Fairy Tales

Words by A. J. Parker

Illustrations by Arthur Rackham
(1867 – 1939)

For those that put up with me

Merry Christmas

eep under the earth, beneath a frosted covering of dead leaves clumped together against the chill of the forest night, the Writer sat hunched over his desk, scribbling across the pages before the tired light of a weary candle.

The quill scratched across the parchment, casting its ink by abandonment as much as by design. At each new line, the old man dipped the nib in the inkpot, pushed his long grey beard from the page and continued with his writing, oblivious to the fact that his whiskers crept back across the page with each new word. Only a clock watched on, gently ticking and tocking, held in place by the twisting roots that seemed an extension of the old man's own limbs.

The candlewick flickered, shuddering against the darkness, never wearing down the yellow nub of wax beyond the length of the flame. A shifting pattern of shadow swayed back and forth across the earthen walls and a gentle dust fell upon the pages from the writer's ancient eyelids as they blinked for the first time in a season.

The chair creaked, but without complaint, for it had said nothing in as long as it could remember and simply wanted to yawn before falling asleep again. One of the roots curled a little tighter about the old man's raggedy, thin ankle, but he paid it no attention, simply continuing the flight of his pen across the pages before him.

What he wrote of, whether it be of events past, present or future, real or imaginary, the Writer could not have told you, nor even the language he used. The words were not important, only the story, continuing from a past that stretched as endlessly behind it as into the future before it, and that was all he knew…

The stories.

The Fairies Have Their Tiffs with the Birds

~ *The Fool's Wish* ~

here was once a foolish boy, born to a blacksmith, who wished away his life. When his brothers were carrying out their chores, the boy would be found not to be found. Instead, he would be elsewhere, daydreaming and wishing he were elsewhere from elsewhere, and not to be found anywhere.

The laziness of his son did not pass by the blacksmith, who despaired that his son would ever amount to anything, so he turned his attentions to his other sons instead, who each worked hard, and he was very proud of them.

As the years passed, so did the boy and his brothers grow to be young men. As they did, so did they each in turn learn the skills of their father, the blacksmith. All, apart from the foolish young man who continued to wish his life away while elsewhere and dreaming of other things.

In time, each brother married and left their family to start a home for themselves, and the blacksmith grew proud and knew he had done well, but in his heart there was still a sadness that he had one foolish son who he knew would never amount to anything.

The years continued until only the blacksmith and the foolish son remained in their home, and still the son was never to be found anywhere when work was needed, but always elsewhere, dreaming of other places and other things that he knew nothing of.

'Go fetch some wood, boy,' said the blacksmith, shaking a finger at his son. 'For I am tired of your laziness and your wishing your life away. Should you not return with an armful of wood, then do not return at all,' he said.

'Very well, Father,' said the fool. 'I will go and fetch you your wood, but should I not return, then it is because I have found some better place to be.'

And so, he left behind the home and ventured into the forest to find some wood for his father, but still he daydreamed of other places and other things, but not of the here and now, or the then and there.

At first, the man found a stick and took it up into his arms. 'A fine start,' he said, proud of his stick, but soon was downhearted as he remembered his father's words. 'I must return with an armful of wood, and one stick will not be enough, perhaps two.' And he continued further into the forest.

The trees grew thicker and darker, but the man continued with his stick, looking for another one as light and easy to carry as the first.

As he walked, he happened upon a rabbit before him.

'I wish I were a rabbit,' said the man. 'For being a rabbit seems to me to be a lot easier than being a man. There's nothing to do all day except jump about and eat some grass, and certainly no worries at all.'

The rabbit looked at him curiously before darting away, deeper into the forest. 'A fool approaches!' cried the rabbit as it disappeared.

The man continued on his way, dropping his stick to exchange it for another, which looked easier to carry, but still he had but one for the fire.

Onwards he walked, further into the forest, searching for wood to take back to his father.

And so, did he see a deer appear from the trees before him.

'I wish I were a deer,' said the man. 'For being a deer seems to me to be a lot easier than being a man. There's nothing to do all day except scamper about and eat some acorns, and certainly no worries at all.'

The deer looked at him cautiously before leaping away, deeper into the forest. 'A fool approaches!' cried the deer as it disappeared.

