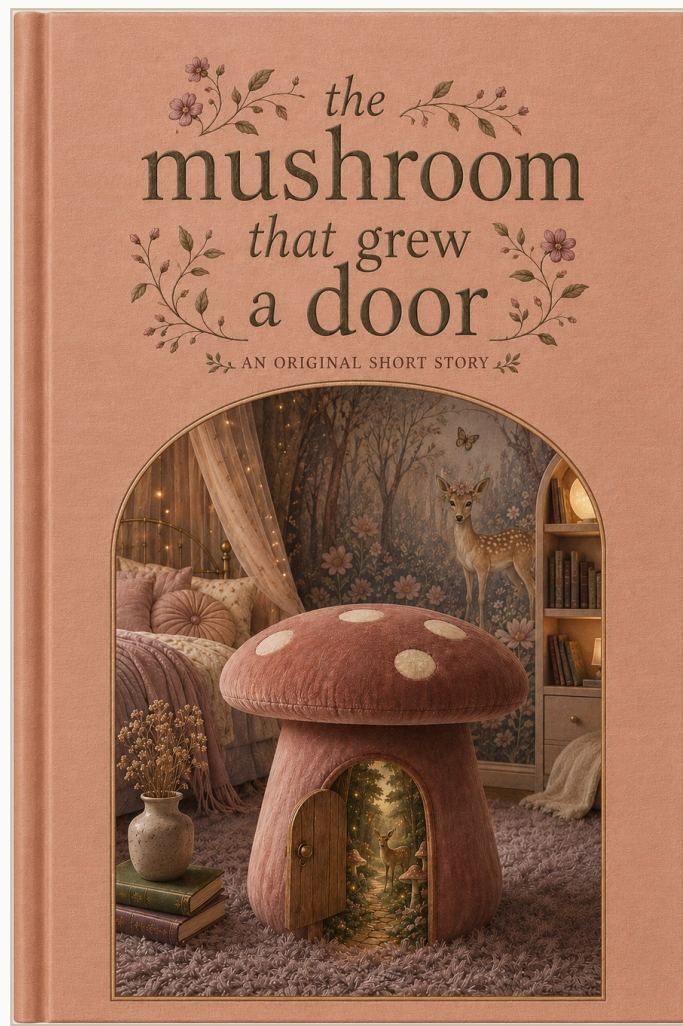


YOUR *Collected* ROOM

AN ORIGINAL SHORT STORY



The Mushroom That Grew a Door

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A story for the fantasy bedroom

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The mushroom stool had been in Lucy's room for exactly three weeks before it grew a door.

Until then, it had behaved exactly like a mushroom-shaped stool should. It sat at the foot of her bed, round and dusty rose, with five cream-colored spots on its velvet top. Lucy sometimes sat on it to pull on her socks. More often, it held yesterday's sweatshirt, or the book she was halfway through.

Grandma had found it at an estate sale. "It looks like something from a fairy tale," she'd said.

Lucy was thirteen. She no longer believed that furniture led to enchanted kingdoms, or that stuffed animals held conversations after midnight. She did believe the stool was excellent for reaching the top shelf of her bookcase — which is what she was doing on Thursday evening when something scratched beneath her sock.

She stepped down. On the mushroom's thick velvet stem was a tiny wooden door, no taller than her thumb — a rounded top, three narrow planks, a brass knob the size of a peppercorn.

She was certain it hadn't been there yesterday.

She tried the knob. It wouldn't turn. She checked every side of the stool for a seam, a hinge, anything. Nothing.

"Okay, weird," she said, to no one.

Then, from the other side of the tiny door, something knocked. Three small taps.

Lucy backed into bed and pulled the blanket over her knees. For ten minutes, nothing happened. Then it knocked again.

She called Grandma.

“Did the mushroom stool always have a little door on it?”

There was a pause. “A door? I don’t remember any door.” Grandma didn’t sound worried, exactly — more like she was thinking about something else entirely. “Well. That’s interesting,” she said, and then asked whether Lucy had eaten dinner yet, which was not helpful at all.

Lucy hung up and looked at the stool with her own eyes. Just a closed door, exactly as before.

Then she picked up her phone and held it up so the camera showed the same spot on the screen.

On the screen, the door was open.

She lowered the phone and looked with her own eyes again — closed. She raised the phone and looked at the screen — open, and glowing, and behind it: not stuffing or wood, but trees. Silver-green trees, and a path winding between enormous mushrooms, and tiny lights drifting through the branches.

