

# Walking Through the Landscape of Faerie

Charles Vess

WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY  
CHARLES DE LINT



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**FAERIE**  
*magazine*  
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WALKING THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE OF FAERIE.  
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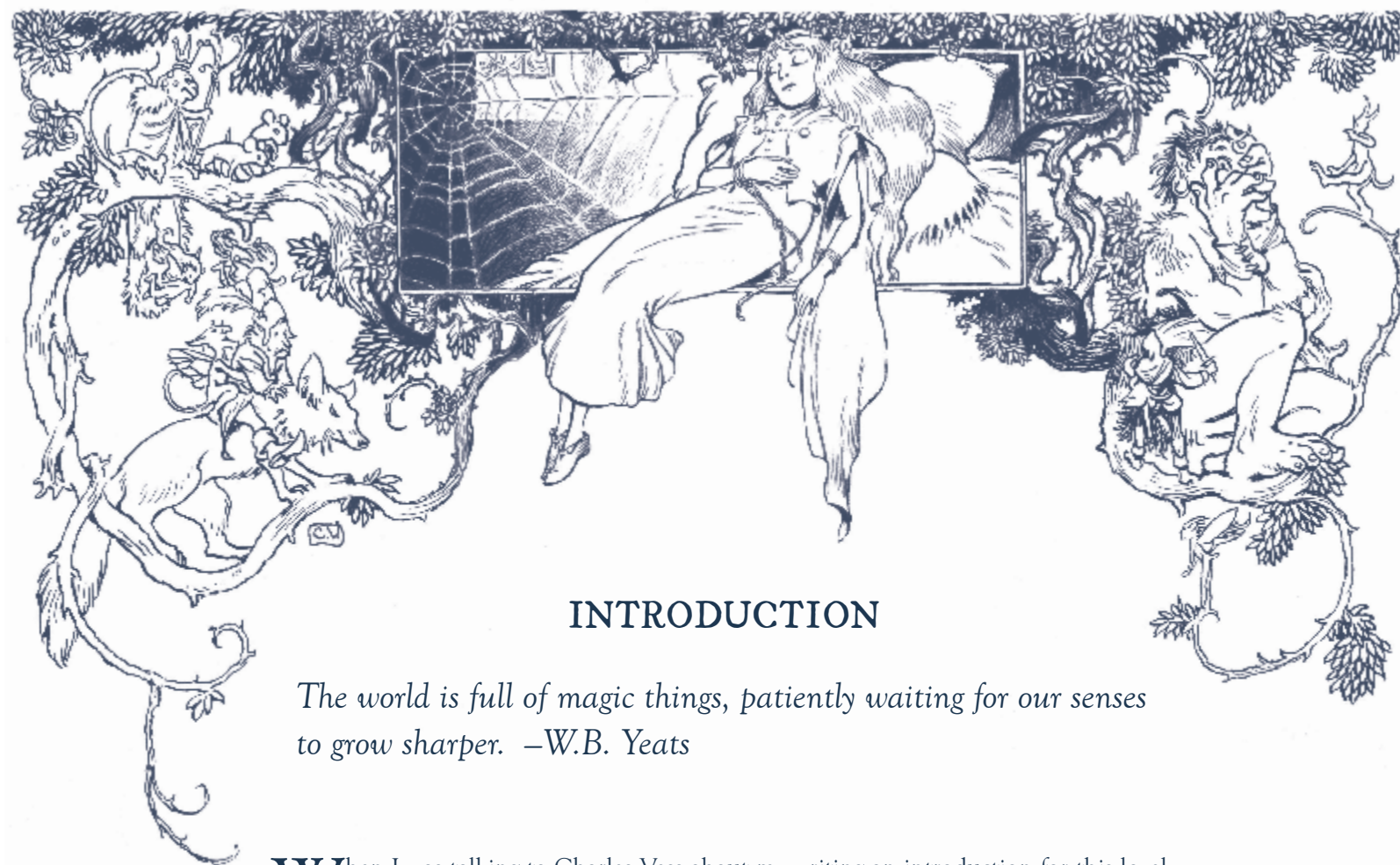
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## INTRODUCTION

*The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses  
to grow sharper. –W.B. Yeats*

When I was talking to Charles Vess about my writing an introduction for this lovely book, he told me a curious thing about himself, one that I immediately knew was mistaken. He said that it had taken him a long time to have any real appreciation for poetry. I considered arguing the point with him right then but decided to hold my tongue and make it here instead.

I would beg to differ and say that at an early point in Charles's life—and certainly from when I first began corresponding with him in the late 1970s—he had already gained a deep appreciation for poetry. He just wasn't aware of it as such because he didn't recognize it in the lyricism of the raggedy lines and sometimes unruly verses that had already made a profound impact on his life.

I'm speaking of balladry here, something that Vess has loved for as long as I've known him. We used to talk all the time about the narrative ballads of the British Isles and his own Appalachian Mountains. We just never referred to them as poetry. But that's what they are. Perhaps not as popular as the free verse that came into prominence from the early part of the last century and onward, but those ballads are poetry nonetheless.

And just as the lyrics of those ballads go hand in hand with their music and performance, so do the poetry and quotations gathered here go hand in hand with Charles's evocative art. The whole of the book paints a portrait of yearning and appreciation for a world that welcomes kindness, magic, whimsy, and pastoral beauty. Neither the art nor the words ignore the shadows that touch each of us at some point or other. But rather than wallow in the dark and despair, they embrace hope and the idea that viewing the world with childlike wonder is far from childish.

Charles has been discerning in his choice of words to accompany the art in this collection, but to my mind, the real heart of the book is a reproduction of the centerpiece mural, "Into the Green: The Art of Charles Vess," an art exhibition that appeared in summer 2015 at the William King Museum of Art in Abingdon, Virginia. Surrounding the paintings and drawings that might be expected at any such exhibit, Vess's 150-foot mural was impossible to miss, beckoning viewers to follow its tale from wall to wall.



Painted directly on the museum's walls, it was a huge undertaking, but there's no denying that Charles likes a challenge. You only have to consider "The Jack Tales" wall, a 750-square-foot red brick bas-relief at the Southwest Virginia Community College; or his larger than life fairy fountain, "Midsummer Play," an 800-pound, 16-foot-tall bronze sculpture featuring Titania and other characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, commissioned by the Barter Theatre in Abingdon.

The difference is those major sculptural artworks will last beyond his lifetime. But when Vess's 2015 museum art show finished, the mural disappeared forever—painted over and preserved only in photographs and the scaled-down version you'll find in these pages. Yet, even lacking the impact of its massive appearance on the walls of the William King Museum of Art, that work distills perfectly the themes and contents of the book that you hold in your hands, reflecting the magic contained herein with an illustrated narrative that cuts to the heart of what Charles has to say.

It depicts the journey into the dark wood, the confrontations with blind beggars, giants, witches, and dragons. You can see them as metaphors for the challenges we meet every day in our lives. Or you can absorb them as simple adventures, the way a child might, and let their lessons seep down into your soul the way that all good stories do.



The happy marriage of words and art here also highlights one of the great things about the arts. It's been said that the poet's job is to make us see the familiar through new eyes, directing our attention to things we might not consider or no longer pay attention to because we've seen them so often we forget the impact they can have.

I might argue that's the job of all art.

The verses, quotations, and paintings presented here do just that, sometimes in tandem, sometimes giving us different perspectives. There are rich details to savor, wisdom to ponder, and plenty of whimsy to make us smile.



Those of you already familiar with some of these paintings might find it odd to have different texts accompanying them—that is, different from the ones that you already know and love. But that's the beauty of art. There's no one story that lies in that golden space between a work of art and what we bring to it.

We are each individuals. So we each have our own stories.

And what's lovely about Charles Vess's paintings is how they can jump-start those stories of ours and send them in new directions. Charles has certainly jump-started several of my own stories, and I am forever grateful for any opportunity to share any page with him.

