

NOT UTOPIA ... BUT MAYBE

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NOT UTOPIA ... BUT MAYBE

Sustainability stories



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PREFACE

This book is one outcome of a small-scale research project exploring the potential of stories and storytelling as a way of communicating sustainability issues in an affective manner, foregrounding emotional connection and personal responses.

The research involved gathering narrative accounts from members of the sustainability team of Canterbury Christ Church University about their involvement with sustainability. These accounts were then offered to creative writer, Victoria Field, to develop fictional responses and the seven stories collated in this volume are part of her response.

Christopher Booker, author of ‘The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories’, argues that “the first concern of stories is to show us the nature of the power of egocentricity and what it does to human beings”. This has particular resonance in the contemporary context where climate change, mass extinction, poverty and inequality are increasingly visible symptoms of the pursuit of individual desires. However, stories can also offer “an idealised picture of how human nature can achieve a reintegrated state”, in which there is no conflict between the desires of oneself, others and the wider world. Paradoxically then, stories both reveal the problem and offer a sense of resolution; they cast shadow and shine light.

This tension between darkness and light within the form of the story symbolises the challenge of engaging with sustainability where dystopian or utopian visions are all too common. We concur with Ronald Barnett who argues in his book 'The Ecological University' that "the task ahead is to develop feasible utopias" in which the focus moves from "what might be in the best of all possible worlds but rather, how it might be its BEST in THIS world".

The stories contained within this book are offered as provocation, consolation, inspiration, possibility...

To be taken from as needed...

Not utopia...but maybe

Nicola Kemp

INTRODUCTION

The main campus of Canterbury Christ Church University is dominated by a brand-new arts building and a 1960s tower block and chapel. But, right next to the cycle park, there's a wall that used to house the brewery and bakehouse of St Augustine's Abbey, now ruined but in Saxon times the foremost centre of learning in Western Europe.

Up the road is St Martin's Church where King Ethelbert was baptised at the end of the sixth century. It's next to The Priory, also part of the University, which was never actually a priory but does have an authentic Tudor garden. Things are not quite what they seem.

You enter the campus through a stone archway beside an ancient mulberry tree, possibly related to the one at Canterbury Cathedral where in 1170 the knights who murdered Thomas Becket left their swords. The campus courtyards are home to Kentish apples and hops, wassailing and beer-making, wild flowers and bee hives, part and parcel of the garden heritage of Kent.

The University, like any institution, is made up not just of its buildings, plants and people but also of its stories. History (and her-story) is the accretion of these stories, some like pentimenti painted over by new ones.

Seven people told their stories about how they came to play a part in Canterbury Christ Church University's award-winning work in sustainability. My task was to re-imagine these stories as they might travel into the wider world, unshackled by specifics of dates and bureaucratic events. I moved from Saturnine chronos

with his ticking clocks and calendars towards a more mysterious Neptunian kairos, all the time paying attention to hunches and instincts, resonances and synchronicities. Some stories emerged as heroes' journeys, some were populated by archetypes, some more like a fragment of a dream.

Sustainability is a word containing other words just as Canterbury contains the dramas of its invasions and upheavals. Sustainability is a flowering, rooting, slithering word that can also shake out its wings and fly. In its current usage, it's only the same age as me, born in the early sixties. But its six-syllabled architecture has the structures and significances of old French and Latin, both languages at one time the dominant tongue spoken in our city – but those are stories for another time. Sustainability begins with a sibilant sigh and ends jauntily with its roots in *habilis*, something handy and manageable.

We offer you these stories as provocations. Like the seven stars, they may provide hints for navigation as we sail over foggy seas. You can read them, draw them, dance them, enact them. You may find something that strikes a chord in you and respond with your own story. You may be irritated and want to use that piece of grit as an impetus to action.

More than anything they are an attempt to initiate a conversation. I imagine a flock of sustainability stories taking flight over our walled city into the wide skies of the world.

Victoria Field





IT'S NOT OVER YET

This is a story without an ending.

And who is the protagonist of our story?

She's a maker of connections, a mover between boundaries, a shape-shifting, tree-nourishing, breathing creature.

Like Indra's net of sparkling jewels, she spreads far and wide. Every jewel is connected to every other jewel so when one shimmers and shudders, the whole net is alive, both under the earth and up in the canopy.

She's not a cat, even though she's always liked her feline companions. She doesn't have to go far to find herself. She doesn't have to get in a train or travel in a car like people do in the North of England when they want to go to the Moors and be in nature.

She's from a country where nature isn't over there. It's here and around and within. Paths and trails come in and out of the heart of her. She's made of air and water, trees and roots. She's connected to the branching threads of the mycelium that hum under the forest floor, like the capillaries and nerves of our bodies.

She's not quite an animal, but she's certainly an entity. Perhaps she's the forest itself, certainly it's embedded in the national identity of everyone in the country she came from.

