

Derek
Pamela
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Devota
Mario
Glenda
Doris



Produced by
Westminster Arts

A Pocketful of Magic



Produced by
WestminsterArts

A Pocketful of Magic is based on the fairy tale template. This participatory arts project is based around the theme of fairytales and incorporates creative writing, poetry, photography and movement and dance. Hester Jones (photographer), Dzifa Benson (storyteller) and Greta Mendez (choreographer) have worked closely with the residents from Dora House to draw out personal portraits of their lives and experiences over a period of months.

Combining a visual and storytelling approach, the artists have created a collaborative portrait of each participant, exploring fairy tales such as Peter Pan and Lotte Reiniger's The Fairy Tale Films, as well as each subject's childhood memories. This body of work is a series of still images edited into a moving projection that evoke and conjure up magical memories from childhood and prominent moments in adult life, finally knitting them together to form one image. The visual projection and portrait of each subject interacts with the sound of their voice to present a carefully crafted fairy tale that portrays the many facets and layers of their imagination - drawn from their earliest childhood recollections right through to adulthood.

In weekly workshops, a core group of eight participants explored contemporary photographic portraiture, landscape and still life images, to provoke discussion and interaction, and to aid them in building their final visual portraits. They also explored storytelling techniques and narrative skills that gave them the confidence to draw out their individual fairy tales. The participants, aged between 60 and 90 years old, are from diverse countries and

backgrounds such as the UK, Germany, France, Chile, Ireland, St Lucia, and South Africa. Dzifa and Hester successfully combined their individual approaches to re-awaken the latent sense of childhood delight in the adult: the final works are imbued with the wonder and fairy tale magic that is so often left behind in the metamorphosis from child to adult. Each portrait aims to explore the innate sense of childhood freedom and adventure, and considering the age group of the participants, it is apparent that the evocation of these memories has not been aided by family photographs which could distort and/or determine the memories of children from more modern generations.

Throughout subsequent group and one-on-one sessions, both Dzifa and Hester worked closely with the participants to create an individual audio and visual profile which was further developed into the completed body of work. Alongside these sessions, we brought in Greta to lead dance and movement workshops which proved to be both popular and stimulating. This extra strand reflected the group's willingness to explore and embrace new experiences, reflecting the issues and sharing of memories that emerged as responses to the sessions.

This publication and DVD is the creative legacy of this project which has been produced and managed by Westminster Arts. It was created in response to a request for the provision of an arts project with older residents in the Regent's Park Ward and is funded through Westminster City Council.

Paula Price-Davies
Project Manager

Jared Teaches the Tokoloshe Manners

Derek's story

written with Dzifa Benson

Many years ago, in a land across the seas called South Africa, there lived a young boy named Jared. At that time, King Shaka of the Zulus still ruled Natal and most of the Transvaal right down towards the Cape. Jared lived with his mother and father in a little thatched-roof bungalow in the land that is between the Illovo and Karridine rivers.

One day a friend of his father's came from very far away to see them. His father's friend told them all sorts of stories about the Zulu kingdom, of how brave and fierce their warriors were and how lovely their maidens. Jared hung on to his every word, his eyes as round as breadfruit. Then his father's friend taught him a song about King Shaka, which made Jared dance around the verandah pretending he was a tall and powerful warrior fighting off monsters with his shield made of springbok hide and his sharp spear:

*He is Shaka the unshakeable,
Thunderer-while-sitting, son of Menzi
He is the bird that preys on other birds,
The battle-axe that excels over other battle-axes in sharpness,
He is the long-strided pursuer, son of 'ndaba,
Who pursued the sun and the moon.
He is the great hubbub like the rocks of Nkandhla
Where elephants take shelter
When the heavens frown...*

But when his father's friend started telling about the sangoma, the Zulu shaman who could open up the heavens and bring down the rains or banish a Tokoloshe, Jared resolved to go in search of this man of magic so that he could learn how to banish Tokoloshes too. The Tokoloshe was the stuff of Jared's nightmares. His parents had told him many stories of the Tokoloshe who was half human, half demon, liked to drink beer and milk and looked like a nasty teddy about three feet tall.

The next morning, before the sun had started smiling upon the earth, Jared crept out of his house, tiptoeing carefully so that he wouldn't wake his parents. He ran down to the beach and

jumped into his canoe and started paddling downstream on the Illovo river towards the point where it flowed into the lagoon and then out into the sea.

When he got to the place where the mlovo trees ended, he decided to get out and walk. By this time, the sun had climbed to its zenith and it was beating down fiercely on his head. His stomach was rumbling loudly because he hadn't had any breakfast, he was in such a hurry and now it was lunchtime. He noticed that the tide had gone out so he decided to look for crayfish among the rocks for lunch.

He found three crayfish and was walking back towards his canoe, his mouth watering at the thought of succulent, roasted crayfish when he saw a strange chap, no more than three feet tall, walking towards him. He was carrying the kind of sack market women used to sell oranges. When Jared got near, the chap eyed up his crayfish and then began to laugh. He then opened the sack and showed Jared dozens of crayfish, many of them with eggs in their bellies that looked like bunches of tiny orange-coloured berries.

'Why have you got those?' asked Jared.

'And what business is it of yours?' snarled the short man

'Are you mad? They are berried! Put them back!' yelled Jared. Even at his young age, he knew that if the egg-carrying female crayfish were destroyed, the whole colony of crayfish in the area would die out.

'You dare to question me, you drippy little snot of a human?' said the short man, his eyes starting to glow red hot like coals. 'On your knees now and apologise or else you will pay dearly for your insolence!'

'No way!' shouted Jared. 'You are in the wrong and you know it!'

'If that's the way you want it', said the man. 'I usually get on really well with children but I cannot allow you to get away with that.'