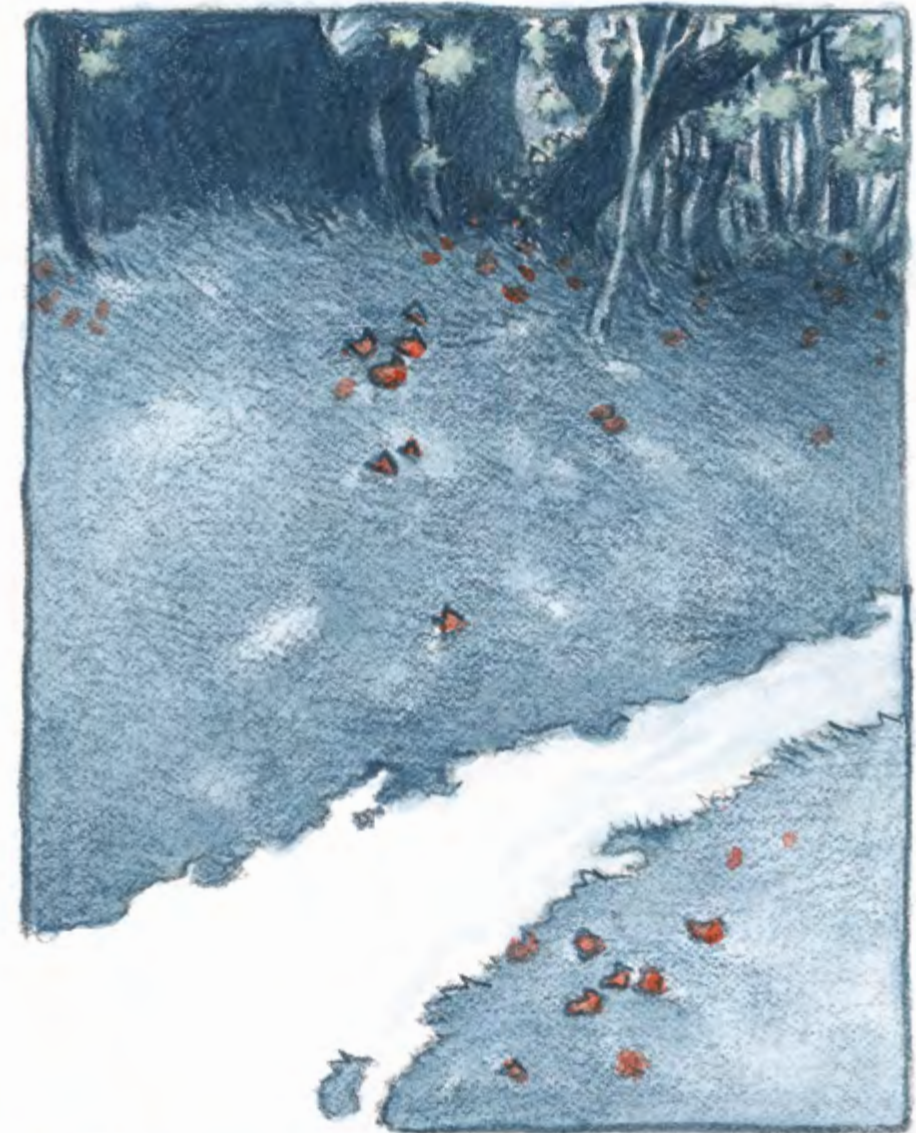
—Charles de Lint  
Summer 2016

This one's for Ray Bradbury and Lord Dunsany.



*"We are the sum of all the stories we have been told."*

INTO THE GREEN  
by Charles Vess



**A** LONG TIME AGO...

A dark, atmospheric illustration of a forest. The scene is dominated by large, gnarled tree trunks in shades of dark blue and black. A path of light-colored ground leads from the foreground into the distance, winding between the trees. The ground is covered with small green plants and some fallen leaves. The overall mood is mysterious and somber.

OR PERHAPS IT WAS  
JUST YESTERDAY...

WE ALL LIVED TOGETHER  
IN A GREAT DARK FOREST.





THERE,  
YOU  
WERE A  
PRINCE  
ON A  
QUEST,

OR  
A PRINCESS  
WITH A SECRET.

A CAT SHOD IN  
SEVEN LEAGUE BOOTS,

OR A MOUSE WHO  
WEARS A CROWN

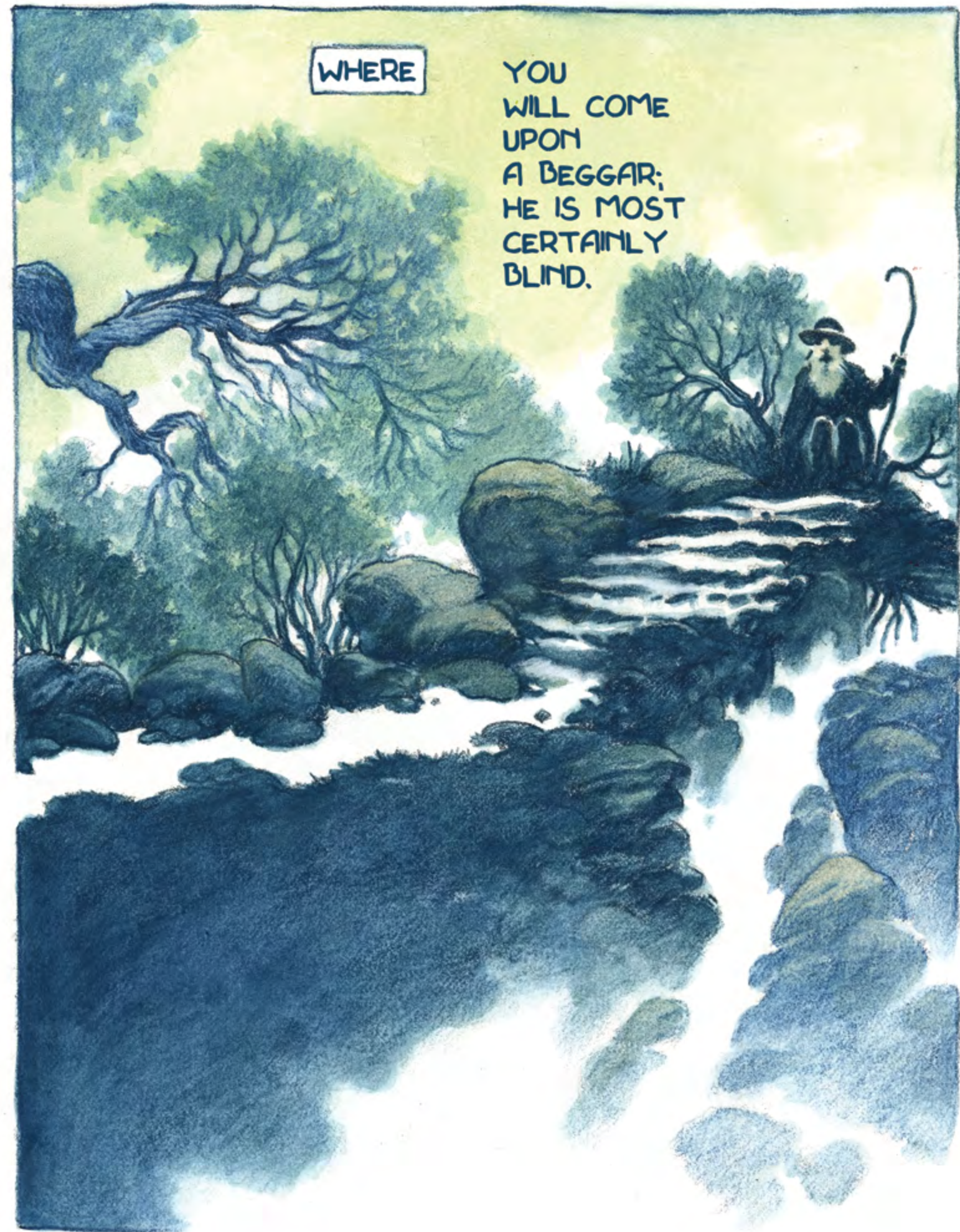
RIDING ON THE BACK  
OF A BRINDLED HOUND.



YOU ARE  
TRAVELING  
TOGETHER . . .

OR APART,

ALONG A  
WINDING ROAD . . .



WHERE

YOU  
WILL COME  
UPON  
A BEGGAR;  
HE IS MOST  
CERTAINLY  
BLIND.



IF YOU CHOOSE TO DO SO  
YOU WILL SIT DOWN  
BESIDE HIM

AND OUT OF  
KINDNESS

SHARE  
WHAT FOOD  
YOU HAVE.

IN RETURN, HE  
WILL GIFT YOU  
WITH SOMETHING.

A BOAT THAT CAN  
FLY OVER LAND . . .

A SWORD.

A BOOK.



WHATEVER  
YOU NEED

TO OVERCOME

WHATEVER IT IS THAT  
YOU WILL SOON CONFRONT  
IN THE DEEP HEART OF  
THAT DARK WOOD.

A WOOD THAT SURROUNDS US  
ALL, EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES.



THERE MAY BE A  
DRAGON THERE

OR A GIANT,

A WITCH,

AN UNLOVING SPOUSE,

OR AN UNCARING BOSS.