It took her a while to become this way. At first she wanted to escape the tree-filled wilderness of her Northern land, with its space and lakes. She wanted to come to England, because it would be cool to be in a city after living in a little town.

Her childhood was forest-filled but the gathering of blueberries in the vast shady spaces of her country's woodlands had become boring for a young person.

Her little town was constricting compared to the industrial sprawl of the city where she first settled in England. In England, nature is over there, a car ride away, a trip out. It seemed separate which was a strange notion for our protagonist who is at least part forest.

She didn't seem to have much in common with questions of balance and harmony when she arrived. Her concerns were more with people, with society, with criminology and social justice.

But in her university, kinship was fostered between people and ideas and departments that on the surface had nothing in common. People left their individual houses and followed paths and trails that had surprising affinities.

These issues ran like rhizomes under the surface. She discovered that even though the forest wasn't on her doorstep in this big industrial city, there was an ecology of connection. Like a cobweb strung between two trees sparkling with dew at dawn, light jumped between the chosen disciplines. The forest within her sprang to life.

Leadership spoke to homelessness, careers development to dentistry and everyone looked for innovative solutions to twenty-first century problems. No field of knowledge here grew as a monoculture, the winds blew in seeds from everywhere. Her passion for criminology was nurtured by social justice and nourished by concerns about the future of the planet. Nothing existed alone but all was connected in the complicated breathing entity of a forest.

She brought her knowledge from the big city to Canterbury. Here as a newcomer to a small community she had freedom to experiment. She began growing a

new kind of plant from seed. For one year it flourished but now it has died back, its flowers faded and no one is interested in it.

But she's a forest so she knows it's not enough to just grow a single tree. She wants these shoots and roots to be embedded but it's tricky to do something across the whole ecosystem when not everyone sees the beauty. She looked for collaborators to nurture her plants. This has made a difference, and now new things are taking root in different places.

She knows that not every plant will grow and flower so it's important to be philosophical. She can't not nurture her forest because the forest is her.

She has started something and there's new growth in the institution which may develop roots and branches.

And now others are putting sustainable ideas into new areas, the tender plants that may grow and colonise the deserts, making forests of everywhere. Family, friends, colleagues and even antagonists have parts to play in the new flourishing of the forest.

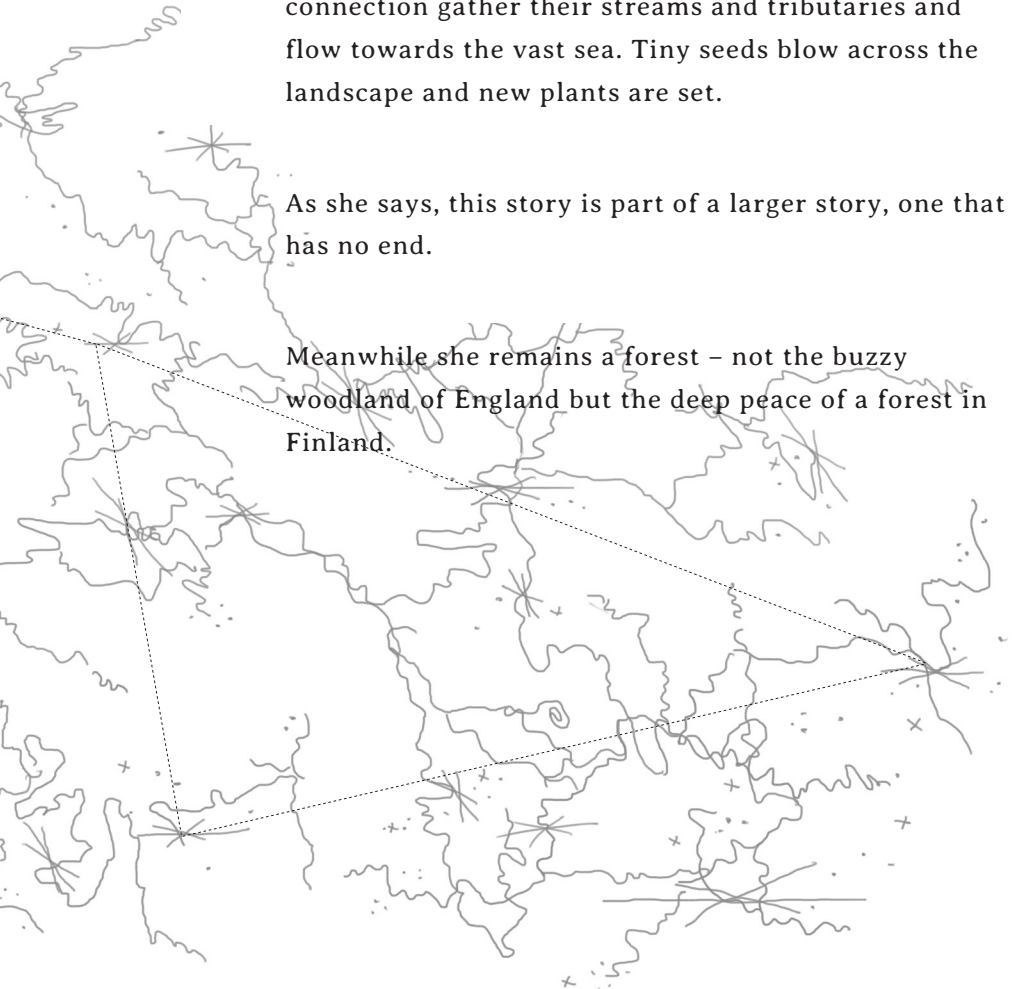
Our protagonist knows that social justice and environmental justice are like the earth and the sky, land and sea, night and day, the forest and the mushrooms. Each one is part of the other and can't exist alone.