At that he unzipped his skin to reveal that he was really a Tokoloshe with horns sprouting out of his head and short stiff hair all over his body. Jared tried to run back the way he had come but the Tokoloshe held him tight, shouting some gobbledygook words in his ear. Jared's skin started itching as if he was being bitten by a battalion of red soldier ants. To his horror his body began to turn into that of a black-backed jackal. Cackling madly, the Tokoloshe put a pebble in his mouth and promptly disappeared.

Whimpering and with his tail between his legs, Jared began to run inland. He ran for miles across the veldt, sorry now that he had not told his parents where he was going. He wondered if he would ever see them again. Eventually, he ran out of breath and lay panting in the shade of a rooibos plant, sure he was going to die. Then he heard the sound of footsteps walking

towards him. He was so tired that he could not be bothered to get up and run away.

'So little jackal', said a man's voice. 'I hear you've been looking for me.'

Jared turned to see a Zulu man wrapped in a cloak of leopard skin with a pouch made out of a goat's bladder tied around his waist. Remembering what his father's friend had told him, he realised this man was the sangoma. He began to lick the man's hand.

'There, there little one' said the sangoma throwing a handful of bones on to the sun baked ground. 'Hmm. I think you have learnt your lesson about running off without telling your parents. But I can't turn you back into your human form. That is up to you because you will have to take on the Tokoloshe again to do it. But you have the courage of a meerkat. Take this sjambok with you, it has been blessed by the gods. Be sure that you do exactly as I tell you.' With that the Sangoma walked across the scrubland and disappeared into a mirage.

Jared retraced his steps, his jackal sense of smell helping him to find his way back to the beach where he had met the Tokoloshe. It wasn't long before the Tokoloshe appeared in the distance, running towards him bellowing:

'You dare to cross my path again? You are obviously a glutton for punishment!'

'Come on you big bully' shouted Jared. 'I'm not afraid of you!'

The Tokoloshe ran at him, his eyes once again glowing like red-hot coals. Jared raised the sjambok above his head and began to swing it in a circle like a lasso just like the Sangoma had told him to do. The sjambok made a high pitched whistling sound like an angry wind and when he whipped it down to the ground, it cracked like thunder. The Tokoloshe dropped to his knees, clutching his ears, his whole body convulsing.

'Please, please stop it, I'm in agony. I will do anything you want but please make it stop', pleaded the Tokoloshe.

'Alright then' said Jared still swinging the sjambok. 'First of all, you will put the female crayfish back where you found them and never, ever, take the berried females again. Then you will apologise to every single person you have terrorised and I know there are many. And then you will go far, far away from here and never come back.'

As soon as the Tokoloshe agreed to these terms, the jackal's hide fell off Jared and he became a boy once more. He ran over to his canoe which was still where he had tethered it. He rowed back up the Illovo river to his house where his parents joyfully and tearfully threw their arms around him. They didn't scold him as they were simply happy that he had come back home. And there he lived until he grew up. But he always kept the sjambok close to his side just in case.

The Wishing Well at the Top of the Faraway Tree

Pamela's story

written with Dzifa Benson

A long time ago in the New Forest, when stones were still soft and animals could still speak, there lived a little girl (she was bigger than a really little girl) whose name was Sweetpea. She lived with her parents, her older sister and younger brother in a snug and warm cottage called The Nest in a hamlet deep in the tranquil heart of the forest. There was a stream just in front of The Nest and a little side gate leading out onto a gravel path and into the forest. Father worked on his large garden at the rear of the cottage every free moment and it always seemed to be full of fruits and vegetable. At the bottom of the garden, Sweetpea and her siblings loved to feed their pig acorns and their chickens seed and grain. Sometimes, inquisitive wild ponies of the forest would wander into their garden if the gate was left open. Sweetpea, her best friend Fred Purse and the other children, liked to go and play in the woods. Their mothers would pack them a picnic and they would run through the forest, playing hide and seek in the long ferns.

One day in autumn, when the forest changed her coats and dresses, Sweetpea decided to go and have some quiet time by herself in one of the tree houses with Rosebud, the pretty china doll that went everywhere with her. She skipped down the path and jumped over the stream, humming. She stopped to pick up smooth pebbles and pretty russet leaves as she made her way deeper in the forest. When she was very near to the tree house, a creature covered in straw and twigs jumped out in front of her giving her a big fright. Rosebud slipped from her hands and dropped to the ground, her head smashing into several pieces.

'Oh Sweetpea, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to startle you so much' said Fred Purse, for he was the creature that had scared Sweetpea half to death. Sweetpea bent to the ground to gather what was left of Rosebud in her arms, fat tears welling in her eyes and plopping on to Rosebud's dress.

'Look what you have done, Fred Purse!' she sighed. 'You have destroyed the one thing that is more precious to me than anything else in the whole world!'

'I'll make it up to you, Sweetpea, I promise', said Fred.

'And just how are you going to do that?'

'I have heard in the breeze whispering through the leaves that there is a wishing well in a land at the very top of the faraway tree which is in the centre of Telegraph Hill, the highest point in the New Forest. I will go there and get a wish to make Rosebud whole again!'

'I don't think that's a good idea, Fred Purse. You have never been further than a few miles from these woods. You could get lost and then I would have lost my most precious thing and my best friend too!' cried Sweetpea.

But Fred was determined to prove his love to Sweetpea. So off he plunged into the woods taking the pieces of Rosebud's head with him. Sweetpea went back home to wait for him.

Many days passed and still there was no sign of Fred Purse. Soon the nuts and leaves had all fallen off the trees and in the mornings, the dew frozen on the trees made them sparkle like crystal chandeliers. Sweetpea became sadder and sadder as each day passed with no sign of Fred Purse. She went over to the side gate, leaning on it dejectedly and looking towards the forest for any sign of him. Then the leaves parted but it wasn't Fred Purse. Out of the woods came the fawn pony who would always wander into the garden. He came up to Sweetpea and nuzzled her ear.

