone believed his name was backwards was beginning to aggravate Morgan, but as the woman was so kind as to offer him transportation to the City of Towns, he decided to change the subject. “Why is no one moving? The road ahead is clear.”

The lady seemed slightly offended at his comment. “I’m well aware of *that*, but why would we move when no one has told us to go?”

Morgan furled his brow. “Well, it’s just that--usually--you go until you come to a stop sign.”

“Silliness!” the lady laughed. “It’s quite rude to go unless you’ve been told to. You wouldn’t serve fish to an elephant, would you?”

“I don’t suppose so.”

“Indeed not. And you would not play cards with a jackalope, would you?”

“There’s no such thing as a jackalope.”

“Wrong. They’re very real, and they’re awful cheaters,” she replied. “So, no, you would not play cards with a jackalope. In the same way, you don’t go unless someone tells you to.”

Morgan did not follow her logic but, again, did not want to be impolite; thus, he kept his mouth closed. Only a few moments passed before someone on the street yelled, “Go!” And with that, all the traffic on the street lurched forward. The four ostriches drawing the coach strained to get the square wheels moving and toiled to keep them in motion, while the combined effect of the cobblestone streets and irregular wheels jolted Morgan all over his seat. Though the coach jostled the lady back and forth, too, she appeared rather accustomed to it and went about fanning herself and gazing at the scenery outside the window. After a few minutes, she turned back to Morgan.

“What business does a simple Mountain-dweller have in the City of Towns--no offense to you, I mean.”

Morgan wondered how that might not be offensive if he were a Mountain-dweller but, nonetheless, replied, “I’m trying to get back home. You see, I woke up in the middle of a wood, quite uncertain where I was--”

“Were you certainly uncertain?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Well,” the lady said, crossing her legs, “it is only that you cannot be uncertain unless you are certain that you are uncertain.”

“Yes, you can!” Morgan cried, frustrated.

“Why not?”

“Because you’re uncertain!”

“But if you aren’t certainly uncertain, you’re uncertainly uncertain, which is a rather miserable and perplexing state.”

Morgan scratched his head. “I guess so. Where I’m from, we normally just say uncertain.

That we are certainly uncertain is implied.”

“Hmp!” the lady huffed. “You mountain bumpkins are *very* uncivil! You know it’s rude to imply something--you might as well come out and say it.”

Now, Morgan was beginning to get offended with the creatures of this world in general, for they were rather blunt. He grinned sarcastically at the woman and scooted close to the window to observe the scenery, hoping that she would stop speaking to him. For the majority of the journey, she did stop, and when she did talk, he refrained from giving long answers. All he wanted was to reach the City of Towns and get back to Cincinnati--he had no interest in her silly talk. Most children might be thrilled at the thought of being transported to a strange new world, but not him. He desired to be back in the real world, orderly and sensible, with his dear mother. Oh, how he missed her! Tears swelled in his eyes, and it took all his might to keep from weeping in front of the lady. The landscape could not roll by quickly enough.

After several random stops (and the subsequent cry of “Go!” from someone in the area), they arrived near sunset in the City of Towns--a city no less bizarre than Morgan had imagined it might be. The walls and the sprawling castle in the north of the city were constructed entirely of sand; on occasion, parts of the wall would collapse, prompting several guards to scurry to it, equipped with shovels and buckets to repair it. The houses within the walls came in impractical shapes of all kinds--circles, hexagons, spirals, hearts, and so on. Fountains were scattered liberally throughout the city, but instead of water, they spouted various drinks; the merry citizens of the city gathered round them with empty glasses waiting for their favorite refreshment to gush out. A few trees dotted the town as well, swirling with that pink luminescence that Morgan had observed earlier. The city was indeed peculiar, but there was a wonder about it that secretly enchanted Morgan. Still, his mind was set on reaching Cincinnati again.

The lady gave him directions to the Traveler's Office, where she said Old Sputterer could help him. However, on the way there, he had to ask for directions several different times from several passersby, for he found that the streets were laid out much like the Road he had just traveled--looping and curving and twisting without any purpose whatsoever. Nevertheless, he did eventually reach the office around 9:00 that night. He opened the door towards him, ringing a bell hung on the outside of the building. The interior of the office was mostly empty, featuring only a desk and a bookshelf recessed in the wall high above the floor, accessible only by a staircase leading straight up to it. A bell sat upon the desk with a note attached to it that read, "RING THE BELL FOR ASSISTANCE: OTHERWISE, DON'T." Morgan lightly tapped it.

Within a few moments, a short elderly man with thin white hair, a long white mustache that drooped almost to his waist, and small, circular glasses perched on the tip of his nose burst out of a door behind the desk. He sputtered a few times, blowing his long whiskers away from his mouth. "Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said, sputtering all the time. "Didn't hear you come in."

"You might have if the bell over the door were on the inside of the building," Morgan suggested, but the man ignored him.

"Where can I get ya, lad?"

"Cincinnati," came the reply, but for good measure, he added, "Ohio."

"Mmmm," said the man, blowing his mustache out of his mouth again. "I've been 'round here a long time--never heard of a place like that."

"Please," Morgan pleaded, beginning to cry. "It's on earth. I have no idea where I am, but I need to get back to earth--just somewhere on earth! Please!"

Old Sputterer stroked his mustachios. "Earth. Hmm. Now, that is familiar. 'Nother fella

like you came through here a long time ago tryin' to get to the same place.”

“So, you can get me there?” cried Morgan, a note of hopefulness in his voice.

Old Sputterer pushed his lenses up his nose and looked at Morgan with a solemn gaze.

“Boy, if there’s a way there, I haven’t found it. I’m sorry.”

He knew it. He knew it all along. He was stuck there. Weeping, he stormed out of the Traveler’s Office and fell down on the now silent street. A light flurry of snow was beginning to fall as a dark cloud revealed the moon’s stoic light. A terrible chill came over him. If his mother were there, she would scold him for not wearing his jacket, but now, he would have taken a scolding over the loneliness that pervaded his heart. He did not have a house, a bed, or even food. Poor, poor Morgan lay there on the icy stone streets of a foreign world he wished he could escape and sobbed bitterly over a world to which he could only travel in the ever-fading fields of memory until the end of his days.