The man looked about himself and found he grew tired.

'This could take all day,' said the man to the nothing beside him, as he sat down under a tree and wiped his brow of the sweat he had not.

As he sat, gathering his fortitude, so he noticed a bird upon a nearby bush.

‘I wish I were a bird,’ said the man. ‘For being a bird seems to me to be a lot easier than being a man. There’s nothing to do all day except flutter about and eat some berries, and certainly no worries at all.’

The bird looked at him fleetingly, before darting off, deeper into the forest. ‘A fool approaches!’ cried the bird as it disappeared.

The man succumbed to his tiredness and fell asleep, as he daydreamed of being a bird, unknown that two fairies watched him as he rested.

‘Did you here him wish?’ said one fairy to another.

‘I did. I noted that,’ said the other. ‘I heard him wish.’

‘Should we help him?’ asked the one fairy.

‘Why, I think we should,’ answered the other. ‘To do otherwise seems rather rude.’

So the one fairy, and the other, cast a spell and made the foolish wish a reality.

When the man woke, he found himself a bird and cried with joy.

‘Oh, I’m a bird! How happy am I?’ he sang, springing from bush to bush.

‘Oh, I’m a bird! I have wings and can fly!’ he sang, darting from perch to perch.

And it happened that a wolf spied him in his joy, and snuck through the bushes on his belly until he was within distance of the foolish bird, and sprang forth.

'Food!' cried the wolf, leaping at the bird.

The foolish bird took to the air, barely escaping the snapping jaws of the wolf.

'My! That was close!' exclaimed the foolish bird. 'Perhaps, I should stay higher in the trees, and up there I will be safe from the wolves down below.'

And so, he took to the branches of the trees, and kept a wary eye on the happenings below.

'I'll be safe up here,' he said, and began to sing again. 'Nothing can reach me up in a tree! I'm safe from the wolves, and have flown away free!'

And so, the foolish bird sang, and soon attracted a cat, who climbed the tree and edged ever nearer the noisy bird, unseen.

'Food!' cried the cat, leaping at the bird.

The foolish bird took to the air, barely escaping the sharp claws of the cat.

'My! That was close!' exclaimed the foolish bird. 'Perhaps, I should stay in the sky! I'm almost certain no wolves or cats can fly!'

And so, he took to the sky above the forest and flew in circles overhead, singing his song. 'Nothing can reach me up in the sky! I'm safe from the wolves and the cat's greedy eye!'

And so, the foolish bird sang, and soon attracted a hawk, who flew high above him with the sun at his back, ready to swoop down on the sparrow and eat him for his dinner.

'Food!' cried the hawk, darting through the air at the sparrow, who ducked and twisted and flew, and hid in the branches.

'My! That was close!' exclaimed the foolish bird. 'I think nowhere is safe from being eaten. Perhaps I should go home.'

And so, the foolish sparrow flew home, ever watchful for being eaten from above, and below, and behind.

When he reached the house he had known as a man, he landed beside the window and peered in. There, inside, he saw the blacksmith, who he had known as a father when he had been a man, and a longing came upon him, and he called out.

'Father, Father! It is me, your son!' he chirped, bounding about on the windowsill.

'Ah, food!' said the blacksmith, spying the singing bird at his window, and he reached for his bow.

'No, Father! It is me, your son!' chirped the foolish bird.

But the man did not understand, and took aim at the bird with his arrow.

‘Please, no, Father,’ cried the bird, taking to the air and flying for his life, narrowly avoiding the arrow that chased him.

And so it came to be that a nervous, hungry sparrow daydreamed of being a man.

The Joy of a Falling Leaf

~ *The Jar of Hope* ~

There was once a farmer who lived with his son and daughter. They tended the fields and looked after the lambs and each other in contentment until it came to pass that the farmer died, leaving behind his children.

The son was now a young man and he tended the fields and looked after the lambs in his father's place, while his sister cooked the food and kept their house clean and tidy.

But, then one day the young man's sister took to bed complaining of a fever, and did not get up, not on the first day, nor on the second, nor on the third.

The young man paced back and forth with much concern.

'Sister, I must go to the Writer in the Long Wood and ask for him to write you well again,' he said, picking up his bag and putting it over his shoulder.