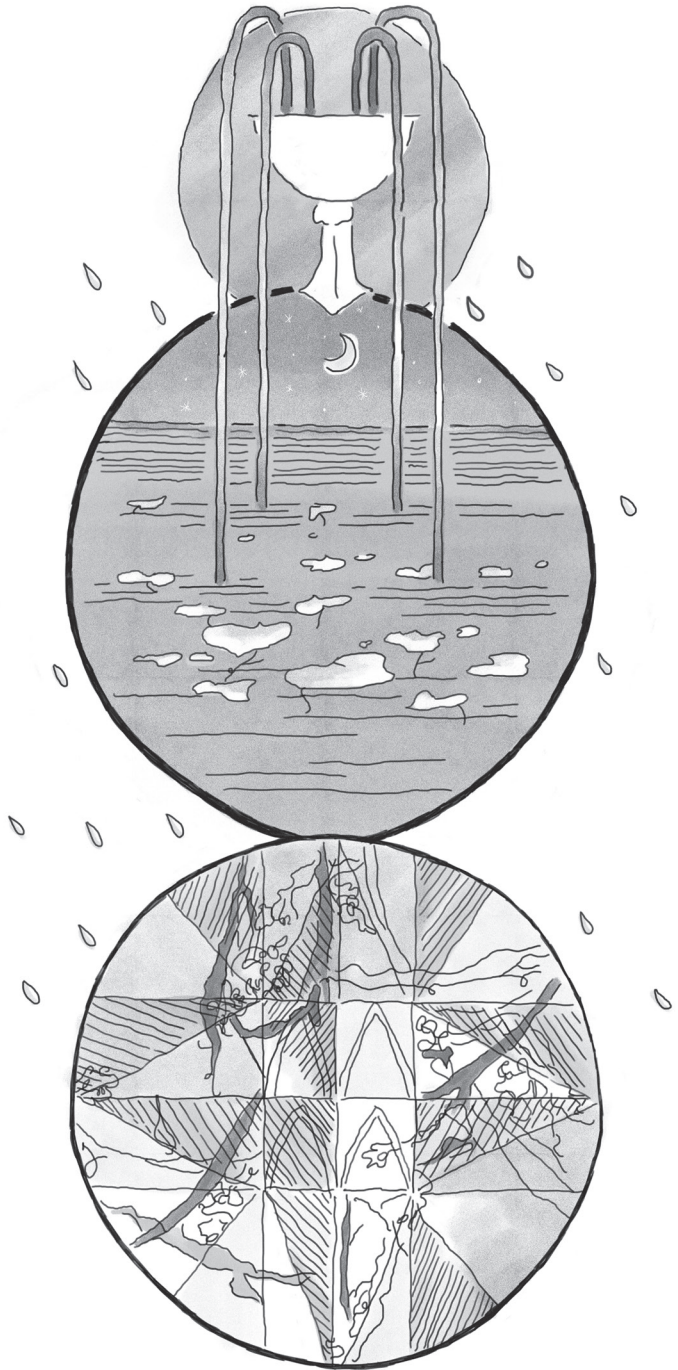
And the story of the forest is one that has no ending. Sad things happen, it's not all happy-happy, joy-joy. Sometimes the forest has been known to weep when no one is interested what is growing within it, the beautiful plants, the amazing fungi all ignored.

As a forest she knows nothing exists without being part of a whole. You can't help people without helping communities and communities exist in villages and towns and ultimately whole world. And so the paths and trails continue to be formed. The deep rivers of connection gather their streams and tributaries and flow towards the vast sea. Tiny seeds blow across the landscape and new plants are set.

As she says, this story is part of a larger story, one that has no end.

Meanwhile she remains a forest – not the buzzy woodland of England but the deep peace of a forest in Finland.





LOOKING ROUND CORNERS

Let's call him a flâneur but without the connotations of idleness. Let's draw on Baudelaire's definition and call him a kaleidoscope of consciousness, a giant mirror to the world.

When we first encounter him, he answers our questions with a question.

We ask: Who are you?

He replies: Do you mean am I a goody or a baddy?

I think we know he's a goody. Let's follow him as he strolls around the city.

And what a city it is!