IT DOES NOT MATTER  
WHICH

YOU WILL MEET  
THEM THERE.

AND

IF YOU DO NOT STRAY  
FROM THE PATH

YOU WILL VANQUISH  
THEM ALL.



BUT BE  
WARNED

THE SHARP BRANCHES  
OF THE WOOD

WILL CATCH AT  
YOUR THOUGHTS

AND . . .

TWIST THEM TOWARD  
DESPAIR

IF

YOU LET THEM.



ON ONE DAY  
OR PERHAPS  
IN  
FOREVER  
AND A DAY,  
SOON  
OR NOT . . .

YOU WILL  
COME TO A  
TOWER.


INSIDE IT IS THAT  
WHICH YOU SEEK.

THERE,

IN THE HEART OF THE  
HEART OF THE WOOD

YOU WILL FIND YET  
ANOTHER HEART.

IT IS  
YOUR OWN.



AND THEN, WITH IT HELD  
BEATING IN YOUR HANDS

YOU WILL BE ABLE  
TO MAKE YOUR  
CHOICE.

THEN

AND ONLY  
THEN

CAN YOU BECOME  
THAT DRAGON,

OR THAT WITCH,

OR

A LOVING SPOUSE.



OR OFFER A  
KIND WORD TO  
THOSE WHO WORK  
WITH YOU.

THE CHOICE  
IS ALWAYS

YOURS.





*"I shut my eyes in order to see."*

*—Paul Gauguin*

## LOOKING AHEAD

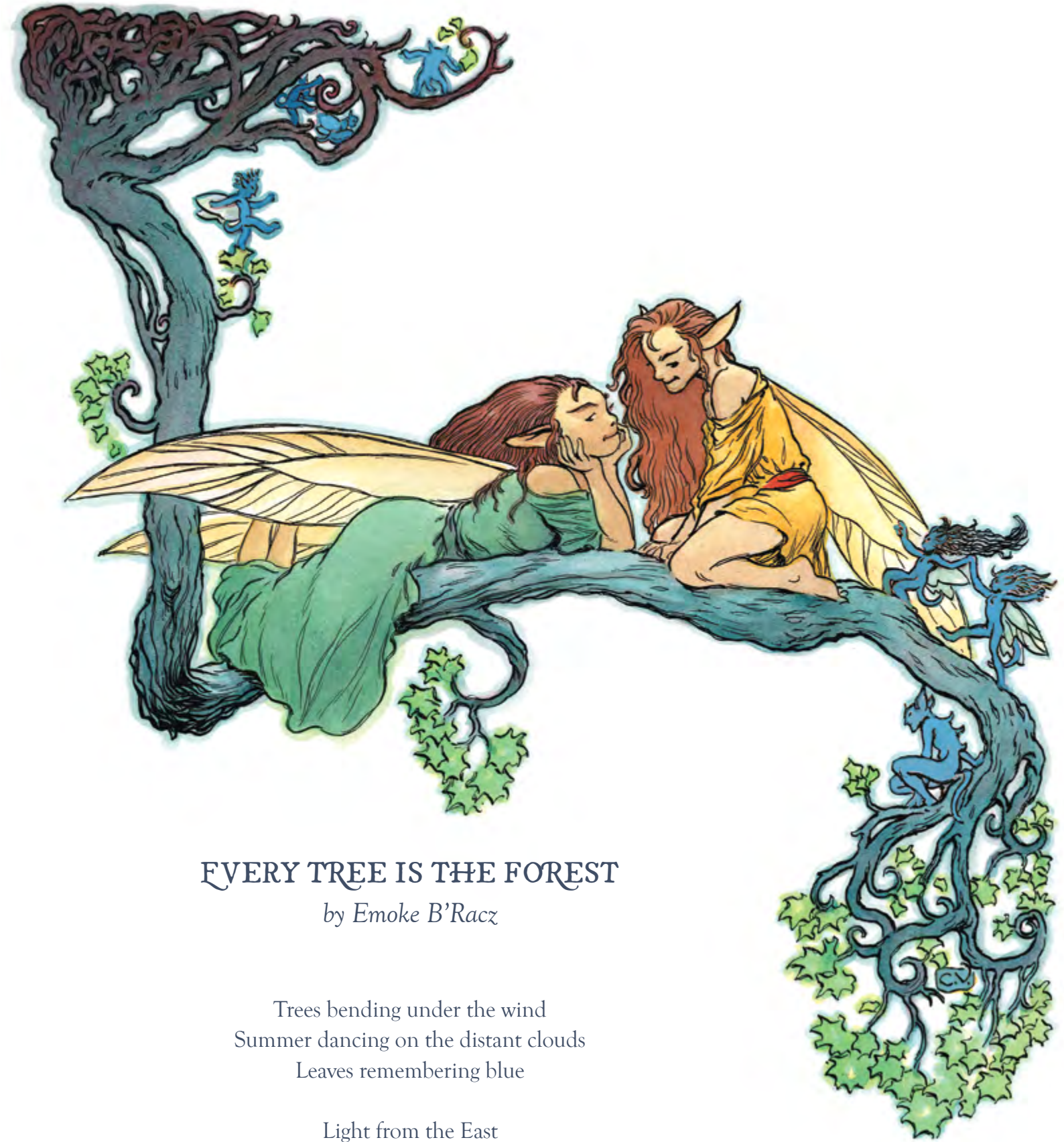
by Charles Vess

Looking  
up a road  
choked with the debris  
of thumb  
tap, tap, tapping  
on keyboard  
and  
droning 24/7 news,  
there is another landscape.

There,  
your imagination  
will be  
set free.

There,  
you may  
smile again,  
laugh again,  
even cry freely again  
and there  
you will  
savor the moment  
when  
you begin to tell  
your own  
story.





## EVERY TREE IS THE FOREST

by Eموke B'Racz

Trees bending under the wind  
Summer dancing on the distant clouds  
Leaves remembering blue

Light from the East  
Illuminates the trees  
Catfish keep low in the river beds  
Snow comes surely from the West

Every tree is the forest





*"Fairy tales don't tell children that dragons exist. Children already know that.*

*Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed."*

*—G.K. Chesterton*

## IN THE STORY MADE OF DAWN

by Jane Yolen

*“In the story made of dawn ...”  
from a Diné (Navajo) Medicine Chant*

Here, on the rock,  
the Story Made of Dawn  
touches first.

Light pours down,  
a rain of it,  
as if sky weeps.

Here in the grass,  
the Story Made of Dawn  
touches next.

It braids light  
through each startled blade,  
linking them for morning.

Here in the earth,  
the Story Made of Dawn  
touches last,  
soaking into hungry ground,  
giving bright life,  
if only for the moment.

I touch rock, grass, earth.  
Light covers me, uncovers me,  
starting with my hands.





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• THERE ONCE WAS A HILL OF STANDING STONES • THERE ONCE WAS A HILL WITH A BIRCH TREE GROWN • THERE ONCE WAS A HILL WHERE THE LORD AND LADY STOOD •  
 AND I SAY TO YOU NOW, IF YOU BUT OPEN YOUR HEART THEY DANCE THERE STILL



THERE ONCE WAS A HILL WHERE THE FAIR FOLK DANCED • AND I



## AUTUMN'S SONG

by Theodora Goss

You are not alone.

If they could, the oaks would bend down to take your hands,  
 bowing and saying, Lady, come dance with us.  
 The elder bushes would offer their berries to hang  
 from your ears or around your neck.  
 The wild clematis known as Traveler's Joy  
 would give you its star-shaped blossoms for your crown.  
 And the maples would offer their leaves,  
 russet and amber and gold,  
 for your ball gown.

The wild geese flying south would call to you, Lady,  
 we will tell your sister, Summer, that you are well.

You would reply, Yes, bring her this news—  
 the world is old, old, yet we have friends.

The squirrels gathering nuts, the garnet hips  
 of the wild roses, the birches with their white bark.

