

## **The Forest Inside Me**

### **By Jacq A**

In the world above and below is beauty;  
The speckled stars that crowd the sky  
At night, in their duty  
To illuminate those who live below,  
Where blackness turns to indigo,  
Until the pale yellow of the sun beaks through  
And cold grey light of dawn changes the hue.  
We at last can see  
Epping Forest in it's early splendour - a huge gathering of trees.  
In the middle of all this, a human child lay,  
Far from the roads and old pathways.  
A little wild girl eating nuts and berries  
Thankful for the food that filled her belly.  
But she was hungry for so much more:  
Some human contact - she couldn't even be sure  
If she could remember how to speak to another.  
It had been so long, and there had been no other,  
Save the hikers, the random rider on horseback  
Who never looked up to see her hiding in her shack.

"Will I be alone forever?"  
Says Forest Jacq in her shelter,  
Pulling torn rags around her little frame  
As she sits shivering in a little treehouse she has made.  
"I watch the seasons flicker around me;  
The small animals and birds my only company.  
Yet when the night turns cold I am left alone,  
And no burrow or nest welcomes me as a home.  
I feel I am old before my time,  
Or that the passage of clock hands are held fast,  
And oh my  
I am set in amber like a bug preserved eternally:  
My little body trapped, a decoration adorning the tree."

From another part of her splintered mind  
Came the voice of her brother torn from reality and time.  
"My little sister, do not be sad.  
Your freedom, your escape is a thing many wish they could have.  
I wish I could reach across the divide  
To hold you in my arms, to comfort you and try  
To remind you that you're special and strong.  
But I cannot do it while our host feels they don't belong.  
I admire the things that you have done.  
Your survival in the forest is only just one,  
And I will protect you as much as I can.  
Loneliness is something I can truly understand."

Says the little wild girl,

“Do not tell me that I am strong  
When the pain, the ache of solitude is never gone.  
As much as I love the forest around me,  
My most ardent wish is to have a family.  
I want to be held, to be safe and free  
With others who won’t hurt and abuse me.  
I want to awaken and not be alone.  
Is that so much to ask, for affection and a home?  
I am afraid, that much is true and real,  
For the family I had before often mistreated me.  
And one day they took me here and I never left;  
Only the shell of my little self returned home but yet  
Somehow I survived in the forest green and brown.  
Now aloneness is the only thing that surrounds me like a shroud.  
But I’m not dead, I’m alive just like you,  
And what kind of life must I live through?”

Says her brother,  
“I have seen others just like you and I.  
I have witnessed them through their own eyes.  
I have watched a little girl, smaller than you  
Be brutalised and told it’s her fault, a lie as truth.  
I moved through the crowd of men all around her;  
I placed myself in harm’s way, with my arms surrounding her.  
But when I did, she disappeared, splintered from the host,  
And I was left to take her place, a victim for the most  
Violent men with violent intent, our own father among them.  
But I could not look the other way when a tiny girl was victim.  
I gladly stood and faced the storm of whatever the men inflicted.  
I protected her, I could do no less and this I know is true.  
Lizzie would never have survived, and the host would follow suit.  
We survive to let the host grow up to be here today.  
You cannot see them, but they have been here  
Since their mind threatened to break.  
When they manifested as Lizzie at only three,  
The only way to survive was to create you and me.  
There are others out there you have never met,  
For the abuse and violence rarely left.  
Our host first tried to ignore us, but yet  
We surfaced through dreams and nightmares that meant  
That we troubled them, and they thought themselves mad.  
But we were a natural result of all the bad  
All the terrible things a three year old had to face.  
So to meet you now, I know there is a place  
Where we can help each other to live.  
A better life with all the love I can give.”

The little wild girl shook with tears as her brother spoke.  
The little tree house trembled as emotions made her choke.  
She moved her fingers in a language of her own.  
She signed a message of sadness and pain:  
“I just want to go home!”