And on the path stood a deer — the same deer painted on the mural above her bed.

She looked up. The mural deer was gone. Only flowers remained where it had stood.

A sound came from the stool. Not knocking. Hoofbeats.

Lucy raised the phone again. The deer had moved closer, looking straight through the screen at her. Then it turned and ran.

For reasons she'd have trouble explaining later, Lucy followed — sweeping the phone slowly around her own room, screen held up like a window into somewhere else. Her rug became a field of lavender grass under a violet sky. The canopy over her bed became the peak of a tent rising between trees. The little crescent-moon lamp on her shelf became an actual moon, low enough to touch. The string lights across her wall stopped being lights at all — they were stars, and they made a trail from the stool, across the rug, to the mural.

She followed the trail with her eyes on the screen until it stopped at a painted tree, where a keyhole she'd never noticed sat low among the roots.

“Of course,” she muttered. “A key.”

She knew exactly which one. Grandma had given her a little brass key when she was seven — “What does it open?” “I don’t know. That’s why you should keep it” — and for six years it had sat in the box on her shelf where she kept things she liked but didn’t use: a smooth stone, two friendship bracelets, and, more recently, a blank sketchbook with a sage-green cover, also from Grandma, that Lucy still hadn’t opened because she wasn’t sure the first page would be good enough.

Lucy found the key beneath the bracelets. She held it up. The mushroom door flew open — not just on the screen, but for real. Warm air rushed in, smelling of pine and rain, and the doorway grew: thumb-sized, hand-sized, book-sized, until Lucy could crawl through.

She did.

The forest was enormous and strangely familiar — wallpaper flowers grown waist-high, mushrooms like umbrellas, stars strung between branches. The deer waited for her to stand, then trotted ahead until they reached a clearing with a stone archway standing free of any wall. Carved across the top: THE DOOR OPENS FOR WHAT YOU KEPT.

The deer nudged her pocket. Lucy pulled out the key. “I already used this one.”

The deer nudged again, and Lucy understood. It wasn’t the key she’d kept. It was the idea of it — six years of carrying around something that opened nothing, because some part of her liked believing it might.

She walked through the arch.



On the other side was her own room — every version of it at once. Her old stuffed rabbit on the bed. Paper stars she'd made at six, hanging from the ceiling. A cardboard castle against the wall. Drawings of dragons, a shoebox house, and the ridiculous purple cape she'd worn almost all summer when she was four.

Lucy walked slowly through it, remembering not just the objects but the feeling — that a blanket fort could become a castle if you wanted it badly enough, that an unopened door was exciting simply because you didn't know what was behind it. She'd started thinking that growing up meant leaving all of that behind. Not the stuffed animals — she really had outgrown those. But the wondering. The possibility that an ordinary thing might be more interesting if you looked at it differently.

Behind her, the deer stamped once. The room flickered. The castle vanished, then the stars, then the rabbit.

This place wasn't asking her to stay. It was reminding her what she could take back.

Lucy ran for the arch.

She tumbled through the mushroom door onto her bedroom rug. Behind her, the opening shrank — book-sized, then hand-sized, then smaller than her hand — and for one last second she saw the deer standing beneath the silver-green trees. Then the door was simply gone. Not closed. Not hidden. Gone.

She ran her fingers over the velvet stem. There wasn't even a seam. She'd found an impossible door, and now she'd lost it, and that made her sadder than she expected.

Lucy sat on the rug for a while, turning the brass key over in her hand. Then she looked at the sketchbook on her nightstand — the one she'd never opened, because she'd never been sure the first page would be good enough.

She opened it.

For a moment she just looked at the blank page. Then she drew a tree, and it was not a particularly good tree, and she kept going anyway — mushrooms at its roots, a stone archway, a path of stars. She drew the deer beneath the branches, and behind it, a second path disappearing into a part of the forest she'd never actually seen.

She had no idea where that path went. That was the best part.

By the time she turned off the light, the first page had become a map. The second held a castle built into a tree. On the third, she wrote Things that might be hidden in ordinary places and started a list: the space behind the moon, a staircase under the rug, a train station that only appears during thunderstorms, something living in the walls that steals socks. She laughed at that last one and kept it anyway.

Her room looked ordinary again. The stool was only a stool. The lamp was only a lamp. The deer stood among the painted flowers exactly where it always had.

Lucy climbed into bed and looked at the mural for a long moment.

Nothing had changed. Except now, when she looked at it, she wondered what might be beyond the trees.

For the first time in a long while, she didn't need a magical door to go find out.

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The End

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