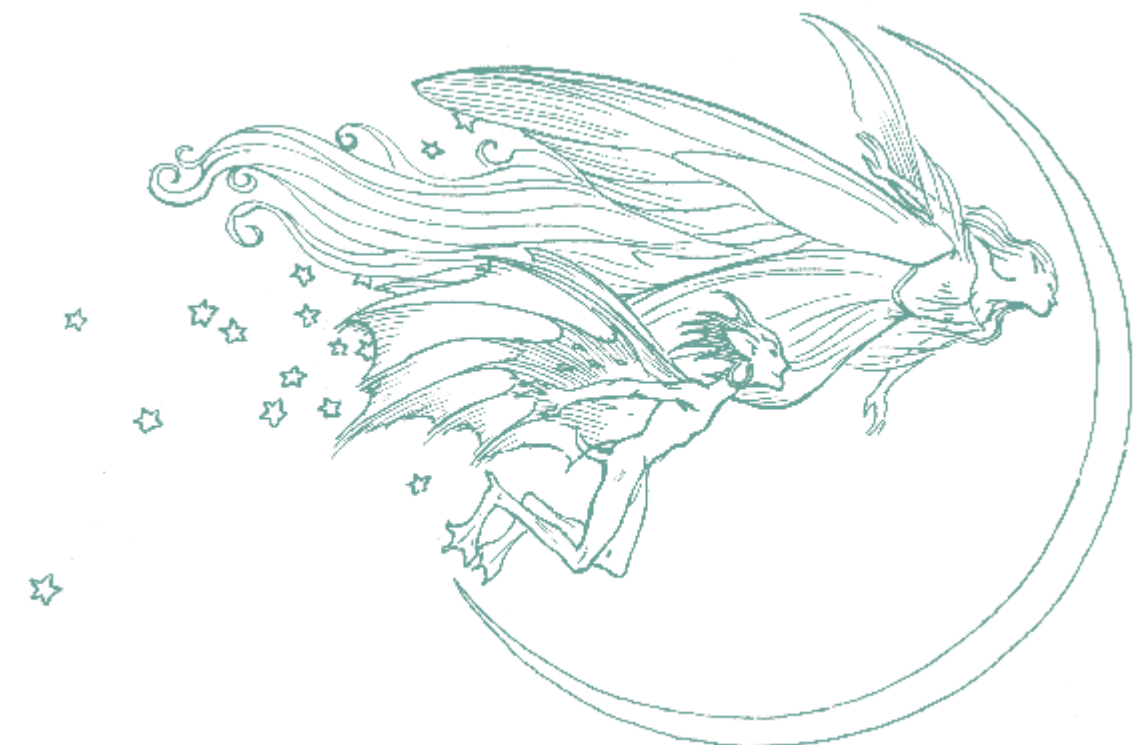
You would dress yourself in mist and early frost  
 to tread the autumn dances—the dance of fire  
 and fallen leaves, the expectation of snow.

And when your sister Winter pays a visit,  
 You would give her tea in a ceramic cup,  
 bread and honey on a wooden plate.

You would nod, as women do, and tell each other,  
 The world is more magical than we know.

You are not alone.

Listen: the pines are whispering their love,  
 and the sky herself, gray and low, bends down  
 to kiss you on both cheeks. Daughter, she says,  
 I am always with you. Listen: my winds are singing  
 autumn's song.









*"I have seen landscapes ... which, under a particular light, made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge. Nature has that in her which compels us to invent giants: and only giants will do."*

*—C.S. Lewis*



## MAGIC WORDS

by Nalugiaq

translated and edited by Edward Field

In the earliest time,  
when both people and animals  
lived on the earth,  
a person could become an animal if  
he wanted to  
and an animal could become a  
human being.  
Sometimes they were people  
and sometimes animals  
and there was no difference.  
All spoke the same language.  
That was the time when words were  
like magic.  
The human mind had mysterious  
powers.  
A word spoken by chance  
might have strange consequences.  
It would suddenly come alive  
and what people wanted to happen  
could happen—  
all you had to do was to say it.  
Nobody can explain this:  
That's the way it was.





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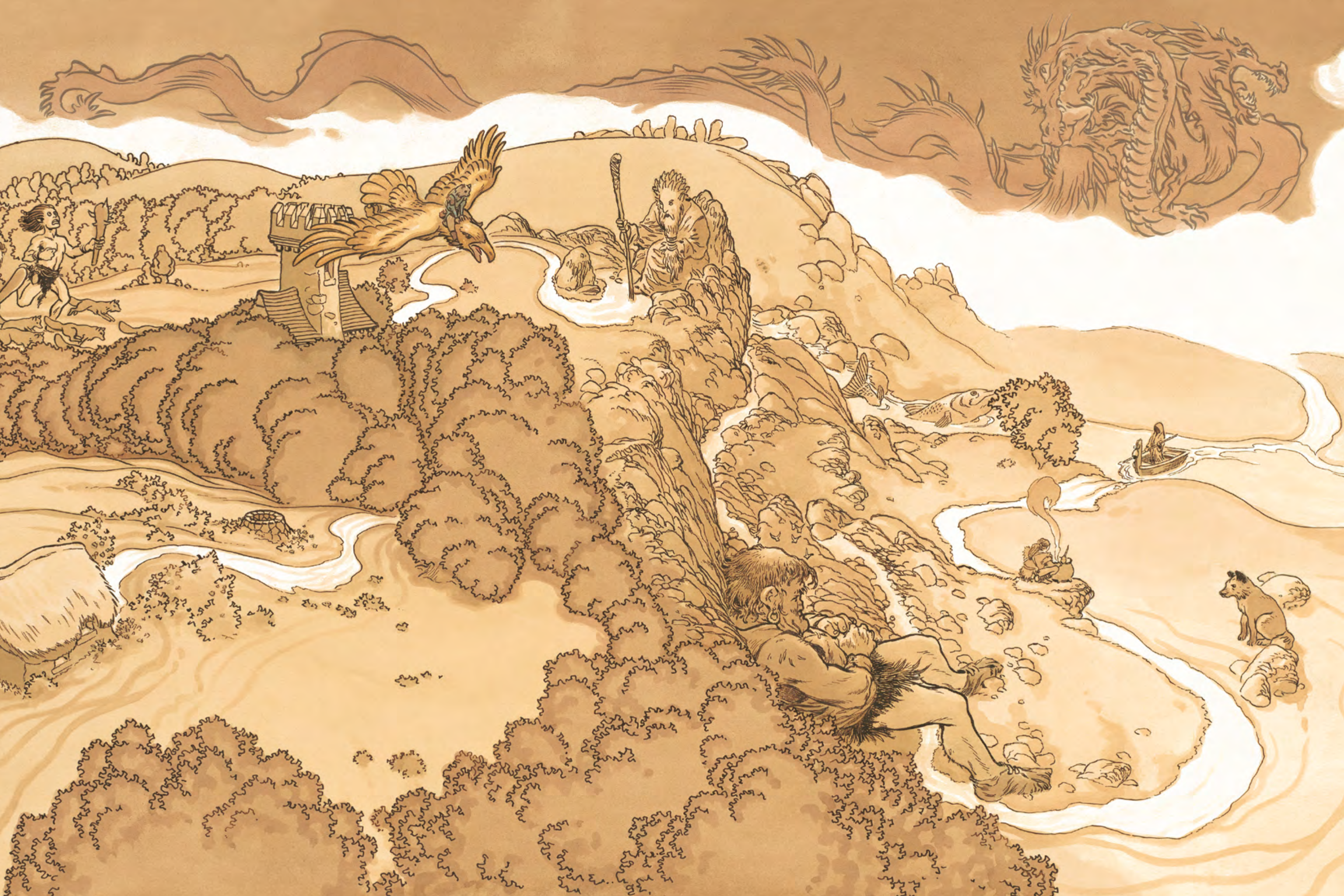
## SORROWSONG

by Ursula K. Le Guin

Come with me my sorrow  
come away with me  
where the road grows narrow  
westward to the sea

where the waters darken  
slow as evening falls  
where no winds waken  
and no voice calls





## THE CRONE

by Delia Sherman

I sit by the side of the road, comfortably planted  
On a stone my buttocks have worn silky.  
My garments are a peeling bark of rags,  
My feet humped as roots, my hands catch  
Like twigs, my hair is moss and feathers.  
My eyes are a bird's eyes, bright and sharp.  
I wait for sons.

They always come, sometimes twice a day  
In questing season, looking for adventure,  
Fortune, fame, a magic flower, love.  
Only the youngest sons will find it:  
The others might as well have stopped at home  
For all the good I'll do them.

It's the second sons who break my heart,  
Anxious at their elder brothers' failure,  
Stuck with the second-best horse, the second-best sword,  
The second-best road to disaster. Often I wish  
A second son would share his bread with me,  
Wrap his cloak around my body, earn  
The princess and the gold.

That's one wish. The second (I'm allowed three)  
Is that a daughter, any daughter at all—  
Youngest, oldest—seeking her fortune,  
A kingdom to rule, a life to call her own  
Would sit and talk with me, give me her bread  
And her ear. Perhaps (third wish) she'd ask  
After my kin, my home, my history.  
Ah then, I'd throw off my rags and dance in the road  
Young as I never was, and free.