So, the young man gathered some bread and some water and handed them to his sister, so that she should not want for food while he was gone, and he began on his journey to visit the Writer.

The man followed the roads, and asked the way, and climbed the hills, and travelled the valleys until he

reached the Long Wood, which he entered with a sense of foreboding, for he was far from home.

The trees hung over him like great arms from the ground, ready to snatch him from his feet. The birds stopped singing, and the wind howled a warning in his ear.

'I must go on, for my sister,' said the young man as he stepped into the wood, a shiver at his spine.

The sun withdrew and the path became narrow and hard to follow, but he continued into the darkness of the Long Wood, his heart pounding in his chest.

After some time, the young man reached the Writer's burrow, and put out a hand to knock upon its wooden door.

'Come in,' said a voice from within, like a breath upon the wind.

The man opened the door, and entered the burrow, following the hallway of earth and roots down under the ground. There, he found the old Writer at his desk, a parchment before him, scribbling with his ink.

'And what is it you want?' asked the Writer, not looking up from his work.

'My sister is sick with fever, sir. I come to ask that you write her well again.'

'Her story is told. There is nothing to be done.'

'But, sir, I beg you,' pleaded the young man. 'I have come far, and will do anything to see her well again.'

'Then take this jar,' said the Writer, 'and bring me Hope, and if you can do that, then will I write her a new ending.'

'I will,' said the young man. So, he took the jar and made his way back into the world where he began to search for Hope.

He left the Long Wood behind him, and travelled the roads in his search, until he tired and rested beneath a tree to fed his appetite with some bread and cheese.

As he ate, a fox crossed his path.

'Would you have any Hope for me?' asked the young man of the fox.

The fox looked at him suspiciously, and curled his lip. 'No, I have no Hope. The winter is coming, and I am hungry,' said the fox.

'Then, you cannot help me,' said the young man, and threw a stone at the fox, who went on its way.

The man continued upon his journey, travelling far until he happened across a trader on the road, riding along in his caravan.

'Can I offer you anything?' asked the trader of the young man.

'Do you have any Hope?'

'No, but I have a bag of Pity to sell.'

'No, it must be Hope, for that is what I must find,' said the young man.

'Well, I also have a box of Truth I could give you.'

'No, it must be Hope, for that is what I must find,' said the young man.

'What of a chalice of Desire?' offered the trader.

'No, it must be Hope, for that is what I must find,' said the young man.

'Then, I have no Hope for you, I am afraid. Times are hard and I cannot find anyone to purchase my wares, but here, take this walking stick,' said the trader, and continued on his way.

The young man was healthy and sure-footed, and had no need for a walking stick, so he threw it into a stream.

'I must find Hope!' said the young man as he trod the roads, braved the storms, climbed the hills and fought the chill winds.

He travelled many miles, and saw many things, but none offered Hope.

The young man eventually happened upon a town, and stopped at a fountain to sip water. As he drank, he noticed from the corner of his eye an old beggar waving his arms before him as he walked.

'Why do you wave your arms so?' asked the young man.

'Because I am blind, and must feel my way,' said the beggar.

'Do you have any Hope?' asked the young man.

'Nay, I have no Hope and no sight,' said the beggar.

'Would you know of where I might seek some Hope?' asked the man

'Nay, but I can offer advice,' replied the beggar. 'If you should seek something, I find it in the place I least expect it to be. Have you tried searching there?'

'The place I least expect it to be?'

'It always works for me,' said the beggar, continuing on, stretching his arms in front of him to test the way.

The young man scratched his head and pondered the words. 'The place I least expect it to be?' he said. 'Where would I look for Hope last? That is where I should begin!'

And so, he continued his journey and left the town behind him, and searched for Hope.

After several miles, he happened upon a large stone in his path, and pushed it aside with much huffing and puffing, but did not find Hope beneath it.

He climbed a tree, and moved aside a bird in her nest, but did not find Hope upon it.

He removed a rabbit from his warren, but did not find Hope within it.

'I must find Hope,' said the young man, 'but where should I look?'

The young man pondered and pondered, and thought, and thought. 'Where would I last look for Hope?' he asked of the Nobody beside him.

'On the furthest part of the furthest land,' he said to his question. 'That is where I would last look, so I should start there!'