'What's the matter Sweetpea?' he asked.

'You can talk!' Sweetpea exclaimed shocked.

'All the animals can. We just don't let humans know that. My name is Mr Hoofsure Trotalot. Your pig and chickens told me what happened. Would you like me to help you get Rosebud and Fred Purse back?'

'Oh would you? I'll do anything to bring Fred Purse back. I can always get a new doll but there will never be another Fred Purse', said Sweetpea.

'Okay, that settles it. Hop on. Chop, chop we've no more time to lose. There are many lands that pass through the top of the faraway tree and we don't want the one with the wishing well to move on to make way for a new land before we can rescue Fred Purse. If it moves on before we get there, we won't see Fred Purse for many years. He may be a bit annoying sometimes but he does have his good points. Besides, I think he wants to marry you when you are both grown up!' he snickered.

With that Mr Hoofsure Trotalot clicked his horseshoes three times, turned three times east then once west and whoosh! They found themselves at the bottom of Telegraph Hill. Mr Hoofsure Trotalot raced up the hill as if his tail was on fire. He isn't called Trotalot for nothing thought Sweetpea. They got to the top of the hill and came to a stop.

'Off you go, my child. Hurry, I'll be waiting here for you'.

Sweetpea shinned up the tree but it was very tiring because the top of tree was so high it disappeared into the clouds. She had to stop to catch her breath and rest her aching limbs several times. Eventually she made it to the top of the tree and

Boxing the Fox

Sean's story

written with Dzifa Benson

stepped off into a land where everything looked like it had been painted in technicolour. The reds were a vivid crimson, the pinks vibrant fuschia, the blues brilliant turquoise. There were people walking around with blissful smiles on their faces but it seemed as if Sweetpea was invisible to all of them. Fortunately she had come just in time as she could spot a sign that pointed towards the wishing well in the distance. She picked up her skirts and ran as fast as she could pump her legs towards it. When she got there, she found Fred Purse lying curled around the signpost, clutching Rosebud, who looked better than new, tight to his chest. But his skin was cold to the touch. Sweetpea's heart stopped in her chest and she looked round for help but when she tried to reach out to the passers-by, her hand passed through their bodies as if it was passing through thin air. She realised that this must mean the land was getting ready to move on for another to take its place.

There was no time to lose. She picked up her skirts again and followed the direction of the sign. After what seemed an eternity, she saw the wishing well at the top of a small hill. Huffing and puffing to the summit, she lowered the pail on a rope into the well, making a wish for Fred Purse to come alive again. When she brought the pail back up, she took out her hanky and soaked it in the water. Then she ran back to Fred Purse whose lips were turning bright blue. She squeezed water from her hanky into his mouth. Nothing happened for a moment or two then Fred Purse began to cough, sucking great lungfuls of air into his chest.

By now everything had begun to blur as if the earth was spinning ten times as fast as usual. People were starting to break apart and float away on the wind that was picking up speed.

'Come on, Fred Purse, we've got to go. Now!' she shouted.

She hauled him to his feet and stumbling all the way, they made it to the top of the faraway tree just as the ground started to tilt at an alarming angle. They tumbled down the tree, skidding to a bumpy stop among its gnarly roots.

'There you are!' whinnied Mr Hoofsure Trotalot. 'I knew you had it in you. And it's so good to see you again Fred Purse. Don't you go scaring us like that ever again!'

And with that he clicked his horseshoes three times, turned east three times and west once and whoosh! They were home. He deposited them at the bottom of The Nest's garden where they walked hand in hand into the cottage. Whether they got married or not is stuff for another tale because this one has come to an end. Let out the rooster and lock up the hen!

Once upon a place in the land of the Emerald Isle, it was the time of the dreaming when even the gods had not yet woken up. Euan lived with his widowed mother in a one-room shack with a leaky roof on the edge of a farm. They were so poor that Euan and his mother would have to share one egg between them if they were lucky enough to have eggs at all. Being so poor meant that Euan had to go out and find work everyday even though he was still very young. He would go fruit picking on the local farms – strawberries, apples, pears – it didn't matter which, whatever he picked would be weighed and he would get paid accordingly. It would never amount to very much but in those times of great famine it made the difference between them starving or surviving.

Even so Euan was a happy, mischievous boy. His nickname might as well have been leprechaun. He would send people off on a wild goose chase when they asked for directions. Or he would go on stealthy expeditions to steal apples from orchards otherwise known as scrumping or boxing the fox. He would scrump the apples then carry them home in his shirt for his mother to make apple pies. But there wasn't a malicious bone in his body. All he wanted when he grew up was a small cottage where he could tend chickens, ducks and hens with one or two pigs and enough money to feed a wife and children. Well, that wasn't quite all he wanted. He also wanted to find the silver lining in a cloud.

One day at the end of a long, hot summer Euan was riding up the hill and down the dale into the glen after he'd been boxing the fox again. He hadn't got much for his trouble this time though, just a few apples from the last of the harvest, enough to make just one apple pie. He was riding in an orange crate that he had converted to a little box-car by attaching wheels made of scrap metal and a swivel to steer the thing along. Looking up at the clouds as he rode along, trying to spot one with a silver lining, he didn't see the bedraggled man coming the other way until he had almost run over his foot. He had to swerve madly to avoid crushing the man's foot, hitting a rock that sent him flying out of the box-car. He lay there winded,

the apples scattered around him. The man came up and stood looking down at him. He was very pale and as thin as a pencil.

'Alright laddie,' the man said, holding out a hand to help Euan up. 'Those are some juicy looking apples you've got there. I haven't eaten in a week. Can you spare an apple for a poor, hungry soul?'