I still gasp in delight when I remember the sleigh beginning to rise again high above the snow-covered field. Below it, the small figures cheered and tossed their tall red hats far into the air.

Of course, Morningstar took up her accustomed station, flying before Father Christmas. Her gentle light guided the sleigh with its precious contents through all the clouds heavy with snow, tickling the night around them with color.

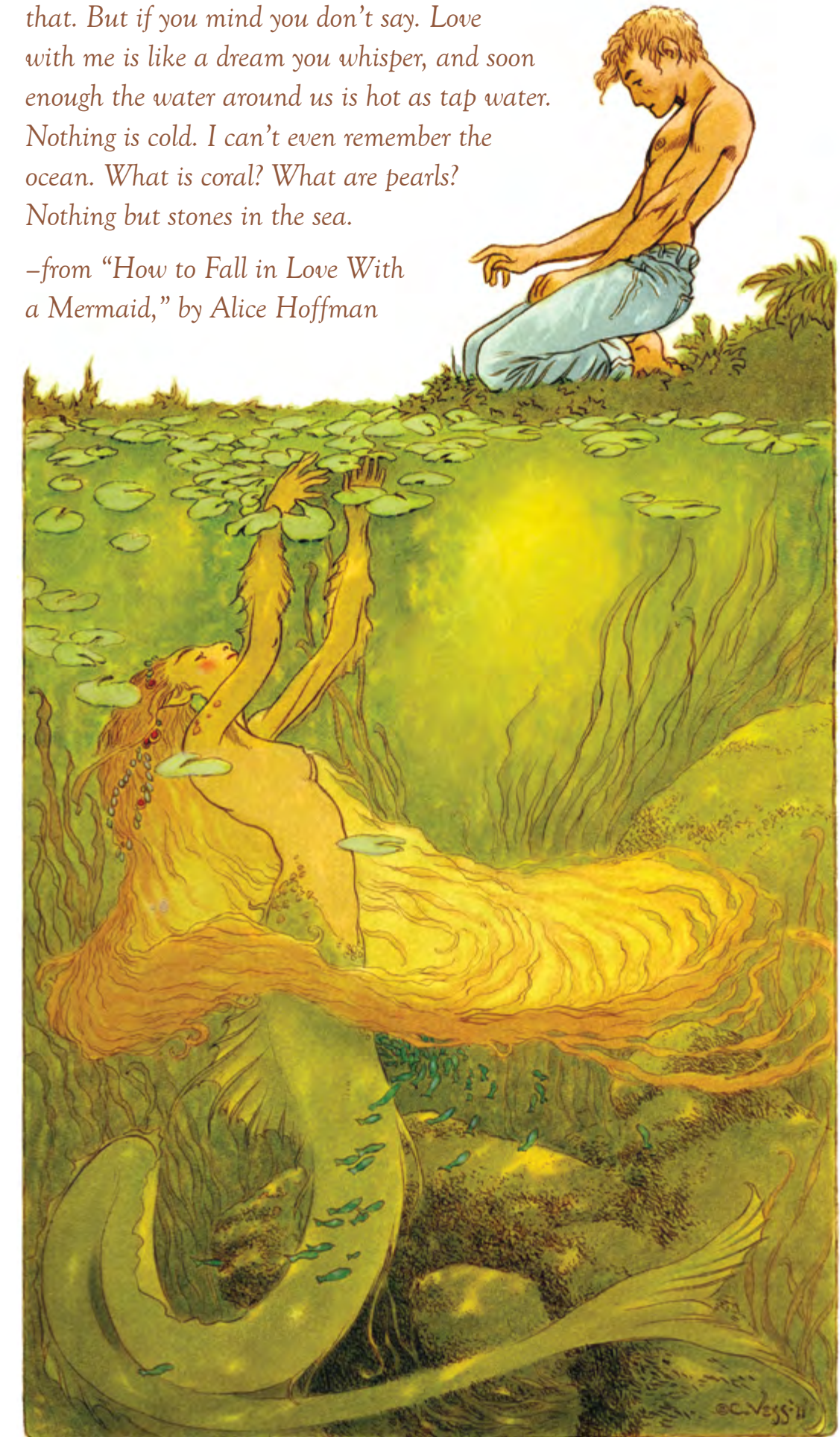
And just before they disappeared into those clouds, I saw our Tomten raise his arms and cry with delight at the world stretched out so far below him.

—from “Father Christmas and the Tomten,” by Charles Vess



*My kiss is cold, no one tells you the truth about that. But if you mind you don't say. Love with me is like a dream you whisper, and soon enough the water around us is hot as tap water. Nothing is cold. I can't even remember the ocean. What is coral? What are pearls? Nothing but stones in the sea.*

*—from "How to Fall in Love With a Mermaid," by Alice Hoffman*





## WITCH WORK

by Neil Gaiman

The witch was as old as the mulberry tree  
She lived in the house of a hundred clocks  
She sold storms and sorrows and calmed the sea  
And she kept her life in a box.

The tree was the oldest that I'd ever seen  
Its trunk flowed like liquid. It dripped with age.  
But every September its fruit stained the green  
As scarlet as harlots, as red as my rage.

The clocks whispered time which they caught in their gears  
They crept and they chattered, they chimed and they chewed.  
She fed them on minutes. The old ones ate years.  
She feared and she loved them, her wild clocky brood.

She sold me a storm when my anger was strong  
And my hate filled the world with volcanoes and laughter  
I watched as the lightnings and wind sang their song  
And my madness was swallowed by what happened after.

She sold me three sorrows all wrapped in a cloth.  
The first one I gave to my enemy's child.  
The second my woman made into a broth.  
The third waits unused, for we reconciled.

She sold calm seas to the mariners' wives  
Bound winds with silk cords so the storms could be tied there,  
The women at home lived much happier lives  
Till their husbands returned, and their patience be tried there.

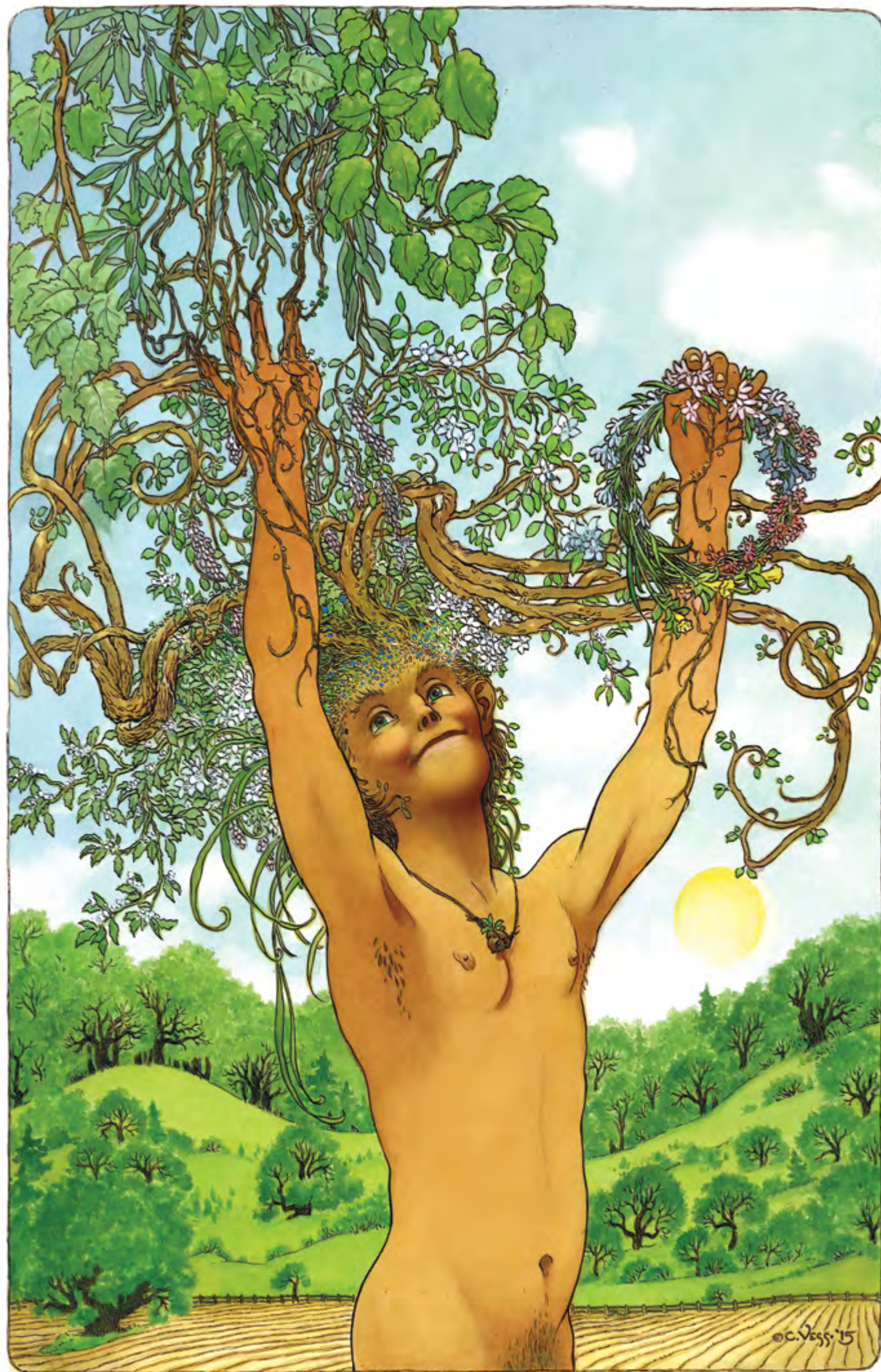
The witch hid her life in a box made of dirt,  
As big as a fist and as dark as a heart  
There was nothing but time there and silence and hurt  
While the witch watched the waves with her pain and her art.