It has water in myriad different forms. There's a wide sea which eventually gives on to the Mediterranean, there's a narrow channel where ships sometimes go

astray in fog and crash into the wooden houses on the waterside.

There's a stinking hook of a backwater lined by ancient mosques, churches and palaces. There are fountains in parks and gardens, the holy water of Christendom and courtyards for ablutions abutting each of the many mosques.

This city contains worlds within its many walls, built by the Romans, by the Ottomans, by the city planners of the sixties. There are walls to keep people in and to keep people out.

There are palaces and castles, islands and monasteries, shoe-shiners and sellers of small sesame-covered hoops of bread. There's the glitz of big hotels and the boutiques of Niantai and the squalor of the backstreets of Beyazit.

This man has lived here all his life but he's also lived elsewhere all his life. He dwells in the whole wide world. For all we know he may have lived here in previous lives too and will live here again.

As he walks through this huge conurbation, he unravels a thread of golden light, some can see it, some cannot. Some people have grasped the thread and taken it away to weave through their own towns, or villages or cities. Some never let go. Some, for no clear reason, simply snip it and let it drop.

He says it's hard to say exactly what the thread is. Its' had different names, like 'sustainability', like 'curriculum', like 'environment' or 'climate change'.

Like the emperor for whom the city was once named, our man is constant and steadfast. He is faithful like the dogs who roam around the Galata Tower, nuzzling the hands of the shop-keepers who feed them. He laughingly says he's like a horse plodding along. We hear the clip-clip clopping of the tired pullers of the carriages on the Buyuk Ada, taking tourists past the bouganvillea-draped villas.

So what is he doing, our city-walker, our flâneur? Why does he wander among the steets and buildings? Let's ask him.

What are you searching for?

I'm turning over stones and looking around corners, he replies.

Why are you are doing that?

It's what I've done since I was a child. I'm looking for something called meaning.

Let's sit down with him and drink tea from tulip-shaped glasses and talk about the meaning of meaning.

He is a genius at bringing people together, at seeing how the global and the local relate to one another. He can speak the languages of the world and the languages of the locality with equal ease.

If we zoom out and look at his city from the air, we see its structure, its squares and blocks, its quaysides and bridges. Walking the streets of the city, up and down its many hills, crossing from one side to another by ferry or by bridges, from country to country, our man is an expert on the urban environment.

And of course, urban blends in with the natural. Alongside its millions of human inhabitants, the city is home to seagulls feeding on rubbish, to feral cats sliding under the fish counters in the old Balik Pazar, the occasional dolphin frisking alongside a ferry. And of course, the dogs, both the wild packs roaming the parks and the coiffed and pampered pets on diamante leads carried in handbags.

You see, says the flâneur, we don't need to be without walls to be outside, surroundings are everywhere, surrounding us.

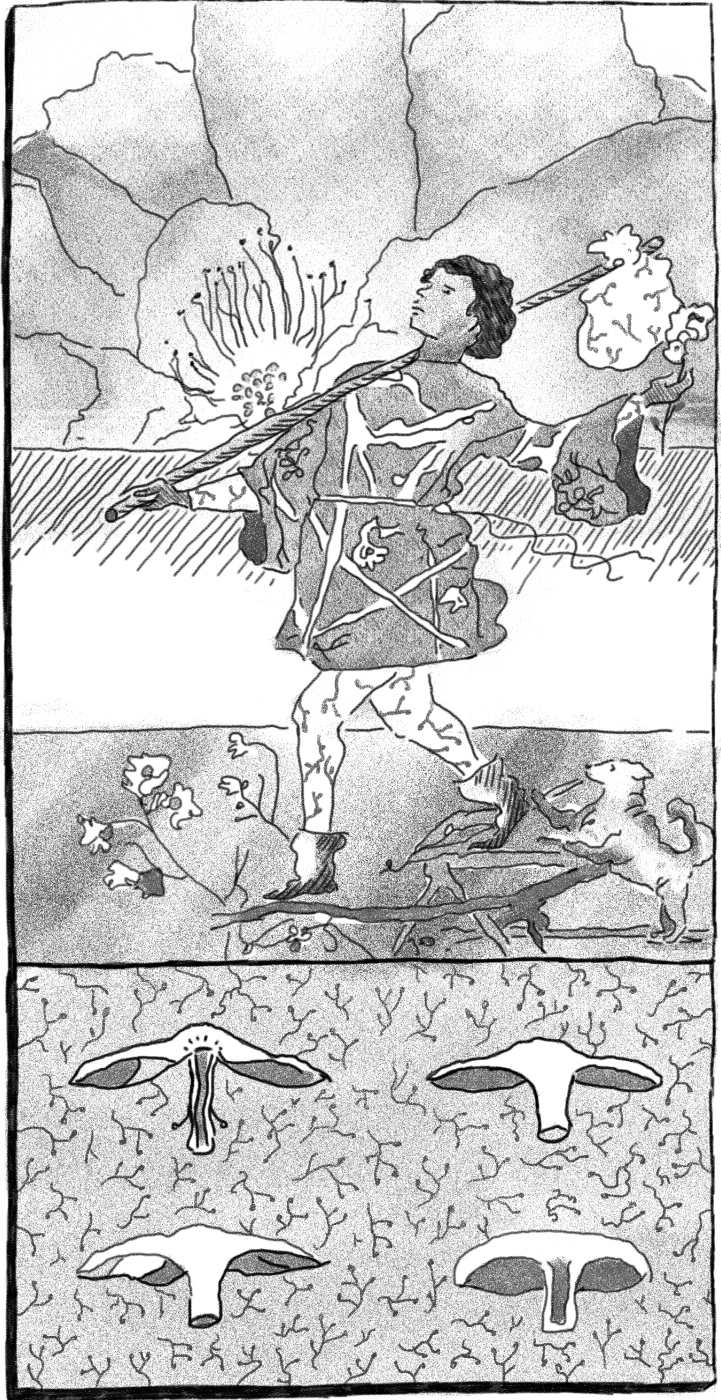
He is a living embodiment of Mary Oliver's maxim for writers: Pay attention, Be astonished, Tell about it. He loves to discuss and to put his ideas into books.