And now you tell me this world isn't real;  
That it's all a figment of a fractured mind that feels  
Overwhelmed by things she couldn't face,  
So she created me and doing so sealed my pitiful fate.  
God said, 'It is not right that man sleeps alone.'  
Early in the Bible, I read that Adam was sole  
Among the living creatures who had never seen another like him.  
And here I am in an Eden of sorts, trapped, and the fact is so daunting,  
That I am losing hope: I'm so tired and unhappy.  
What can I do to escape and end this existence for me?  
The host may have once needed me, but did they ever consider my thoughts?  
Did they create me with no regard, to be discarded like I am naught?  
But a crutch, a howling beast to fend off the angry men?  
Do they even know that I am so sad? Do they know a little wild girl is abandoned?"

When next her brother spoke, his voice was low and sad;  
"Reality is ever-changing inside and out of this land.  
The forest can become a place to rest for the others.  
I'm not lying when I say we all need somewhere  
To be safe and free so we can recover.  
I was already a teenager when I came into being;  
I could understand better the reasons for seeing  
Escape on the inside instead of running away,  
For things were very different for black kids in those days.  
The host would have left one hell and straight into another:  
A black child alone in the 1970s with no father, no mother.  
They would have died, bereft and alone.  
I could not bear to imagine her bought and sold  
Like a little slave, like a body to be used then thrown aside.  
I'm sorry if that's not what you want to hear when you're stuck inside."

The little wild girl was full of rage:  
"How dare you tell me I can't feel this way?  
If you knew how I suffered and cried,  
Then hell would be a trip to the seaside.  
You speak of slavery like an ancient thing,  
But you know nothing of the life I had before I hid  
Among the trees, far from grabbing vicious hands.  
The scars I carry are now my battle-plan.  
I'll soon defeat the nightmares that thrash around my head at night.  
Just because you placed yourself in harm's way,  
You have no right to ignore what I say.  
Are you the master of this world?  
Do you hold the keys?  
Do you say the host has the real power,  
But you really just come and go as you please?  
You're no better than my old family:  
Your words of peace will never quieten me.  
Now go back to whatever place you came.  
I'd rather be alone than suffer promises as pain."  
The wild girl climbed up and out of the shelter she had made.  
She lost herself in the canopy of dappled light and tree-bought shade,

And there she remained until the sounds of London did fade.

The other parts of the mind were brought to awareness  
By the anger the hurt and the split in consciousness.  
Munro stepped forward first, the forest a scene  
She had never forgot, not even in fitful dreams.  
Her hands moved in jerky movement, a foreign language to her  
Only seen when waking, with no way to refer  
To the meaning of each specific expression,  
But somehow she knew the essence of the words in question.  
“Forest Jacq!” She cried out. “Come down and speak.  
Larry is worried for you, don’t let me seek  
You down like you’re a creature, a pet  
Who ran away and now regrets  
Leaving her home for the wild world outside  
Only to lose herself and wish she had a friend by her side.”

“Go away!” Forest Jacq shouted from above in the trees.  
“Nobody called you here, Munro. Just leave me in peace.  
You’re another of those cursed folk  
Who treat my existence as a project, a sick joke.  
How many more will come here and try  
To convince me to stay in this green prison and while  
You have freedom of sorts outside with the host,  
Who’s an ignorant fool who couldn’t handle the most  
Pathetic things that happened long ago,  
So she conjured up this place cos her mind was broke.”

Munro replied,  
“She was just a kid when it all began.  
You’re right when you say she’s broken,  
And all that started decades ago.  
The host has grown, but you’re never truly alone.  
There are four others within, here for Outside Jacq,  
But those people who hurt you are never coming back.  
Time moved on, Jacq is almost fifty.  
See, you are of the country, and I am of the city;  
The others live in times and spaces of different kinds:  
Larry, the seventies in North London,  
And me, the eighties in the East, though I tried  
To escape by sneaking out of windows at night,  
And pretending I didn’t care, but all that was a lie.  
It’s hard for me to show emotion without being scared  
That another will use that to trap and snare.  
I can’t let my guard down, just secretly yearn  
And pray I will be left alone when I go to bed,  
For the ones who hurt me were sister and brother: both women and men.”