*(But he never came back ... he never came back.)*

The witch was as old as the mulberry tree  
She lived in the house of a hundred clocks  
She sold storms and sorrows and calmed the sea  
And she kept her life in a box.







## THE GARDEN

by Ari Berk

From the First Days we were gardeners.

Even before we became aware  
of what was man, which was woman,  
we were, all, husbands of earth.

From these First Days we came to know  
that when God showed love to earthfast folk  
he made them the gift of a garden.

And so those who still work the earth know:  
keep a garden and see the world with love.

When we see the world with love  
Spring and Eden come again.

Thrice blessed is the soil amended  
by the holding and turning of joined hands.

Nothing need be wasted:  
even eggshells, coffee grounds, last night's salad ...  
all will come to riches, sifting memory into the loam.

The Garden of the World holds all  
the fruits and flowers, nettles and thistles.

Petal and thorn it goes.

The figures of plants, their leaves and lives,  
show us the world made small, for what they need  
we need: light and air, sustenance and care.

The Garden is our own selves,  
a greening vow between us and the world.

Recall the hope of Spring  
and the hopefulness that attends  
all things framed by season.

And though the ground lie fallow  
through a winter of distraction,  
through pest, or through drought,  
remember Spring, and see the world with love.

For then, rising from its sleeping roots,  
your vow is restored,  
lives and breathes,  
becomes a child again,  
glad to feel the sun upon its face at dawn.



## I WILL GO NOW

by Charles Vess

I will go now  
into the wood  
into the green, green wood  
and seek there  
something rich and strange,  
fecund with life.

All there in that wood praise  
the sun,  
the light,  
the rain,  
the breeze that carries  
seed to mate with earth,  
settling under  
layers of rot, of mold  
of leaf rack,  
to be reborn as  
fruit and flower,  
briar and thorn,  
berry and nut.

All silently trumpet  
their heaving,  
tangled  
desire  
for life.

As do I.  
As do you.  
As do we all.





## LORD OF THE DANCE

by Aidan Kelly, C. Taliesin Edwards, and Ann Cass

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;  
I was called from the darkness by the song of the earth,  
I joined in the singing and she gave me birth.

Dance then wherever you may be!  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
And I'll lead you on, wherever you may be,  
I will lead you in the dance, said he!

I sleep in the kernel and I dance in the rain,  
I dance in the wind, and through the waving grain,  
And when you cut me down, I care nothing for the pain—  
In the Spring I'll be Lord of the Dance again!

I see the maidens laughing as they dance in the sun,  
I count the fruits of the harvest, one by one,  
I know the storm is coming. But the grain is all stored,  
As I sing of the dance of the Lady and the Lord.

We dance ever slower as the leaves fall and spin,  
And the sound of the Horn is the wailing of the wind;  
The earth is wrapped in stillness and we move in a trance,  
But we hold fast to our faith in the dance.

They cut me down, but I leap up high!  
I am life that will never, never die.  
I'll live in you and you'll live in me—  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he!

The moon in her phases and the tides of the sea,  
The movement of the Earth, and the seasons that will be  
Are right for the dancing and a promise through the years—  
The Dance goes on through joy and tears.

Dance then wherever you may be!  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
And I'll lead you on, wherever you may be,  
I will lead you in the dance, said he!



## THE SHORTEST DAY

by Susan Cooper

So the shortest day came, and the year died,  
And everywhere down the centuries of the snow-white world  
Came people singing, dancing,  
To drive the dark away.  
They lighted candles in the winter trees,  
They hung their homes with evergreen,  
They burned beseeching fires all night long  
To keep the year alive.  
And when the new year's sunshine blazed awake  
They shouted, revelling,  
Through all the frosty ages you can hear them  
Echoing, behind us—listen!  
All the long echoes sing the same delight  
This shortest day  
As promise wakens in the sleeping land:  
They carol, feast, give thanks,  
And dearly love their friends, and hope for peace.  
And so do we, here, now,  
This year, and every year.  
Welcome Yule!





## THIS IS THE WOOD

by Jane Yolen

This is the wood.  
This is the dark wood,  
This is the dark wood I must cross.

This is the path,  
This is the hard path.  
This is the hard path I must walk.

This is the rain.  
This is the long rain.  
This is the long rain I must bear.

This is the beast.  
This is the fell beast.  
This is the fell beast I must help.

Dark and hard, long and fell,  
This is the story I must tell.





## ONE OF THOSE DAYS

by Theodora Goss

It is one of those days when I feel completely out of step  
with the world, when I am convinced  
I should be somewhere different ...

Walking through a forest of tall trees, preferably maples  
because it is autumn, and their leaves would create  
a carpet, maybe even a path  
of red and yellow. And I could follow it,  
in the belief that I was going somewhere.

What has happened to my life?

My moments are measured by clocks,  
not by the chirping of crickets, or the call  
of birds in the underbrush at the edge of the forest,  
not by the movements of water  
as it falls over rocks into a pool.  
Not by the sun sinking lower.  
Although I know, I can feel, that it is all  
falling: the leaves, the sun,  
the running water into the still water.  
And then the birds and crickets falling silent.

I can feel it even though in my efficient life  
where the clocks are marking time,  
all the minutes are the same: one after another,  
in equal intervals. Still, outside my window,  
behind the reflected electric lights,  
slowly darkness comes,  
like a benediction. And I feel  
once again, that I was born elsewhere  
and have, still, elsewhere to go ... where beneath tall trees, slowly the leaves  
and evening are falling together.





## BLOSSOMS AND BLOOMS

by David Winship

On the waft of morning mist,  
the morning dew freshens the day  
as birds' morning songs jumble  
in a boiling pot of notes.

The heavy sweet scent of lilacs' bloom  
takes me to where I once lived and  
the white four-petaled flower on gnarled limbs  
takes me to the dogwood days of my youth.

Daytime descends,  
where limbs lace and  
treetop branches brush the blush  
of the evening sky.

As moments turn to days and  
seasons to years,  
memories remain of life  
passed into past.

What's ahead  
when the blossoms and blooms will once again  
sweeten my nose and caress my eye and  
sunrise and moonset bookend the morning sky?



## TALIESIN

by John Matthews

“I am a Bard,” answered the child. “And I hold the keys to all knowledge, both past, present and future.” Then he sang this song:

Behold a Bard  
Who has not chanted yet,  
But will sing soon enough.  
By the end of his song  
He will know all the wisdom of stars.

Gwion kept the cauldron boiling,  
Gwion of small merit  
Shall outlast the ages.  
I am Taliesin—  
I will defend true knowledge  
To the end of time.

I am a master of stars,  
I know the mind of trees,  
I know good and evil.  
I know the number of the winds and streams,  
I know size of the earth.

I know why cows are horned,  
Why milk is white,  
Why holly is green,  
Why the goat is bearded,  
Why the wheel is round.

I have been dead.  
I have been alive.  
I am Taliesin—  
I will defend true knowledge  
To the end of time.