The young man followed the roads, and asked the way, and climbed the hills, and travelled the valleys until he reached the Mountain-at-the-End-of-the-World.

'This is where I would last look,' he said as he stood before the Mountain-at-the-End-of-the-World.

And so he hoisted his bag over his shoulder and began to climb.

The higher he climbed, the colder it got, until snow and ice stretched under foot. Still, he climbed and pulled, and scrabbled his way up the slope.

'What are you doing?' asked an eagle that soared around his head.

'I'm looking for Hope in the place I would last expect to find it,' said the young man as he puffed and climbed, and climbed and puffed.

'There is nothing up there,' said the eagle, as it looped and turned and fell and rose. 'I have been up there, and there is no Hope.'

'It must be at the top, for it is the last place I have looked, and the Writer said that I should return to him with Hope, and the beggar said that it should be in the place I least expect.'

'Climb if you must,' said the eagle, 'but you climb to your doom.'

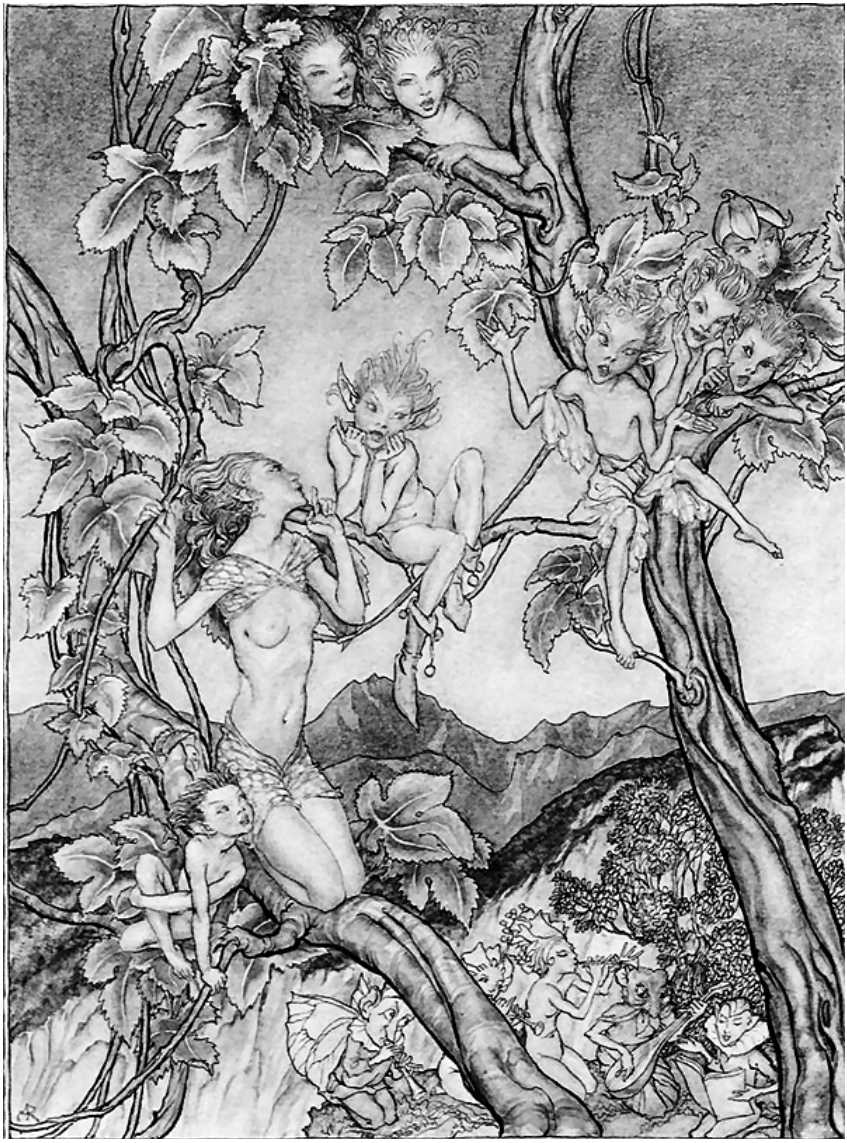
And so, the young man climbed, and clawed, and scrabbled, and clambered, and crawled, and pulled, himself up the Mountain-at-the-End-of-the-World.