'Yes, of course, here you go', said Euan, holding out a shiny, red apple. The man's eyes grew as big as saucers and he fell on the apple with the eagerness of the truly ravenous, polishing it off in a matter of seconds. Euan watched in awe as the man devoured the apple. He had known hunger but never seen anything like this. He gave the man another apple, which quickly went the way of the first in no time at all. Seeing that the man could probably do with a square meal and being the kind-hearted soul that he was, Euan said:

'I was taking these apples home to my mother for some apple pie. I dare say she will have made some leek and potato soup too. Nothing fancy but you are welcome to come and share what little we have.'

'Oh bless you, my son for taking pity on a poor old man', said the man. As you can see, I'm not in a position to say no.'

'Come on then, let's crack on!' said Euan. 'I've been gone long enough as it is and mother will start to worry.'

The man was so thin that he could fit easily behind Euan in the orange box-car and off they went, trundling down the lane.

'Why were you looking at the sky so keenly?' asked the man as they neared Euan's cottage.

'It is told that every cloud has a silver lining. I have been looking carefully for many years now but I have yet to spot one. When I do, I am going to use the silver to make life better for me and my mother.'

'Hmmm...', was all the man said to that.

Eventually, they got to the cottage and Euan told his mother all about what had happened. She said:

'But of course you must have something to eat. We don't have much but 'tis plenty enough for three to be sure. And you must stop here tonight. I'll not have you wandering around in the dark when the pinch of winter is already upon us.'

Then she proceeded to make a fuss over their guest until he sat back rubbing his tummy, protesting that he was unable to eat another morsel.

The next morning, as soon as the sun winked over the horizon, the man got ready to leave. His cheeks were looking much ruddier and his eyes more sparkly.

'Well my friends,' he said, 'I must be on my way. But by all the fairies hold dear, your kindness will not go unrewarded. You will never see another poor day again. Euan, take this stick. When I am gone, tap it on the wall seven times. You will find the silver lining.'

With that he went outside and found a patch of hungry grass to take him back to fairyland. Euan and his mother realised that he must be the Fear-Gorta who some called the Man of Hunger and who brought good luck to all those who were kind to him. They rushed into the cottage and tapped on the wall seven times as he had instructed. Sure enough, the wall cracked, spitting out millions of silver coins onto the floor. And yes indeed it's true, Euan and his mother never saw a poor day ever again.

The Little Wood Sprite

Devota's story

written with Dzifa Benson

Once upon a time, deep in the woods of St Lucia, where no human being dared to go, there lived a princess wood sprite named Leila. She lived with her mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. Their palace sat on the treetops in the forest and was made out of the branches twisted into intricate shapes. Flamingo lilies formed the windows and the roof was made of leaves in all shapes and sizes in all shades of green. There were many fabulous migrating birds and wondrous animals that had wandered far afield of the forest. They would tell Leila and the other wood sprites stories of the far off lands they had seen and the habits of human beings. It was difficult for the wood sprites to travel beyond their forest because their appearance was strange to human beings. They had a head, trunk and four limbs like human beings but that was where the similarities ended. Their skin was made of bark, their hair of ferns. Their feet were what humans might call gnarly roots. They had wings, as translucent as those of dragonflies, sprouting out of their backs. Wood sprites made a sound like the wind whispering through leaves when they talked. They had no desire to see the world outside of their forest because all that they wanted, they could get right there in the forest. Besides, they were jumpy creatures, easily spooked by new things and people.

Leila was the most beautiful of the wood sprites and her nickname was Windrider. All the other creatures of the forest – elves, gnomes, fairies, animals and trees alike would all sigh as she walked by. She had red, trumpet-like hibiscus for ears, a yellow snapdragon for a mouth, her nose was a delicate pink cyclamen and she wore foxgloves on her twiglike hands. She liked to decorate the ferns of her hair with the marigolds that she grew on her garden plot. Leila was the most quiet and wistful of them all. All her brothers and sisters had their own garden plots too. They would decorate them with all manner of strange things like matches, a bicycle wheel, a sow's ear. But Leila wouldn't allow anything on her plot except the prettiest of flowers. It was impossible to describe the joyful feeling that coursed through her when she put a seed in the ground and