Forest Jacq threw up her hands: “Why are you telling me this? Why do you feel the need,  
To inform me of your wretched life when the host left the scene?  
If you can’t help me then go back where you belong.  
The future is a dream to me, return to the 80’s where you came from.

I only want to live in peace and be part of a family;  
Why is that so hard for you to understand? Why so hard for you to see?  
If the host truly grew up to become all these people,  
Then send the one with intelligence to understand this principal.  
I never asked to be born here. I never wanted to stay.  
Only desperation and fear has made me remain.  
I care not one bit about the host who made me;  
I want only to be loved, to be held: a family.”

The little wild girl pulled off sticks and twigs from the tree around her.  
She threw them down at Munro in hope she would scatter  
And go away, far from the forest and leave the little wild girl in peace.  
But soon tears welled and the wild girl cried: her motions and exertion found bitter  
release.  
She turned in shame, dropped down to the mud, the ground at her feet.  
She cried and called out to the sky, “Let me go home, please!  
Or let me die here in this place where urban grey meets country green.  
The barriers of Epping Forest: the car park near Snaresbrook,  
The river Lea, the river Roding, and the places that took  
Travellers of the most hateful kind from Essex, London and Hertfordshire  
Into this place, to abuse and plunder the things, the kids they found here.  
For I will not cross these boundaries if nothing good awaits me.  
Bring the wisest among the alters, bring the one who really loves me.  
If any such personality exists, don’t let me remain alone.  
Bring the one, if they are present, to help me find a way home.”

Said Munro, “What the hell are you saying? We all care for each other.  
How can part of the whole hate another?”  
She moved closer to the little wild girl,  
“You insult us all. You insult this world.  
When the host became an adult, she gave us all a choice  
Stay or go. Shut your mouth or use your voice.  
Pretty sure she didn’t expect a whining little child  
A wild ragged creature in a tree house who hides,  
And then expects us to cater to her needs:  
To ask the impossible and plant the seeds  
Of discontent, why don’t you be thankful for what you have?  
It’s better than being stabbed in the back  
By those all around, never feeling welcome, like an orphan who found  
She was unwanted, left on a grimy doorstep.  
Being raised by wolves would have been my preference.”  
Munro cursed to herself as she turned and disappeared.  
Forest Jack threw a stone at the retreating figure but then heard  
The wind start to howl up in the trees.  
The wind grew even stronger, and knocked her off her feet.  
The storm descended.  
All the trees bended.  
Forest Jacq held on to the ground for dear life.  
When at last she opened her eyes,  
The wind suddenly ceased, and in her line of sight,  
An apparition floated, barely touching the ground.  
It was a smiling older woman, with skin glowing copper brown.

She wore strips of cloth that flowed with her movements,  
As if it was animate, the motions independent.  
The silent woman stretched out a hand,  
And spoke without words, but Forest Jacq could understand.  
This ghostly figure  
Didn't want to hurt her,  
But possibly to help and heal,  
Though she seemed transparent, so ethereal.  
The little wild girl felt drawn to the woman  
But after so many years of pain, she had to be certain  
This wasn't someone with violent intent,  
Who appeared as an angel, but was really a serpent.  
For wasn't the Devil an angel too?  
She recalled the Bible teachings and church she'd been put through.  
It made her cautious as she inched away,  
Yet the woman only floated closer so she could stay  
Nearer to the wild little girl, and all the while smiling,  
Reaching out as if to embrace and surround  
Forest Jacq as she sat cowering on the ground.  
"Who are you? What do you want?"  
The wild girl asked, focusing her thoughts.  
When the ghost remained silent after a time,  
Forest Jacq repeated the questions with hands that signed.  
The ghost shook her head, opened her arms so wide,  
So Forest Jacq took a breath, stood and stepped inside  
Gentle arms that slowly closed around her.  
The wild girl felt a swelling of peace and calm - a gentle power,  
And though the ghost still did not speak,  
Forest Jacq knew this was indeed the one she had wanted to seek.  
The words of Shadoe were not heard by her ears,  
But felt in Forest Jacq's heart, loud and clear.  
She pressed herself closer, felt it resonate in her soul;  
The silent sentences of kindly Shadoe.