When he reached the top of the Mountain- at-the-End-of-the-World, he fell upon the snow and dug with his hands.

'There is nothing here!' he said. 'I have reached the place I least expected to find Hope, and cannot find it. I cannot fill the jar with Hope and take it to the Writer, for I have none. I have lost all Hope in ever finding it.'

And he laid himself upon the mountaintop, sighed his last breath, and realised that he had started his journey with Hope and lost it along the way, like carrying water in a bucket with a hole in it.

The snows fell, and covered his body, and the eagle swooped and said 'I told you there was nothing there,' but the words went unheard and the story did end, as it had, as it would, and as it only ever could.



Fairy Song

~ *The Crooked Path* ~

It was a warm afternoon, punctuated by hazy sunbeams that broke through the silhouettes of the branches overhead.

Hansen raised his face and let the sun graze his cheeks as he took in the scent of the air. He became acutely aware of the sounds of the forest; of the distant birds calling to each other. Nearer by, the ferns rustled against each other for company.

He smiled and continued on, following the crooked path further through the forest, for to go back seemed to him to be rather unpalatable.

It had been only that morning when his stepmother had sent him from his home, raining insults upon him as quickly as she had thrown things at him.

Hansen had been happy to go. His father had barely looked at him as he left, and it was he who Hansen pitied. He imagined his father now having to suffer all the abuse on his own that Hansen had suffered since his stepmother's arrival.

A sense of freedom filled his chest as if it were a tangible thing. The world suddenly seemed full of opportunity where only the day before it had seemed full of more chores. He smiled again to himself and began

to whistle as he followed the crooked path further through the forest.

The trees seemed to huddle around him and whisper in the breeze as he walked.

'Look, what goes there?' said one to her neighbour.

'I've heard stories of such rootless things,' said the neighbour to the one.

And so the leaves told the tale to the rest of the forest that something approached and to beware.

Hansen glanced back along the crooked path, no longer sure of how he had reached himself, or of where he might find himself, should he look.

'Go back, child', cried a robin, darting from branch to branch overhead. 'Ahead is only your doom!'

Hansen watched the bird fluttering before him between the trees with a curiosity as he listened to its melodic birdsong.

'Turn back, child, turn back!'

Hansen smiled and attempted to copy the bird-song with a poor whistle, before laughing at his own efforts.

'I'm afraid I'm no companion for you, my friend,' said Hansen to the bird.

'If you heed not my warning, then I will leave you to your fate,' said the robin as he hopped into the air with a flap of his wings, disappearing into the forest in a blur of red and grey.

'Excitable fellow,' said Hansen, shaking his head and continuing to follow the crooked path further through the forest, for to go back seemed to him to be rather unpalatable.

The sun began to recede through the branches overhead as the trees huddled closer together and the crooked path wove its way through the forest.

And so it happened that Hansen heard someone approaching from the opposite direction.

'Hello?' said Hansen, as he noted a young man walking along the crooked path.

'Hello. I almost didn't see you there,' said the young man, seemingly distracted as he neared through the fallen shadows of the forest. He carried a jar carefully in his arms, as if the contents were valuable and he dare not drop it.

'Have you any Hope?' asked the young man as he neared, his eyes glimmering at the possibility. 'Can you spare some for my jar?'

Hansen looked at him with a mixture of pity and confusion that he knew readily etched itself on his face.

'I'm afraid I don't. Sorry,' he said in a stuttering reply.

The young man looked saddened and walked by without further word, clutching his jar to his chest, muttering to himself.

Hansen watched him disappear along the crooked path until the young man was swallowed by the forest.

'What a peculiar chap,' he said to himself, and continued on his way.

The trees thickened and the sun dimmed as Hansen travelled into the late afternoon, following the crooked path further through the forest, for to go back seemed to him to be rather unpalatable.

The path twisted and turned through the trees, which seemed to part as he rounded each bend, revealing the way ahead. After a time Hansen became aware of a bee buzzing only inches from his person.

'Go back, child!' cried a bee. 'Ahead is only your doom!'

'Get away from me!' Hansen

cried, flapping his arms at the air.

The bee circled and called its warning out several more times. 'If you heed not my warning, then I will leave you to your fate', it buzzed, realising the fruitlessness of its efforts, and so taking back to the forest.

