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***UNIVERSITY OF THE PEOPLE***

*ENGL 1405-01 World Literature - AY2024-T2*

*Learning Journal Unit 5*

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The genre of the following short story "The Forbidden Forest" is fantasy with mystical forests and magical creatures.

## The Forbidden Forest

Elara tucked her curly red hair behind her pointed ears as she crept past the high stone wall at the edge of Elven city. She knew she wasn't allowed to enter the Forbidden Forest, but ever since she was little, she had felt strangely drawn to it. She had to know what secrets lay within its shadowy depths.

As Elara stepped under the dark canopy, a shiver went through her. It was cooler here and so quiet she could hear her own heartbeat. Sunlight filtered through the leaves in hazy pillars full of dancing dust motes. Strange birds called in the distance and the woody scent of earth and moss enveloped her.

She followed a winding path further into the woods, stopping to pick up interesting feathers or examine peculiar plants and fungi along the way. Slowly the path narrowed until she had to turn sideways to squeeze between the thick tree trunks. Elara was certain no other Elf had ever come this far.

Suddenly, the trees opened into a misty glade. Elara gasped—in the center stood a tall, dark figure with sweeping antlers. A stag! But as it turned to look at her, she saw its eyes were silver pools that reflected the stars. Her people's legends spoke of magical forest guardians, but she'd always thought they were just fables.

Elara knew she should leave, but the magical creature's gaze kept her transfixed. Slowly, she reached out a trembling hand. The stag stepped forward and pressed his nose gently into her

palm. Elara's mind filled with visions of the forest—ancient trees stretching to the horizon, fawns dancing in dappled sunlight, ravens playing tricks on foxes. She saw seasons change and the eternal balance of life and death.

Too soon, the stag pulled away, his eyes still full of stars. He blinked slowly at Elara before turning and melting like smoke between the trees.

Elara made her way back through the dim forest in a daze, leaves and dirt staining her pale green dress. She wriggled under the stone wall just as the sun sank behind the towers of Elven city. She knew the magical stag's blessing would be with her forever. And she was certain this was not the last time she would venture into the Forbidden Forest.