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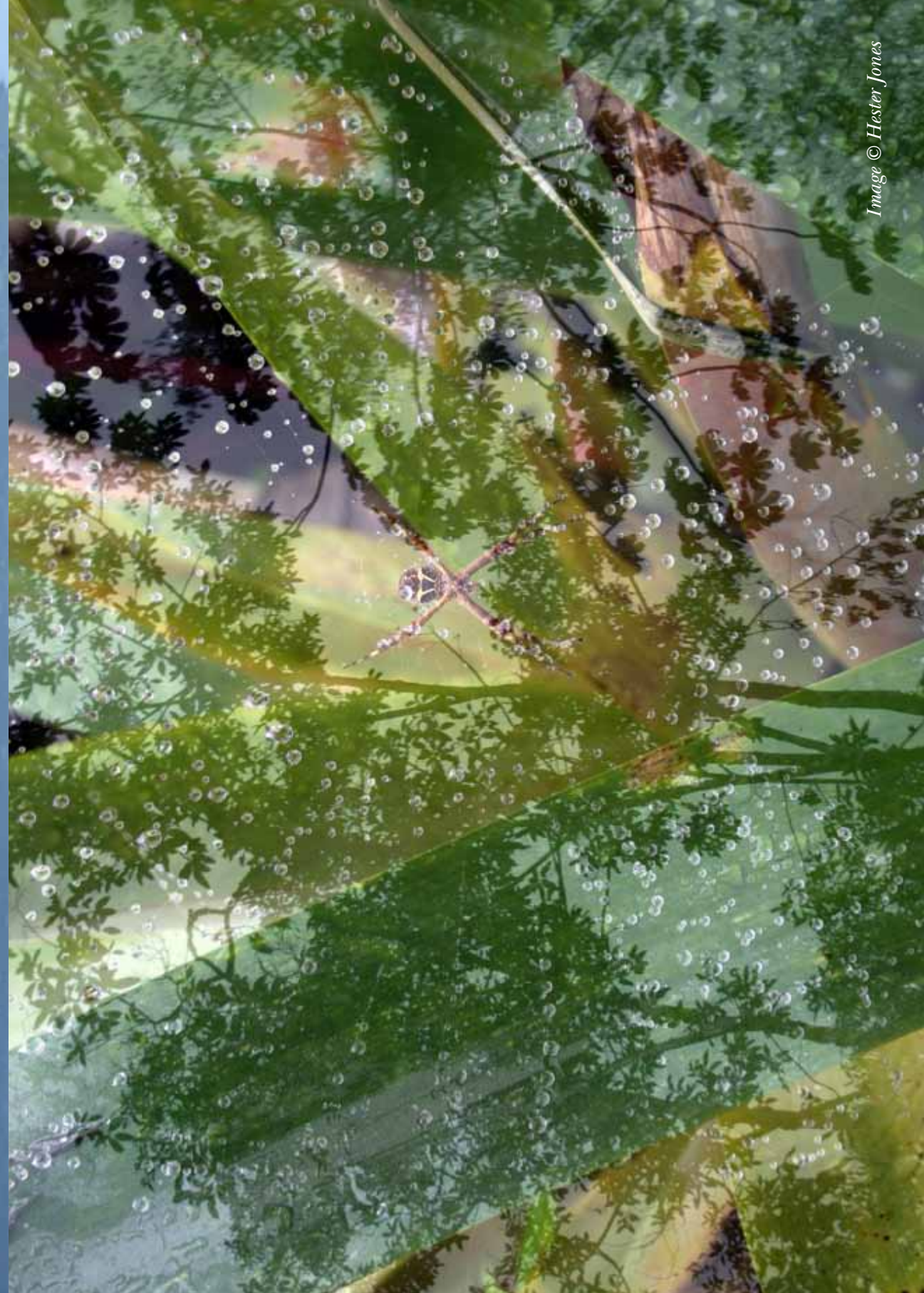


Image © Hester Jones



watched it germinate into the most beautiful plant. And hers were the most beautiful flowers in the forest.

One day during a fearsome thunderstorm when the overcast sky made the day as dark as night, Leila found herself on the very edge of the forest where it met human territory. She had been secretly following a young man who was caught in the storm and struggling vainly against the wind to make it back to his farm before night set in. He was a very handsome man and Leila fell in love with him immediately. Suddenly, a thick branch blew off a tree and hit the young man on the head knocking him out. Leila pulled him under the canopy of the trees, where the fat raindrops could not penetrate. She made a balm out of healing herbs to rub on his head and heal his wounds. Eventually, when the storm blew over, the young man woke up and headed back to his farm. Leila followed him, darting in and out of bushes and shrubs so that she wouldn't be seen. When she found out where his farm was, she turned and headed back for home.

Many days later, she was still thinking about the handsome young man. She pestered her parents, her siblings and the other creatures about the nature of humans but they couldn't answer all her questions. Not even her garden plot could take her mind off the young man or the yearning to see him again. So Leila decided to go and see La Diabliesse who lived in the deepest, blackest part of the forest where even the wood sprites feared to go. It was where the trees looked like petrified hybrids of animals and plants. Their roots tried to reach out and grab her ankles and thorns would dart out suddenly trying to poison her.

'I know why you are here, Windrider', said La Diabliesse. 'And you are a fool. To see your young man again, you will have to change your appearance to that of a human. If you do that you will never be able to change back and will not be able to return to the forest. You may never see your family again. Is this what you really want?'

But Leila was determined. 'I know what I want. If becoming more like him is the only way I might be able to marry him, then that is what I am prepared to do.'

'Well, if you insist. But there is a price to pay,' La Diabliesse warned. 'Removing your wings is going to hurt more than you can imagine. There will always be an itch that can never be scratched between your shoulder blades. And when the bark of your skin is stripped, it will feel raw forever. Even if a leaf brushes against you, it will feel like fire licking your flesh. But everyone will think your skin is dewy and your smile heavenly.'

Leila trembled at that but La Diabliesse could see she was resolute. 'One more thing, I'm going to need your ability to grow beautiful flowers. And those snapdragons too.'

'No, you can't have those,' cried Leila. 'I won't be able to talk!'

The Scarlet Macaw

Mario's story

written with Dzifa Benson

'Take it or leave it,' snarled La Diabliesse.

Leila nodded. La Diabliesse went over to her cauldron which was already bubbling away. She whispered an incantation over it and shook her claw at the moon. She poured some of it into a cup and handed it to Leila.

As Leila turned to leave La Diabliesse said:

'One more thing, if your young, handsome man doesn't fall in love with you and marry you, you will die!'

As Leila left La Diabliesse, the forest and all that she knew behind, the trees and animals, including the ones that had tried to harm her only a short while before shrank away from her. Some of the more delicate flowers even withered. She carried on walking until she got near to the farm where the handsome, young man lived. Then she drank down the broth before she could change her mind. The pain of losing her wings was so intense that she blacked out.

She woke up to a gentle swaying. She was being carried in the arms of the handsome, young man. When he got to the farmhouse he went through and lay her down on the couch. Leila was so happy to be finally so near him, the feeling of joy nearly overwhelming her even though her skin burnt from his touch. She put out her hand to touch his cheek but just then he turned to call out to someone.

'My love, come quickly, we have an emergency!' he shouted.