Hansen carried on his way, following the crooked path deeper into the forest, for to go back seemed to him to be rather unpalatable.

The breeze began to chill him, and he rubbed his limbs, shuddering against the cold. The sun flecked the path ahead periodically, but left much of the way in pools of darkness.

Before long, a whining began to drift through the trees ahead. Hansen approached cautiously for it sounded like an animal. As he entered a clearing ahead, he found himself facing a wolf which licked its leg and whined.

'Help me,' whined the wolf.

Hansen edged sideways, realising that the wolf had been caught in a trap, and that one of its paws was clamped tightly by some mechanical construction that Hansen had heard tale of.

'Help me release my paw,' whined the wolf.

Hansen kept his distance, nervous and unsure. He had been told his entire life to keep clear of the wolves for their devious nature and bloodlust.

'Please help me,' begged the wolf in his whine. 'I've been here for days, and have not eaten.'

Hansen paused. To leave the animal trapped seemed cruel, but to release it could be dangerous. He looked at the wolf as it studied him.

'If I release you, will you try to eat me?' he asked.

The wolf dropped his heckles and looked sheepishly at Hansen.

'I promise not to eat you, if you release me,' whined the wolf, opening its big eyes wide with plea.

Hansen inched closer to the wolf, ever ready to leap away should it try to eat him. Eventually, he laid his hands on the trap about the wolf's leg and tried to pull it open.

'Release me,' whimpered the wolf as Hansen struggled to pull the trap open.

'I'm not sure I have the strength to pull it apart,' said Hansen.

'Release me!' whined the wolf.

Hansen pulled at the trap with all his strength, but it would not open.

'Release me!' barked the wolf.

'I cannot get the trap to open,' said Hansen.

'*RELEASE ME!*' growled the wolf, snapping at Hansen with his jaws.

Hansen jumped back, narrowly avoiding the wolf's bite.

'RELEASE ME!' snarled the wolf, tearing at the air with his teeth.

Hansen took several steps backward, able to feel the warmth of the wolf's breath as it tried to reach him.

'My, what big teeth you have,' he said, looking into the mouth of the wolf as it roared with fury at him.

'All the better to eat you with, if you don't *OPEN THIS TRAP!'* snapped the wolf.

'I think I'd rather not,' said Hansen, edging around the wolf to continue on his way, leaving the furious animal behind him, following the crooked path deeper into the forest, for to go back seemed to him to be rather unpalatable.

'Go back, child!' cried the grass beneath him, as Hansen continued to follow the path. 'Ahead is only your doom!'

'What tales this forest would tell,' said Hansen. 'I imagine these trees and path have seen much over the years.'

'If you heed not my warning, then I will leave you to your fate', said the grass beneath his feet, as Hansen continued on his way.

The path wove and twisted and rose and fell, and Hansen followed it without question. Eventually, it came to an end, and he found himself standing on the edge of the world.

Hansen stopped, staring before him, unsure for the first time if he should turn back or not.

'I've reached the edge of the forest,' gulped Hansen. He realised he had followed the crooked path all the way to its end; an end which fairy lore had told did not exist and only a fool would seek.

Hansen lifted himself higher on his wings, so that he might see further.

Before him stood no trees, but a field of grass that rolled into forever.

He took a deep breath and drifted forward into the world of men.

The Fairy Flew Off with the Changeling

~ *Belonging* ~

t the end of the world stood a mountain. It stood without name, and without age, for longer than even the stories could remember. Men came and gazed upon her in awe, but none were foolish enough to climb her, for what would be the purpose?

Only the eagle dared visit her peak, but the wise eagle did not claim to own her, for such a claim would be foolish.

The sun broke through the clouds and touched upon the tip of the mountain at the end of the world, causing her to shed a single tear for the warmth of his fleeting embrace.

The tear felt a pull of belonging and rolled down her cheek, becoming a trickle.

The trickle wove its way through the icy furrows of its mother, who encouraged it to grow and to reach out into the world.

It was not long before the trickle gathered confidence and became a stream.