## THE NIGHT JOURNEY

by Terri Windling

Go by coombe, by candle light,  
by moonlight, starlight, stepping stone,  
and step o'er bracken, branches, briars,  
and go tonight, and go alone,  
go by water, go by willow,  
go by ivy, oak and ash,  
and rowan berries red as blood,  
and breadcrumbs, stones, to mark the path;  
find the way by water's whisper,  
water rising from a womb  
of granite, peat, of summer heat,  
to slake your thirst and fill the coombe  
and tumble over moss and stone  
and feed the roots of ancient trees  
and call to you: go, now, tonight,  
by water, earth, phyllomancy,  
by candle flame, by spirit-name,  
by spells, by portents, myth and song,  
by drum beat, heart beat, earth pulsing  
beneath your feet, calling you home,  
calling you back, calling you through  
the water, wood, the waste, the wild,  
the hills where Dartmoor ponies pass,  
and black-faced sheep, a spectral child,  
a fox with pale unnatural eyes,  
an owl, a badger, ghostly deer  
with horns of star light, candle light  
to guide the way, to lead you here,



to lead you to the one who waits,  
who sits and waits upon the tor,  
he waits and watches, wondering  
if you're the one he's waiting for;  
he waits by dawn, by dusk, by dark,  
by sun, by rain, by day, by night,  
his hair as black as ravens' wings,  
his eyes of amber, skin milk white,  
his skin tattooed with spiral lines  
beneath a mask of wood and leaves  
and polished stone and sun-bleached bone,  
beneath a shirt of spiders' weave,  
his wrists weighted with silver bands  
and copper braids tarnished to green,  
he waits for you, unknown and yet  
familiar from forgotten dreams;  
you dream and stir upon your bed  
and toss and turn among the sheets,  
the wind taps at the window glass  
and water tumbles through the leat  
and through the garden, through the wood,  
and over moss and over stone  
and tells you: go, by candle light,  
and go tonight, and go alone;  
he's sent you dreams, he's left you signs,  
he's left you feathers, beads and runes,  
so go, tonight, by candle light,  
by ash and oak, by wood, by coombe.



"Without mysteries, life would be very dull indeed.  
What would be left to strive for if everything were known?"

-Charles de Lint



• TRUE THOMAS •

## THOMAS THE RHYMER

As told by Robin Williamson

The ancient thorn they called the Eildon Tree was always one of Thomas's favorite haunts. He'd take his harp and while away a summer's afternoon by the waters of Bogel Burn on the slopes of the three-peaked Eildons. It was always known as an uncanny place, a place where fortune might wink or scowl. The very place a poet would choose when at his verses. A feared and honored place, as the bards relate.

On a day of days, the Lady came—riding her white horse between the worlds, she that was Elfland's Queen—to hear the Rhymer's music for herself.

*her skirt was o' the grass green silk  
her mantle o' the velvet fine  
at ilka tett o' her horse's mane  
hung fifty siller bells and nine*

And she that was more beautiful than frost or firelight gave him good warning. "Harp and carp," she said, "sing and play, but if you dare kiss my lips, sure of your body I will be."

*But he said,  
"Betide me wel, betide me woe  
That weird sall never daunten me."*

And he kissed her rosy lips, all in the shade of the Eildon Tree. In that moment her beauty changed to foulness, her golden hair to straggles of grey, her royal clothes to filthy rags, her face grew skull thin and leaden pale. She beckoned him, and he needs must follow.

*"Now ye maun gang Thomas," she said  
"ye maun rise and gang wi' me  
and ye maun serve me seven years*

*through weel or woe as may chance to be"  
she mounted on her milk white steed  
and Thomas he louped on behind  
and aye whenever the bridles rang  
the steed gaed faster than the wynd*

And somehow they rode into the hill itself, or into the silence from which all things are born. They crossed the river that runs with the blood that is shed on Earth.

Now when they reached the far bank of that river, the Lady's beauty was restored to her a hundredfold. They rode out into a green and misty landscape where the way branched into three.

*And she said:  
"o see ye not yon narrow road  
that's a' beset wi' thorn and briar?  
that is the Path to Righteousness  
and few there be that there aspire*

*and see ye not yon wide smooth road  
that winds across the lily heaven?  
that is the Path to Wickedness  
though many ca' it the Road to Heaven*

*and see ye not yon bonny, bonny road  
that winds across the ferny brae?  
that is the path to fair Elfland  
where you and I this night maun gae"*

Setting off on that bonniest of road, she gave him this advice for his soul's sake, that he would answer none but herself while he was in that land, that was before the world.

Words are weak to tell of Elfland's beauty. But it is said that orchards there are of every fruit, gardens of every flower. Those that have

returned speak of buildings more beautiful than churches or castles, yet neither cruel nor holy, but made for the dance that heeds not night or day. Music plays there, of gittern, psaltery, lute, and rebec but above all the melting strains and merry notes of the harp, feasting without satiety, pleasure without end.

Thomas waited always at the Lady's right hand, passing her this or that as she required. And a handsome manservant to her he made, listening, you may be sure, to music and song, the like of which were never made by Adam's kin.

Then the Lady said; "Now you must leave."  
"How can that be?" said Thomas. "Scarcely a day since we came here."

"Ah, but seven full years on Earth have passed," said she. "And every seven years we must pay a tithe to Hell. If you were to stay I fear the Fiend would choose you. You've served me faithfully. I give you this as your wages. I give you a tongue that will never lie."

But this pleased Thomas ill:

*My tongue's my ain, my tongue's my ain  
a gudely gift you wad gie to me  
I durst neither bargain nor speak in hall  
nor seek for grace from fair Lady*

Yet even as he spoke, Thomas found himself walking towards Earston in a break of day. Never a lie could he speak from that time forth. His prophecies became famous in all the lands of Scotland, and many were repeated in the Border Country. "True Thomas" was the name he gained in many long years.

As a sign at the last that his worldly work was done, there came in the gloaming through Earston to his door-side, a pair of deer. None could drive them away. Neither dogs nor arrows would harm them. A hart and a hind, as white as the white thorn flowers. Then Thomas arose, leaving his guests at table, and followed these white deer into the pure and gathering dark.





## DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

*Retold by Charles Vess*

The story of Deirdre is known as the Third Great Sorrow of Irish Storytelling.

At her birth, on a day of days, the Druid priests of the kingdom of King Conchobhar prophesied that so great would be her beauty that only tragedy would come with it.

And so it was as they said: With each passing year Deirdre grew even more beautiful. When, in the passage of time, she was no longer a child but a maiden full grown, the king of all Ireland looked on her and could contain his lust no longer. He decreed that Deirdre would be his bride, for in those days in Ireland, your possessions counted for much and to have the most beautiful woman in all the land as your wife would make Conchobhar an even greater man than he already was.

Deirdre, however, had fallen in love with the king's greatest warrior, Naoise, and as luck or fate would have it, he with her. Together with his two brothers they fled Ireland and went (some have said) to live in the Highlands of Scotland. Life there was idyllic for them until King Conchobhar sent his emissaries, who with guile and treachery lured them back to the Irish court.

Once there, King Conchobhar had Naoise and his brothers slain, intending at last to possess the beautiful Deirdre. But she, standing over her dead lover's body and watching a triumphant Conchobhar advance toward her, drew out a silver dagger and, plunging it into her breast, killed herself.

So ends the story of Deirdre.



*“Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life.”*  
-Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller



## THE GETTING OF EXCALIBUR

Retold by Charles Vess

And as they rode, Arthur said, "I have no sword."

"Be not troubled," Merlin said unto his companion, "I know of a goodly sword that shall be yours."

So they rode on till they came to a lake of broad, fair water and in the midst of the lake Arthur saw an arm clothed in white samite, holding aloft a fair sword in its hand.

"Lo!" said Merlin. "There is the sword of which I spoke."

"What manner of being holdeth it above the water?" said Arthur.

"That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin. "Within this very lake is a rock, and therein that rock is as fair a place as any on earth or beyond it, rich and passing strange. If you speak well to The Lady she will gift you with that sword."

Then, stepping lightly o'er the water The Lady came nye to them and spoke, "The sword is mine, its name is Excalibur and if ye will pledge me a goodly gift when I ask it of thee, ye shall have it as your own."

"By my faith," said Arthur, "I will give you whatever gift ye will hereafter ask of me."

"Well spoke!" said the blessed damosel, "go ye then into yonder barge, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard as well. I will then ask my gift of thee when the time is fit."

So Sir Arthur and Merlin alighted and tied their horses to two trees, and went into the ship, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him, and the arm and the hand went back under the water.

Sir Arthur looked on the sword, and saw that it was a goodly gift of great power.

"Whichever you liketh better," said Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?"

"I like better the sword," said Arthur.