A pretty woman, who looked somewhat like Leila, came rushing out and started fussing over Leila who could only look on confused as the realisation dawned that the pretty woman was the handsome man's wife. Despair, as blue as endless twilight, washed over her. For now, she allowed them to push her back into the sofa but she resolved to leave at the first opportunity. At dawn, just before the handsome man and his wife woke up, she slipped away. She spent many weeks wandering from wood to wood but nothing could come close to the deep forest she had called home. She tried to grow lilies and busy lizzys her favourite flowers but they never fully took hold of life. All the while, her skin felt as if it was being whipped by a thousand lashes.

One day she found herself in a thickly wooded copse. She went in further and further towards the middle of it. When she got to the very middle, where the trees opened up above to let brilliant sunshine touch the forest floor, she saw a rainbow pouring itself too on to the ground. She walked slowly and purposely into the light of the rainbow. As its many coloured rays shot through her body, she felt as if she was splitting apart into a million different sparkly pieces. For the first time in many moons she was free from pain. She slowly began to rise on the curve of the rainbow and as it got faster and faster, she gave herself up to become one with the air, becoming an air sprite. It is her who makes plants grow lush and green and flowers even more colourful.

A long time ago, long before Manco Capac emerged from Lake Titicaca with his golden staff and founded the Inca empire, there lived a young boy named Yaco in a little village very high up in the Andes Mountains. Yaco liked to entertain everybody with his singing, dancing, theatrical pieces and larking around. He was so good at it that nobody took him seriously even when he was being very serious indeed. Yaco didn't mind too much but every now and again, he did wish that people could see that he was more than just the joker of the pack. Even so, he always maintained his good spirits and was always ready to drop whatever he was doing if he knew somebody needed help.

All was well in the land until a wicked emperor took over the throne. He ruled with a heavy and remote hand from the Sun temple many miles and many moons of walk away from Yaco's village. He toured the empire once a year collecting a punishing tax from his subjects. Sometimes he would take people away with him, never to be seen or heard of again. Soon the people in Yaco's village had to sell the few alpacas they owned just to keep up with his demands. Eventually, his wickedness ensured that there was a famine on the land. As Yaco watched his people scratch for whatever roots they could find in the arid foothills to brew into a thin broth, he resolved to go and confront the emperor.

Before he set off, the Machi of the village came to visit him. The magic woman told him that the emperor would only listen to Yaco if he could present the emperor with something that he considered valuable.

'The emperor has been seeking the Scarlet Macaw all his life', she told Yaco. 'Many years ago, one of the emperor's sons managed to get him a feather but he wants the bird itself because it lays golden eggs. A single one of its eggs is worth more than the value of the temple of the sun itself. It is the bird that Manco Capac himself brought with him when he emerged from Lake Titicaca.'

'But how am I going to capture a bird like that?' Yaco cried.

'Well, that is up to you. I know that the Nguruvilu guards the bird in a cave halfway between here and the Emperor's palace.'

I can give you a little help though. Here, take this herbal balm. You will know what to do with it when the time is right. Good luck, my son. This is a great thing that you are doing for your people.'

All the people in his village came to see him off. They sang songs that spoke of his bravery and gave him provisions for his journey. He set off skipping down the mountain. He walked for many days. The days turned into weeks and the weeks into months until his sandals began to wear through. One day, as Yaco was walking in a valley, he stopped to rest under a tree and have lunch. All he had was a piece of dry bread and a strip of beef jerky.

'Mister, I am so hungry. Please give me some bread,' said a voice from nearby. Yaco started, not knowing where the voice was coming from. A fox appeared from behind a rock and came to sit beside Yaco, eyeing up the beef jerky longingly.

'Of course,' said Yaco. 'I don't have much but what little I have, I will share with you.'

They ate in companionable silence. When they were done, the fox turned to Yaco and said:

'All the things I heard about your kindness are true. I know about your mission and if you will let me go with you on the rest of your journey, perhaps I can prove useful to you. My name is Yerimen.'

'Oh that would be lovely!' cried Yaco. 'It has been a bit lonely going all this way on my own. I could use some company.'

'Right then!' said Yerimen. 'The Scarlet Macaw you seek is hidden away in a cave guarded by the Peuchen, a gigantic flying snake. But before we can get to the cave, we will have to cross that river you can see glinting in the distance. That too has its own dangers.'

'We've come this far, we have to go on,' said Yaco, thinking about the starving people in his village. They walked on until they got to the edge of the river. It looked shallow enough to wade in and Yaco was all ready to plunge in.

'Wait!' shouted Yerimen. 'It isn't as safe as you think. The Nguruvilu, the water spirit makes the water seem shallow at both shores, encouraging you to think it is safe to cross. The only safe way is by boat. But as we have no boat, I will take it on.'

Yerimen, who was a shapeshifter, transformed into a huge fish with fins that beat like wings. She splashed into the river and swam until she got to the whirlpool that showed the presence of the Nguruvilu and dived in. She stayed submerged for a long time and Yaco began to worry that the Nguruvilu had killed Yerimen. Suddenly, Yerimen's head broke the surface. She was clutching the Nguruvilu in her fins and fought her way to the bank of the river where Yaco was watching open-mouthed. Yerimen proceeded to threaten the terrifying creature with the long spikes webbing her fins, promising that she would hack it

to pieces if it ever harmed another person trying to cross the river. Yerimen then released the Nguruvilu back into the water. The whirlpool began to shrink and then disappeared, the fords became even shallower, making the crossing safe enough even for the frailest old woman or youngest child.

They crossed to the other bank and started climbing the mountain where the Scarlet Macaw was hidden in a cave high up in the peaks, guarded by the Peuchen.

'We need a plan if we are to get the better of the Peuchen,' said Yerimen. 'I will distract it while you go into the cave and get the bird. Whatever happens, do not look the Peuchen directly in the eye. If you do, it will paralyse you and then suck your blood. Ready?'