The stream continued down the mountain, smoothing the rocks into pebbles and shaping the

earth as it went. Soon it reached a cliff-side, and before it was able to turn back, it plummeted over the edge, fearful and crying, plunging down and down as it realised itself a waterfall and began to roar with new power and strength.

The waterfall smashed against the earth, where it became a river.

The river left its mother behind, as all must, and journeyed into the unknown alone, seeking its way through the forests and hills for a belonging.

The sun and moon rose and fell. The animals welcomed the river with joy as she swept past. Fish leapt and swam and turned and played with her, but still the river continued on, searching for her belonging.

The earth rose and fell, and the river narrowed and weaved, threading its way ever onward, searching for her belonging, its pounding rhythm galloping along with it as if felt the belonging approach.

And so it came to be,

that the river found the sea.

Titania: Fairies Away!

~ *The Nobody* ~

here was once a farmer, who fell in love with a beautiful young woman, but he did not know her name, nor dare to ask it, instead, he admired her from afar, his heart always heavy with sadness.

One day the farmer was taking some of his corn into town to sell at the market when he happened across a well that he had never noticed before. As he approached, he heard sounds from deep within and edged closer with caution.

'Hello?' he called into the well. 'Is there someone down there?'

'No,' came the echoing reply from the depths of darkness.

'Then who answers my question?' asked the farmer.

'Nobody,' replied the voice.

'I asked if there is someone down there, yet you claim not!'

'Someone is not down here. Nobody is.'

'Very well,' said the farmer, scratching his head. 'Perhaps, I can fetch some rope to throw down, so that you might climb your way out.'

'No. Thank you.'

'You do not wish to climb free?'

'No. I'm quite content down here. Unless you happen to have some food?'

The farmer looked at his corn and hesitated, for he needed the money it would bring, but took an ear of corn and tossed it into the darkness.

A sound of ravenous chomping echoed about the walls of the well. 'Thank you,' called the voice. 'I would help you win your heart's desire in exchange for your kindness.'

The farmer laughed, for he did not believe the voice. 'My heart's desire? I fear you cannot help me with that!' he said.

'I can. I shall!' said the voice. 'A woman, I think.'

'Yes,' said the farmer, taken aback by the voice.

'When you see her, ask her of her name, then come back and tell me of it.'

The farmer continued on his way to market, where he saw the beautiful young woman he so loved, and she purchased some of his corn.

'May I ask of your name?' asked the farmer with trembling, broken voice and dry mouth.

'Eanna,' she said, and smiled at him with eyes that touched his heart.

Later that day, the farmer returned from market, but try as he might, he could not find the well again. And so, he returned home, knowing her name, but saddened that he did not know what to do next, now that he could not find the well.

A month passed and the farmer went again on his way to market, this time taking chickens with him,

which he intended to sell.

As he journeyed, he happened upon the well again, and went to its edge.

'Hello?' he called down into the dark. 'Is anybody down there?'

'I've told you before, there is nobody down here!' said the echoing voice from the bottom of the darkness. 'Did you ask of her name?'

'Eanna. She said her name is "Eanna",' replied the farmer.

'If you give me a chicken, then I will tell you what to do next.'

The farmer looked at his chickens and hesitated, for he needed the money they would bring, but took one and tossed it into the darkness.

A sound of ravenous chomping echoed about the walls of the well. 'Thank you,' said the voice. 'Next, you should ask her what she enjoys doing, then come back and tell me of it.'

The farmer continued to market, where he saw the beautiful Eanna, who purchased one of his chickens.

'What is it you enjoy doing?' asked the farmer with trembling voice and dry mouth.

'I enjoy dancing,' she said and smiled at him with lips he dreamed of kissing.

Later that day, the farmer returned from market, but try as he might, he could not find the well again. He returned home, knowing that she liked dancing, but saddened that he did not know what to do next,

now he could not find the well again.

Another month passed and the farmer returned on his way to market, this time taking several pigs with him to sell.

As he journeyed, he happened upon the well again, and went to its edge.

'Are you there?' he asked of the well.

'Nobody is here,' replied the voice.

'Eanna likes to dance,' called the farmer to the voice.

'If you give me a pig, then I will tell you what to do next.'

The farmer looked at his pigs and hesitated, for he needed the money they would bring, but took one and pushed it into the darkness.