"We all love you, all in our way,  
Even Munro though she doesn't always know the right things to say.  
My little baby, you can leave this forest anytime.  
You don't have to be certain of what lays outside.  
No human can predict their future life;  
You must have faith your strength will do you right.  
Or if you want to rest in peace,  
After decades of struggle, you can go to sleep  
Inside the host where you will be safe  
For however long you want. You can take a place  
Within them, integrated into the whole,  
Where your love, skills and talents will benefit the host.  
You can help them find a home, live in peace.  
It's your decision; they would never force you to be  
Anything or anywhere you didn't want to be, it's true.  
When abuse happened we were powerless,  
But now you get to choose.  
Just know whatever you do, sweet child,

Outside Jacq will do their best to care for you.”  
All these words were said silently,  
Caught on a breath of a breeze.  
The tears returned to Forest Jacq once more  
For Shadoe had put her at such ease.  
“This place is lovely,” said Shadoe, “The others would love it here,  
But I recognise you want it to all disappear.  
Think on your choice, you can always change your mind.  
Many things are possible for this world on the inside.  
I came here to talk to you and explain  
That in love you were created;  
You were never meant for fear or pain.

Forest Jacq said,  
“I want to stay with you, you treated me so well.  
I wish you were my mother, to take me from the forest where I dwell.  
Won't you have some pity?  
Don't leave me like the rest, in these woods on the edge of the city  
Where birds make their nest  
But all I have is a tree house. Please don't make me beg.  
Dear Shadoe, you're my only hope to bring this to an end.”

Says Shadoe,  
“I do not know the intricacies of the condition our host has  
But I will stay here with you, sweet child, and give you all the affection I have.  
Though I sense your anger at the host and Lizzie  
Will never be resolved unless you face them directly.  
You are all too connected for this to be ignored:  
The simmering hate,  
The unsaid words  
Will destroy you if you let it run its course.”

Shadoe held Forest Jacq even tighter,  
Then much to the wild girl's surprise, they rose through the trees.  
The night sky a dark speckled scene as they flew higher.

“Where do you live when you're not here?”  
Asked a breathless Forest Jacq,  
Her voice in the night sky crystal clear.

“I stay close by the host's side.  
Like my name, in the shadows of the host's fractured mind.”

Said Forest Jacq, “What is the host like now that time has moved on?  
When were you formed, Shadoe?  
What time do you come from?”

“So many questions, my little baby,” said Shadoe.  
“None of the answers are simple. None of them easy.  
For a little child to hear, there's a lot of pain.  
Before the host had memories of her own, she would be forced to forever change.  
The path of her life, like a stream in the forest blocked and diverted;

Forever trying to find the sea, to return to innocence, but forever thwarted,  
By people who saw her only as something to be used - a child who couldn't yet speak,  
Surrounded by siblings, but always alone, told she was a monster, a freak.  
I've been here as long as she has - half a century in fact,  
As a constant companion to soothe her tears,  
To be a comfort and to welcome her back  
To life when she wished herself dead or tried  
To end it all, I'd tell her with silent words that she was worthy to have a good life."

Shadoe and Forest Jacq floated back down to the trees;  
Their flight powered by a gentle breeze.  
Shadoe emanated heat keeping Forest Jacq warm,  
And the wild girl slept peacefully until dawn  
Crept upon them, yellow and grey in the skies.  
Forest Jacq had never slept so peacefully, besides  
She had always slept alone and untouched.  
Shadoe's embrace had provided so much;  
A feeling of safety the wild girl had yearned for,  
And a soothing presence which was a lot more  
Than she had ever thought to imagine or to dream.  
The gift of sweet Shadoe, almost too much to believe.  
"Come walk with me," Shadoe whispered to Forest Jacq.  
"I want to look more at this place where I feel so relaxed,  
Though I know blood has been shed here over the years,  
Somehow the peace I feel just cannot compare  
To any place I've been before."