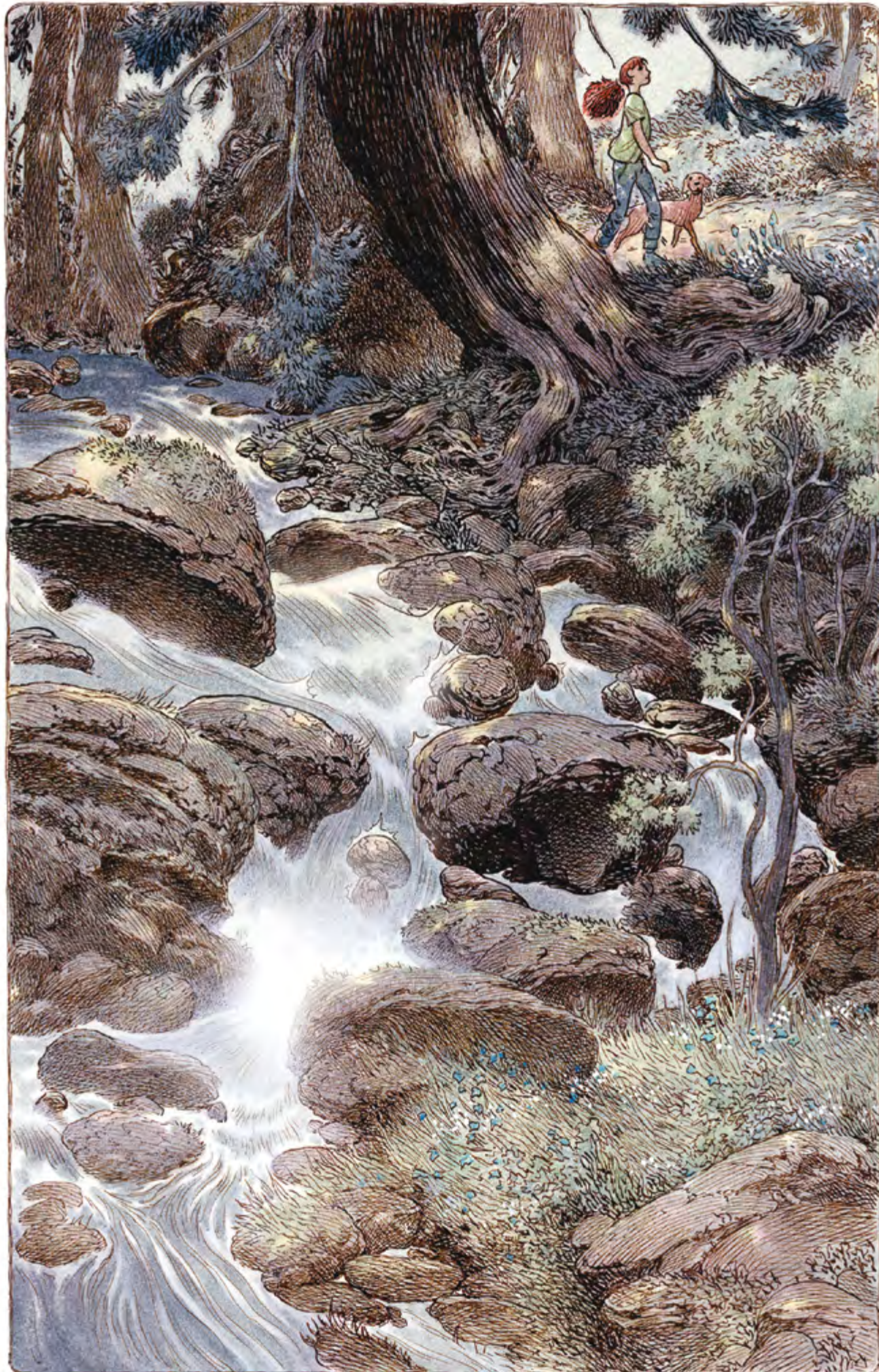
"Ye are then most unwise," said Merlin, "for the scabbard is worth ten of the swords, for whiles ye have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard always with you."

When they had returned to the shore The Lady was no longer to be seen.

So they rode on into Carlion, and when they had come there his knights were passing glad. And when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that their king would put his person in adventure as other poor knights did.







*"I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it's in your mind. Who's to say that dreams and nightmares aren't as real as the here and now?"*

*—John Lennon*



## TIME IN THE FOREST

by Gregory Maguire

The forest has a floor and a ceiling  
But no walls.

The floor is the past; a certain feeling  
That consoles and appalls.

The ceiling is the limitless time to come  
No one can reach.

The walls, which don't exist, are some  
Of the ways our days conceal and reveal  
Differently, each for each.





Where dips the rocky highland  
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,  
There lies a leafy island  
Where flapping herons wake  
The drowsy water rats;  
There we've hid our faery vats,  
Full of berry  
And of reddest stolen cherries.

*Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand.  
For the world's more full of weeping  
than you can understand.*

*Excerpt from "The Stolen Child"  
by William Butler Yeats*





© C. Vess '09

## WHICH WOLF

*Traditional Native American story retold by Charles Vess*

Once there was a people that lived in the west.

The land around them provided everything that they needed to live and they were content.

Yet every day two wolves came amongst them, demanding to be fed. The people knew, without asking, that both animals were essential to the fullness of their world.

One wolf though was filled with violence, cruelty, and anger and the other with joy and hope.

Each day the people of that tribe would decide which wolf they would feed and how much they would feed it. By their choice each determined what kind of world they would live in.

As it is today, every one of us must still make that same choice.

*Always.*

Which wolf will you feed?

## AFTERWORD

After looking through the book that you hold right now in your hands, you might be forgiven for thinking, If this is an art book, why are there so many words in it?

Why indeed?

There's an easy answer to that question, though. For me, art and writing are one and the same—different disciplines that lead to the same ultimate destination: a well-told story. And that story, whether it employs only art or pure text or a combination of both to tell its narrative, is my gift to you, the reader.

Still, you might be asking, “Why all the poetry?”

Well, I guess it's time to confess something: As a young boy I never had any love for the rhythms and rhymes in any poem that came my way. Just one look at all those seemingly endless stanzas marching down a page of type would make me so impatient I'd just skip over them looking for “the good stuff.” And at that age, the good stuff would mean the hardcore action and drama that permeated Robert E. Howard's *Conan* tales or J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Not until I was years older did I bother to read any of the numerous poetic “interruptions” in the professor's epic tale.

This reckless impulse continued for far longer than was good for me until, a few years later, I fell under the sway of Ray Bradbury, a writer whose prose is as close to poetry as any text could ever be. Soon after that, my interest in Scottish and English ballads finally put a large gap in that self-imposed wall. Of course, at first I didn't call those songs poetry and I still thumbed my nose at collections of the same, but that wall had definitely begun to crumble.

It collapsed completely when I came to understand that art, writing, and poetry (at least the kind that I respond to) were all a kind of prayer to beauty when most of our society casually casts aside that impulse in order to worship at the altar of the “real.”

After many years of drawing, writing, and sculpting I began to understand that the art that pleased me most, that made me excited about producing my own, made conscious use of what I began to call “poetic space”—that is, a liminal area where the artist and the viewer (or reader) actively collaborate with each other in order to complete a given narrative. Perhaps it's the space between two words or lurking just behind the haze of a landscape that suggests that there is more there than meets the eye of the viewer or reader but leaves the particular details to be filled in by them. After all, it's the questions that move us, not the answers.

It is that collaboration between a work of art and its viewer that I find both exciting and intensely rewarding.

In this book, though, I've attempted to broaden that impulse by selecting other creative voices and placing their work next to carefully selected pieces of my art. In most cases, neither those words nor the picture itself were developed to illustrate one another, both being conceived at separate times and places.

My hope is that by selecting art and text that share similar sensibilities and placing them side by side, that juxtaposition will encourage yet another form of collaboration—one that this time involves three distinct elements: my art, a selected text, and the viewer. In the best of all possible worlds, this shared space with its inevitable aesthetic friction between what is said and what is shown will serve to create an entirely new tale from the bones of the old within the imagination of my readers.

So then, tell me a story.

*Charles Vess*

Charles Vess  
Abingdon, Virginia, 2016





## AUTHORS

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A lush compilation of fantasy illustrations and writing from celebrated artist Charles Vess with additional poetry and writing by:

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 Susan Cooper  
 Neil Gaiman  
 Theodora Goss  
 Ursula K. Le Guin  
 Alice Hoffman  
 Gregory Maguire  
 John Matthews  
 Delia Sherman  
 Robin Williamson  
 Terri Windling  
 Jane Yolen  
 and others



an introduction by  
 Charles de Lint

*Vess “paints a portrait of yearning and appreciation for a world that welcomes kindness, magic, whimsy, and pastoral beauty.”*

—Charles de Lint



Walking Through the  
 Landscape of Faerie

Charles Vess

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