His ideas aren't always listened to and sometimes people called them nonsense or didn't see what he meant about the future. They snipped the gold thread and turned away.

Other times, there was the buzz of big names congregating around the coffee shops, Jonathan Porritt and Anita Roddick nodding and agreeing with our flâneur, admiring how he weaves his golden threads, bringing things together that don't always seem to belong.

Goody or baddy? Is he steadfast as a street dog near the Galata Tower or plodding like a horse pulling a laden cart in the far slums of the city? Or both those things.

Time has passed and the thread still criss-crosses the city. It gleams in the lamplight, causing the skippers of the big ships to rub their eyes. It's embedded everywhere he's walked, fine and strong, local and global. For those who have eyes to see it, it gleams golden.



THE PRINCE AND THE TREASURE

Once upon a time there was a young prince. He had been given a bag of treasure. He wanted to spend this treasure wisely and set out to learn more about the world.

On his travels he entered a vast forest.

There he met a wise woman. He asked her, what should I learn about the world?

She replied, go into the forest and you will see that it has two faces and two hearts. Each of them will teach you something.

So the prince began to walk, not knowing quite where he was going but simply putting one foot in front of the other.

First he entered the unspoiled forest. Here were glades

full of dappled light where the sun shone through the branches of oak and ash and beech. Here, wild garlic and bluebells grew bright in the spring and mushrooms and toadstools flourished in the late summer. Here, woodpeckers hammered, nightingales flooded the twilight with song and the cheep of the great tits lifted the spirits of anyone who walked there.

Then he entered the dark parts of the forest. Here, nothing grew at ground level, there was only a deep cushion of pine needles. Here, the sky was barely visible through the lattice of twiggy branches so even at midday in summer it was dark and chilly. Here, there was nothing for birds to eat and nowhere for birds to nest. It was silent.

The prince asked the wise woman what had happened to the forest. She replied, that wicked men had felled the native trees that have grown on this part of the earth for millennia.

She told him, they had no respect for the curving connections of roots and branches. They wanted trees to grow in straight lines so machines could easily enter the forest and cut them down. They wanted uniformity, trees that could be loaded onto trucks without wasting space, wood that would sell for the best possible price.

The wise woman said to the young prince, you have talents and treasure. Perhaps you can show the dark forest how to sense once again the light. The prince

agreed, I want to be useful, he said, I need to learn, I will begin.

He made connections between the trees so that the conifers in their straight lines could begin to connect to their roots. He persuaded birds from the untamed forest to visit the tall trees and sing so that spirits of the trees lifted up to the sky and their hearts felt the possibility of spring. Even though those trees never shed their needles and had no need of the seasons, the prince taught them to sense the coming of spring, the relaxation of summer, the yielding of autumn and the gentle sleep of winter.

The wise woman saw how the prince worked and rewarded him with helpers, fairies who could do his bidding and take his knowledge and skills further and further into the dark forest.

Soon the prince had eighty fairies at his command but they were wayward. When they should have been gently persuading the birds to visit, they gossiped and sniped. When they should have been running along the roots of the trees connecting them to other trees, they slept. When the prince tried to talk to them, they yawned and rolled their eyes.

So the prince went back to the wise woman and said to her, I can no longer do this work, I need to rest.

The wise woman said, I will give you another task. I no longer want to live in a cottage so build me a palace in the woods. To do this, you must work alongside my familiar.

The wise woman had a dog which went with her everywhere and the prince was unsure. How could he work with an animal that communicates by wagging its tail or raising the hackles on its neck? How could he cooperate with a creature so easily distracted by the smells at the base of tree and the scurry of a squirrel in the branches? What would a dog know about palaces?