The older woman and wild girl floated down  
From the high oak tree and on to the ground.  
They stood and listened if anyone was near,  
But they heard only the wind flutter the trees,  
There was nothing to fear.  
They moved forwards, even deeper into the forest grey and green,  
Past foxes and rodents who did not wish to be seen.  
The little twigs broke under Forest Jacq's feet,  
But Shadoe moved silently, only pausing to speak  
When they reached a small body of water that reflected the sky.  
"Look into the depths," Shadoe said to Forest Jacq. "And try  
To see what else is hidden here, what's escaped your eyes."

Forest Jacq peered into the pool of water,  
And saw the ripples caused by the wind.  
But soon the breeze died down and she was left  
Staring at a new face. She didn't know where to begin  
With the reason why, but the face wasn't her own,  
But a tiny girl with skin so brown, wearing a fancy dress in bright yellow.  
"Who is this?" Asked Forest Jacq, fearing the answer.  
Said Shadoe, "Another reflection of yourself, the keeper of this place, a master.  
Before you ever came into being, Lizzie was here,  
Already splintered by what she was seeing  
Every time she got into her dad's car.  
Tottenham to Epping Forest wasn't all that far,



And the money he got for passing you away  
To strange white men would easily pay  
For the petrol it costs to travel there.  
You see yourself trapped in the water, plagued by fear.”

Says Forest Jacq  
“So she’s trapped here too, isn’t she?  
Like most of us, she lost her liberty  
It’s fitting that she also has to stay  
In the prison she has made.”

Shadoe looked down with sadness on her face.  
“She’s not a prisoner, at least not in this place,  
But a rundown house back in North London  
In the early seventies, replaying scenes that are never done:  
Sometimes realities bleed from one to the other.  
This is what happened here, you can discover  
How the other alters live, maybe even join them.  
This was never meant to be a permanent arrangement.  
Though I’m really glad this forest exists,  
The other alters can come here at least for a bit,  
And relax with you, if your permission’s given.  
The rest are stuck in city landscapes,  
And this forest is like heaven:  
Nobody to hurt them, lots of freedom, plenty of space.  
They can run around, explore and feel at home in this place.  
Munro, the angriest of the lot would even calm down  
If she were surrounded by trees, the green, gold and brown.  
Will you let your siblings in? Do you grant them access?  
Will you let them escape here, let them have a respite from all the distress?”

Forest Jacq bent down to touch the water,  
And the reflection promptly disappeared.  
“Did you plan all this, Shadoe? Is this why you came here?”  
The wild girl’s heart clenched when she asked these things;  
Had another person betrayed her? Had she been lured in?  
But Shadoe put an arm on the wild girl’s shoulder.  
“Deep calls unto deep. We all reflect each other.  
We alters naturally seek out the rest,  
Even if we don’t know why, it’s in our interest.  
What I have found is a paradise of sorts  
Greater than any I’ve seen.  
It is only fitting we use what’s been  
Used as a place of pain into a place of love,  
Of fun and safe rest beneath the sky above.  
I never manipulated you, sweet child.  
I only came when I felt the pain of a little girl who’s wild.  
It’s your choice, I promise I’ll respect it.  
I will never hurt or trick you. I’ll never make you regret this.”

Forest Jacq hugged Shadoe, her pain started to lift,  
And a cautious smile found its way to her lips.

“Okay, I guess it might not be so bad,  
If you and the others came to visit once in a while.  
We’re all connected but it’s really sad  
I never really got to meet them until yesterday.  
If they come here from their reality, I suppose I’ll let them stay.”

And the little wild girl gazed up at the morning sky;  
The way the trees seemed to reach so high,  
So they almost reached the place where azure turned to indigo  
And above that, the blackness of space, which at night would show.

Outside Jacq looked at the scene as it played out in their head.  
Still ashamed a little at the splinters that had led  
To a group of alters brought to being.  
When they were so young, and hadn’t known what they were doing.  
They hoped one day they could live in peace like the alters would  
In time. If only they could!  
This story from outside and within is a way they have attempted  
To communicate with the others: it was not what Outside Jacq had expected.  
But they are glad most of the Alters were able to speak and say  
All the things on their minds, even if it were loneliness and pain.  
Outside Jacq will do their very best to heal and send  
All the alters best wishes, as this story comes to an end.