At Yaco's nod, Yerimen transformed into a giant man and ran screaming and waving its hands, straight for the Peuchen's cave. Yaco darted from rock to rock for cover, following in Yerimen's wake. A strange whistling sound began to beat the air. It was the Peuchen waking up because of all the noise Yerimen was making. Yerimen grabbed it by its neck but it wrapped its tail around Yerimen's leg, tripping her up. As they fought, Yaco quickly ran into the cave and grabbed the Scarlet Macaw. But it wouldn't stop squawking. Hearing this, the Peuchen paused mid-fight, hurled Yerimen off him and started flying back towards the cave. Yaco was frozen in the mouth of the cave not knowing which way to turn and trying not to look directly in its eye. Just when he could feel its hot breath on his cheek, Yerimen, who had by now recovered, punched the Peuchen far across the valley and behind the peak of another mountain.

'Quick, we've no time to lose!' shouted Yerimen

Yaco thought that now would be a good time to use the herbal balm the Machi had given him. It made them invisible and the Scarlet Macaw silent. They were able to continue on their journey safely and a few days later, they reached the Sun Temple without further incident. Yaco presented the Scarlet Macaw to the Emperor who was overjoyed to finally get his hands on the one thing he had sought for so long. He was so happy that he gave Yaco one of the Scarlet Macaw's golden eggs which was enough to feed Yaco's village for many years to come. He was so impressed by Yaco's example that he vowed to take better care of his people from now on. Yerimen unpeeled her skin and revealed that she was in fact the Machi.

'You have done well, my son,' she said. 'The gods have seen your bravery and bless you for the rest of your days. Your story will live on well beyond your life. So would you like to learn how to be a Machi? I'd be proud to teach such a worthy student!'

They stayed at the Sun Temple for a few days then went back to their village to a joyous welcome.

Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble

Glenda's story

written with Dzifa Benson

In a land between Lithuania and East Prussia and so long ago the stars were still twinkles in the eyes of the universe, there was a poor but good little girl, Alyssa who lived alone with her mother, a dressmaker. They were so poor that soon there was nothing left to eat. So her mother sent Alyssa off into the forest to go and look for food. Alyssa's mother was very ill and could not go into the forest herself but she was very afraid to send her daughter there because unseen monsters had been carrying off children and sometimes, whole families from the forest to places unknown, never to be seen again. Gone were the days when Alyssa and her cousins could roam the fields, playing games, eating fruit straight off the trees and taking cherries home for pickling. All her cousins had disappeared and there was no one left for her to play with.

So Alyssa set off for the forest, wrapping up warmly in a hat, jacket and scarf. She went deep into the dark forest, being careful to stick to the path as her mother had warned her. But still she couldn't find anything to eat. So she went even deeper still into the forest. Soon she met three children coming the opposite way. Their teeth were chattering, their lips turning blue and when they came close enough, Alyssa could see that they were covered in goose bumps. So she gave them her hat, jacket and scarf, after all, she had on a thick linen dress and the brisk walk had warmed her up too. Just then, the children turned into three nixies, shapeshifting water spirits who loved singing and dancing but who could also turn very nasty if they thought somebody deserved it.

'We are Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble and we own the power of three,' they told Alyssa, speaking in one watery voice. 'You are a good and kindhearted girl. Go well on your quest, stay on the path but try to find the old woman with the coal black pot but if you run into trouble and need help, summon us by saying these words:

*I call forth the power of three
Flow down now, come save me*

Alyssa thanked them from the bottom of her heart and went on her way, cheered by her encounter with the nixies and feeling more optimistic. Again, despite going even deeper into the dark forest, she couldn't find any food or the old woman with the pot. Suddenly, she was swept off her feet and left dangling in the branches of a tree. The branches slowly began to pull her towards the big hole in the top of its trunk, making frightening chomping noises that sounded like a huge door creaking. Alyssa realised that it was about to swallow her. She called on the nixies:

*I call forth the power of three
Flow down now, come save me*

Immediately, the sound of rushing water could be heard, like the babbling of a big stream. It was Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble, who flowed in a torrent of water, smashing against the trunk of the tree, splitting it in two. Out poured several children, many of whom Alyssa recognised but alas, none of them were her cousins. Once again, she thanked the nixies, set the children on the path back to their village and went on her way. Deeper into the forest she went, trying to stay on the path. Sometimes, the path wound through jagged rocks and sometimes it disappeared altogether, in a tangle of brambles and thorns but Alyssa persevered, fighting through the thick undergrowth to find it again. She was determined to save her mother from starvation.

She came to a clearing in the forest where the sunlight pierced through the gloom to dapple the forest floor in shafts of sunlight. Here, the path split into many smaller ones, which was very confusing to Alyssa. She didn't know which was the right one to choose. She decided to follow the one that was right in the middle of all the paths. After a while, things began to look familiar time and time again. She was sure she had passed the same trees before. She realised that the path was one big circle that led nowhere except back to itself. She decided to start again, choosing the path that was furthest from the middle on the right. Again, she skipped down the path, trying to keep her mood buoyant by humming a jaunty ditty. When she got to the top of the hill, the path led to a crop of rocks and nothing else. Before her eyes, the rocks began to crawl towards her, increasingly gathering speed. Alyssa began to run in the opposite direction from which she had come but the rocks where moving faster than their usual immobile nature would imply. Alyssa looked over her shoulder to see that one of the rocks was about three feet behind her, its mouth yawning like the mouth of an endless cave. Breathless, she yelled:

*I call forth the power of three
Flow down now, come save me*

In the blink of an eye, a sound like thousands of raindrops falling in a pot filled the air. Alyssa saw curtains of rain falling on to the rocks, smashing them to smithereens and releasing all the people they had swallowed. Alyssa was overjoyed to see more of her people who had been missing for years. Once again she thanked Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble.