But the prince wanted to learn and the dog was loyal. Whenever the prince interviewed an architect or a brick maker or someone to dig ditches or tile rooves, the dog would come too. And when the prince shook their hands, the dog would either jump up, cover them with licks and yelps of enthusiasm, or else cower in the corner and snarl. So the prince developed his instincts and the dog taught him to feel as well as think.

Over time, the prince and the dog built not one, but many palaces. The palaces filled with kings who wanted to live in the forest.

The young prince was summoned to speak to the kings. Come with me, said one king, I want you to manage my farms and my market gardens, my labourers, my horses and my orchards.

Come with me, said another king, I want you to organise my military campaigns, my soldiers, my weapons and my ships.

Come with me, said a third king, I want you to run my oil fields and gold mines, my prospectors and miners. You will grow rich.

The prince was tempted but something in his soul said this wasn't what he needed to learn. He still had his treasure and wanted to spend it wisely.

So he walked once again in the woods, the untamed woods where birds sang and mushrooms flourished and the light of the sun threw dappled patterns onto the earth.

As he walked, he once again met the the wise woman. She asked him, what is most important to you, past, present or future?

All three, he answered. The past needs healing, the present needs living and the future needs creating. But, he said, I am carrying my treasure and I want to use it for the future, for creating the future.

Then, said the wise woman, set to work, create the future. And the prince became busy.

First, he asked the birds what they needed for the future. We want to sing, they said, and for people to listen to our songs.

He asked the trees what they need for the future. We need space to grow and companions to grow alongside.

He asked the sun what it needed for the future. It replied, I need to shine during the day and rest during the night.

He consulted the kings in their palaces and asked what they could do to create the future. The first king gave him fruit and grain for nourishment. The second king gave him ships for travel and armour to keep himself safe. The third gave him gold and oil to trade so he could buy what he needed.

The prince worked diligently and the forest flourished. New species of butterflies appeared on the long open drives. More nightingales than ever sang in the spring dusk. The oak and the ash and the beech trees grew yet more magnificent.

The prince was called to the courts of the kings in their palaces. The kings praised him with eloquent speeches. He was given honours and laurels and his fine work was recognised across the globe. The prince was happy and pleased with his achievements.

But as time passed, the kings began to squabble about what was most important for the future. They began to think more about their own households, their personal wealth and their desire for power and influence.

The prince grew weary. The forest was so large and so complicated and there was so much to do. Sometimes the sun failed to shine, sometimes the trees failed to thrive and sometimes the birds didn't return from their migrations. And the kings were busy with other things.

One day, as he walked through the untamed forest, there was a gate across the path, a high fence through the trees and a sign reading KEEP OUT.

He jumped over the gate and saw that the wicked men with their axes were back, felling the beautiful oaks and clearing the brambles that held the nests of the nightingales.

He ran to stop them but one caught his arm and pulled it behind his back. He struggled and another twisted his leg around the prince's so he fell flat on his back. The third put his heavy boot on his neck.

Listen, Prince, they said, we're not wicked, we're the voice of reason. We are practical, we make money, we see the bigger picture. You, you are just pissing in the wind, with your butterflies and birds.

And with that, they walked away, leaving him lying on the forest floor staring up at the sky. He lay there for a very long time. He fell asleep but his dreams weren't clear. He woke to a grey sky and a chill that told him winter was coming.

The young prince was no longer young but he still had his treasure. He stood up and sighed and wondered which way he wanted to go, where to travel next.

Once again the wise woman appeared. She asked him, what have you learned?

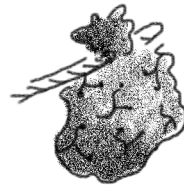
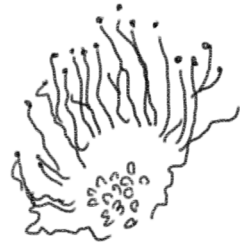
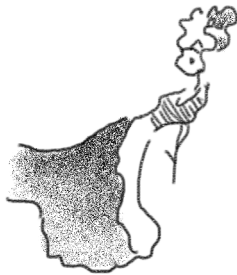
The prince sighed. I have learned many things, he replied, some things about the light and some things about the dark.

And what about your treasure? asked the wise woman.

The prince looked and saw that his treasure had multiplied. There were bags of wisdom and experience, knowledge and disappointment. At first he was puzzled but then he saw that everything that had happened in the forest was a kind of treasure, even if at first it didn't seem so.

It's time to leave the forest, said the wise woman, there are other places in the world to learn from.

And the prince began to walk, towards the deserts, the mountains, the oceans carrying his treasure.





SMALL WINGED THING

She's learned that even small changes ultimately make a difference.

Small things are important. The wren outside my window, busy with her foraging and nest building, singing as she goes, changes my consciousness, sends my thoughts in a new direction.

She knows that sustainability isn't just the environment. Economic and social sustainability are all part of the system that sustains us. Her wellbeing depends on it, the wellbeing of the world depends on it.