A sound of ravenous chomping echoed about the walls of the well. 'Thank you,' said the voice. 'Next, you should ask her what flowers she likes best, then come back and tell me of it.'

The farmer continued to market, where he once again met the beautiful Eanna, who bought one of his pigs.

'What are your favourite flowers?' asked the farmer with a dry mouth.

'I like poppies,' she said and smiled at him with a beauty which made his soul hunger.

On his journey home, the farmer once again looked for the well, but try as he might, he could not find it again. He returned home, knowing she liked poppies, but saddened that he did not know what to

do next, now that he could not find the well again.

A month passed until it was time again for the farmer to go to market. This time he took with him three of his best goats for which he expected a good price.

As he journeyed, he happened upon the well again, and went to its edge.

'Are you there?'

'No,' replied nobody in the well.

'Eanna likes to dance, and her favourite flowers are poppies.'

'If you give me a goat, then I will tell you what to do next.'

The farmer looked at his goats and hesitated, for they were very expensive and he needed the money they would bring, but took one and pushed it into the darkness.

A sound of ravenous chomping echoed about the walls of the well. 'Thank you,' said the voice. 'Next, you should ask her what food she likes best, then come back and tell me of it.'

The farmer continued to market, where he once again met the beautiful Eanna, who bought one of his goats.

'What is your favourite food?' asked the farmer.

'Stew,' she said and smiled at him, pushing back hair that he so desired to touch.

On his journey home, the farmer looked again for the well, expecting not to be able to find it, but it happened that he did. With excitement, he ran to its

edge and looked deep into the darkness.

'She likes stew!' he cried into the well.

'I hunger for… company,' said the nobody at the bottom of the well. 'Perhaps, if you were to bring me a friend, I would be able to tell you what to do to win her heart.'

The farmer peered into the dark hole and spoke quietly, repeating the words he had heard. 'Bring you a friend?' he asked.

'Yes. Bring me a man, or child, and push them down here so that I might… have company.'

The farmer left the well, suspicious of what he had heard. He suspected that the nobody at the bottom of the well would not be making a friend of whomever he pushed down, but he longed for Eanna, and the nobody had been good to his word so far.

He returned home and slept, tossing and turning through the night.

The next day the farmer went to his neighbour and asked him to join him on a trip to the town.

His neighbour agreed and together they set off, following the road the farmer had taken many times before to market.

Before they reached the town, the farmer happened across the well again.

'That's curious,' said his neighbour. 'I don't remember such a well before.'

'Something lives in there,' said the farmer, 'in the

dark.'

The neighbour walked to the edge of the well and looked over. From deep within the walls and dark bottom, the sound of licking and slurping came echoing up.

'What is down there?' he asked.

'Nobody,' said a voice from the darkness.

'What is that?' asked the neighbour.

'Nobody,' said the farmer. 'Help me push a rock down there to squash it.'

And so, together, the farmer and his neighbour pushed the biggest rock they could find over the edge of the well. It plummeted down into the darkness and landed with a squelching thud.

'Are you still down there?' called the farmer into the well.

Nobody answered.

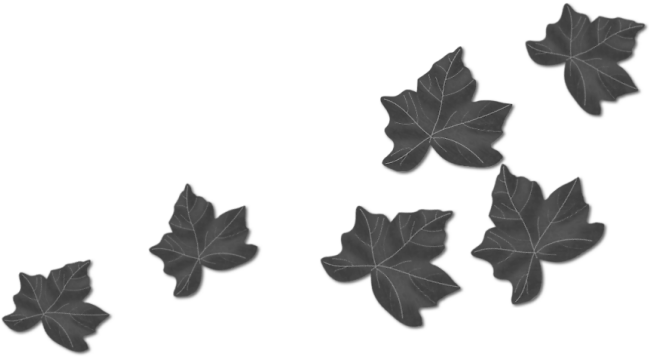
That night the farmer combed his hair, collected some poppies, and went into the town to call upon Eanna.

'Eanna,' he said as she answered her door.

'Yes?' she replied.

'For a long time I have loved you, but always feared saying so.'

'I have always loved you, but always feared saying so too,' she replied. 'Each month I have bought what you sell, whether I have need or not.'

And so, they kissed, and she welcomed him inside, and they lived happily ever after.

Another Part of the Wood