‘Take the path that speaks to the left of your heart,’ their voice splashed and then they disappeared in a rainbow swirl of water droplets.

So once again, Alyssa pushed into the depths of the forest. By now, she was in the deepest heart of the forest, in the part where even the most penetrating of sunbeams feared to shine. It was where the old woman with the coal black pot lived in a house made of human bones and the gnarled limbs of rotten trees. The door creaked open as she got near. She entered into the gloom to find the woman rocking in a chair by the light of a single candle. She was clutching the coal black pot to her chest with all her might in arms spidery with blue veins.

‘No!’ she shouted. ‘You can’t have it!’

Alyssa didn’t waste time arguing with her. Instead she summoned the power of three once again. This time Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble arrived in the form of a great, big water bubble. They trapped the old woman in it so that she could cause no more trouble to the world. In no time at all, the bones that made up the house reformed into people and Alyssa found all her cousins and sent them home. Sprinkle, Ripple and Bubble presented her with the coal black pot and told her that anytime she was hungry to say the words ‘cook, little pot, cook. Alyssa took the pot home to her mother. They were freed from their poverty and hunger and ate sweet porridge whenever they chose.

Blossom of Albion Doris’ story

written with Dzifa Benson

Way, way back, in Albion, when time was not measured by clocks but the ebb and flow of the tides, a father made his ten children work very hard. But he made Blossom, the oldest work hardest of all, even on her birthday. He had vowed never to look at her because she reminded him too much of his dead wife, her mother. So he sat in the house and mourned his dead wife. After work and in the few hours left before bedtime, Blossom would play with her brothers and sisters, swinging on ropes tied in loops around trees. Then she would wash them and put them to sleep, top to tail, in the bed they all shared. Despite all the hard work, Blossom was a cheery sort and the only thing that scared her was thunderstorms.

One day, after she had worked, her father sent her to market to go and buy meat. On her way, she stopped in a field to pick some herbs. A tall, dark-haired young soldier appeared and asked her why she had come to steal his herbs. She said that her father had sent her to buy some meat and thought that some thyme would go well with the meat. The young soldier led her to a castle and told her that he was a great lord and wanted to marry her.

But the young soldier’s mother, who lived in the castle too, did not like Blossom. In fact, she was an evil witch who thought nobody was good enough for her son if she hadn’t chosen his bride herself. She wanted her son to marry the daughter of a sorcerer who was much more learned than her in the way of dark arts. A son in exchange for the power to use more magic seemed like a fair trade to her. She gave Blossom the keys to the castle but warned her that if she tried to open the door that led to the turrets, the castle would crumble to rubble and she would never see her handsome soldier again. In time, curiosity overcame Blossom. When her mother-in-law was not looking, she rushed up to the turret door and opened it. Sure enough, as the old witch had warned her, the castle crumbled to sand as if it had never stood there. She cried wretched tears, went to the field where they had first met, broke off a sprig of thyme and set off to search for him.

She roamed over hill and dale, across river and through wood all the while calling his name but only the birds in the trees would whistle back. Eventually she came to a hamlet where one of the families agreed to take her in as long as she was prepared to work for her keep. She worked so hard, even harder than she had in her parents' home but she grew sadder by the day. Her mistress noticed this and she asked, Blossom told her story. She could tell Blossom nothing of her handsome soldier so she sent her to the Sun to ask. The Sun looked all over the land but could not shine a light on the place that her husband was hidden at night so he gave her a chestnut and sent her to the Moon. The Moon beamed high and low, searching in the places that the Sun had missed but could only look at night and found nothing so she gave Blossom an almond and sent her to the Wind. The Wind did not know but said that he could get into the places all day and all night so he would look.

Two days later when Blossom was working in the fields the Wind blew back and told her that her husband was hidden in the palace of the sorcerer and would marry his daughter the next day.

Blossom pleaded with the Wind to delay the wedding if he could. He agreed and gave her a walnut. The Wind blew on the seamstresses sewing the wedding clothes making them run for miles to find the fabric. Then he blew on the stable doors making them bang and the carriage horses bolt. Then he blew on the bells in the wrong church making all the wedding guests go to the wrong place. Next the Wind picked up the witch and sorcerer and blew them away across the seas of many leagues. All this gave Blossom enough time to get to the sorcerer's palace. She cracked the chestnut and out fell a golden mirror. She sold it to the sorcerer's daughter, who was as vain as Narcissus, for a great sum of gold. Then she cracked open the almond which contained emeralds, rubies, opals and fine pearls. The sorcerer's daughter was slack jawed with greed. Again Blossom sold them to her for an even greater sum than she had obtained for the mirror.

Blossom cracked open the walnut and when a fine gown fell out, she demanded to see the bridegroom, Blossom's long lost husband. The sorcerer's daughter finally agreed. Blossom went into the room and touched him with the sprig of thyme. The sweet smell brought his memory back and they went back to where the castle used to stand and built a fine palace. They brought all Blossom's brothers and sisters to live with them but her father went back to his house because he had vowed never to look at Blossom. He is still mourning there.



A selection of images from the project
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Westminster Arts is a long-established charity that funds, supports and produces a wide range of arts programmes and activities across Westminster. We work closely with Westminster City Council to ensure that the funding we receive and distribute, reaches the individuals and communities who need support the most. Our work with older people achieved widespread recognition with social services and has led to a contract with NHS Westminster.

We are particularly grateful to the participants who took part in A Pocketful of Magic and to the commitment of the Artists. We would like to thank Margaret Metzger at Dora House and Adie Cresswell from Central & Cecil Housing for their continued support and enthusiasm. We would also like to thank the staff at The Wallace Collection for the enjoyment they brought to the sessions.

Without the generous support we received from the Regents Park Ward budget, this project would not have been able to take place.

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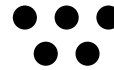
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