Everything begins with the egg, the cosmic egg of ancient mythology and every small winged thing begins in an egg.

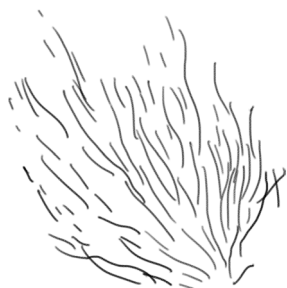
An egg, smooth, oval, mysterious. And inside, the invisible mystery of the embryo, its forming, its pattern

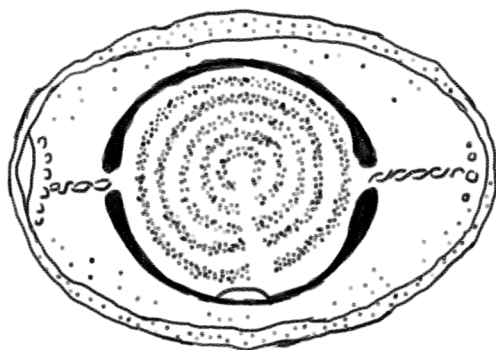
unfolding into birdness. The egg rests in a nest which keeps its temperature constant. The nest is a work of art. No, it's a miracle of engineering. No, it is impossible to name its mixture of beauty and complexity, the way its structure is perfect and predictable while its materials are random.

It was a gift for her to be in the nest. Amazing, inspiring and life-changing.

There are nests in the hedge bristling with twigs. There's a nest under the up-turned flower pot that's made of moss and lichen, like a mattress sprung out of its cover. There's a nest in the bird box that has long human hair in its weave and the softest cat fur retrieved from a fight in the garden lining the hollow orb where the egg lies.

Once, I had a hen who was broody. She was desultory and floppy, listlessly roaming the garden. I was given a clutch of blue eggs by a local farmer and lined an old wooden wine box in the corner of my study with soft fabrics.





The big brown hen jumped in, fluffed out her undercarriage and began to croon to the eggs. Oh, her song was a burble of love, bubbling through her syrinx into the quiet space, my tapping fingers providing percussion to her lilting melody. Breathing, being, breathing, my own human inspiration and expiration like a tide, in-and-out-in-and-out, pulled by its own rhythms of filling and vacuum. Her breath pushed by the pumping of her little lungs with their nine air sacs busy and purposeful.

She loved the Sustainability and Futures Initiative, warm and secure as a sky made of feathers and down,

the rhythmic murmur of heartbeat and soul-song above.

Living, breathing sustainability.

Living it. That's what they did. They lived it.



In the hedge outside the window where I sit writing this, the wren whirrs and jumps, her song like the chink of metal on stone. Polygamous little troglodyte, not even ten grammes of feather and bone but the weight of her song hammers through the glass and out into my fingers on the keyboard. She's writing on the air, turning insects to sound, building something.

She came, she says, for employment but instead she found life in all its forms, amazing, sustaining people,

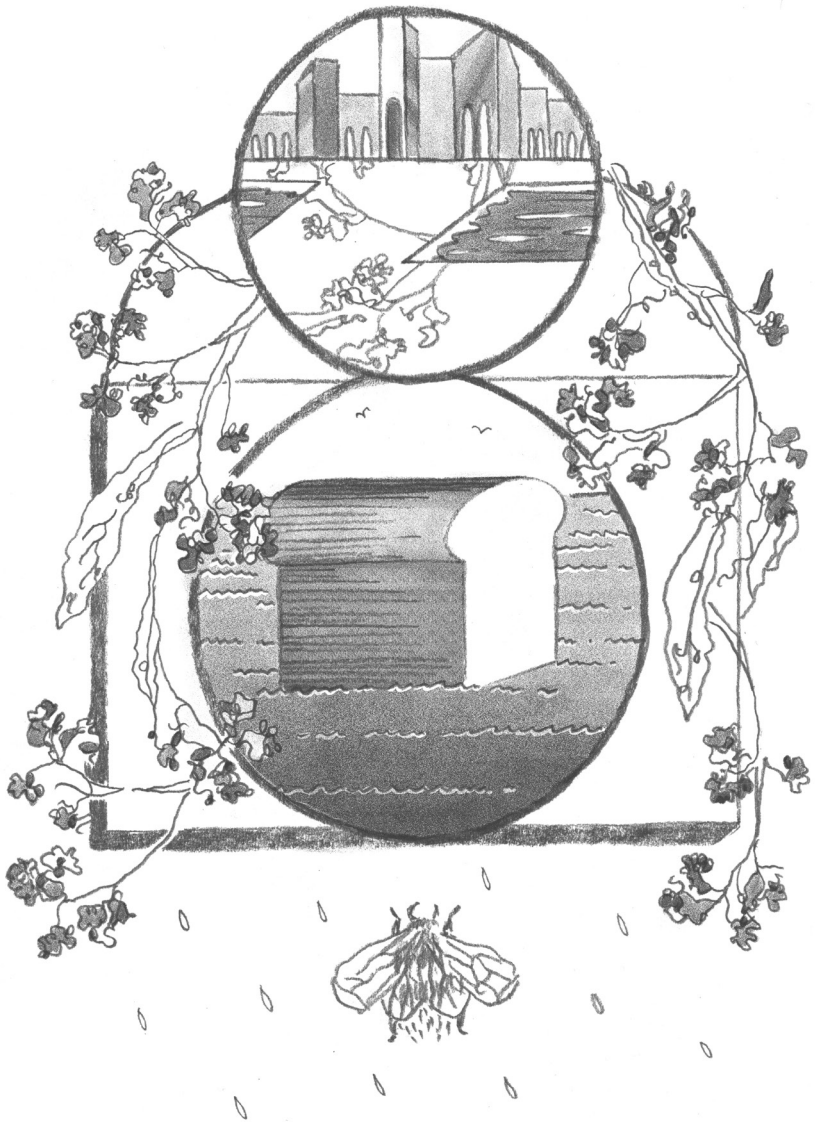
committed like the big brown hen, allowing her freedom to experiment and sing her song even if only one person listened.

Outside, the world is harsher. Once she went to a place that was barren, few berries to peck at, no insects flying by and she realised what she'd been given in the nests and the hedgerows and returned.

One day she might fly away again, build her own small nest, sing her own sweet songs, sit on a clutch of blue eggs that will hatch to surprise us.

Like the day when my big brown hen stood up so I saw the blue egg begin to roll and crack from the inside, where a clawed foot and a beak emerged, wet and smelling of new life. A small winged thing shook itself and dried in minutes to a bundle of fluff and odd proportions, into a world of warmth and cluck-cluck-clucking of connections.





CALL ME ISH

A young sailor is sitting in a pub in a small English city. He's quietly drinking a pint and musing on where he might travel next. He loves the wide world, its creatures and its plants. He loves the way a map can be unfolded showing territories in new ways, places to go, highways and byways. He's a sailor by nature and a reader too. As he sits, he can feel a desire brewing to be moving on the swell of the sea, to taste salt on his lips, to see nothing but the gently curving far horizon where a grey sea meets a grey sky.

The small English city where he sits is landlocked and it's unlikely that a group of seamen will appear and start singing shanties and quizzing our young man on his experience and intentions. No press gangs come here. But the young man has already said 'Call me Ish' to the woman behind the bar who was curious about his provenance.

As he drinks, the bar becomes misty and on the table, the wet rings left by the glass begin to spin as if they

are tracing the orbits of planets and stars are aligning as they do in the Southern sky. The woman behind the bar calls time and the bell makes our young sailor jump as if it were the ship's bell warning of a storm. And he stands, surprisingly steadily to leave the pub, to find shelter for the night and to ponder more on his journey.

As he goes towards the door, a man touches his arm. The man is imposing, someone to be treated with respect. He tells our sailor he wants to recruit him for a voyage, to a territory that's yet to be mapped. It's called the Lands of Sustainability and lies over an ocean that no one has properly charted. The depths and currents of that ocean are unknown. Nor does anyone know how many islands there are, how big the landmasses are. It is said to be inhabited but no one is sure who lives there, what their customs are and which gods they worship. The voyage will be difficult and dangerous, not everyone, not even our protagonist is guaranteed to return. There will be conflict, danger, betrayal and disappointment.

What about the ship, asks Ish? Who is the captain? The man says that the Captain is quixotic and mysterious, tending to stay in his quarters. The ship is vast and unwieldy, needs constant repairs but is a powerful vessel.

Why me? Asks Ish. Are you from a press gang, just picking up anyone?

You've been observed, said the man with the imposing air. You know about maps and geography, you've commanded men, you're ready for a new challenge.

The man was someone who was used to people doing as he said. When he stood in the pub, he filled the space, his authority not to be questioned.

So Ish was led on board and given a cabin, well-appointed and comfortable. He was introduced to the purser, the bosun, the mate and the cook, the gunner and the powder monkey. Each of these had a story about the Lands of Sustainability to which Ish listened with interest. They talked about paper and cups, grey water and thermal piles, they talked about computers and electricity, they talked about the future and the past. Ish listened but he felt they were scratching the surface, that their stories didn't connect, that any map drawn from their knowledge would show only archipelagos rather than a land mass where you could walk from one coast to another.

All the while the Captain remained mysterious, even when the great ship set sail, creaking, pitching and tossing over the waves.

Ish spent his time on deck scanning the horizons during the day and taking bearings from the stars at night. There were cabin boys and able seamen who helped him with his charts. He heard rumours that the Captain was happy with his work.

They entered the Southern seas and after weeks and months of empty ocean, cries went up that a new land had been discovered. Ish and his boys and men lowered

themselves into small boats to go ashore. This land had everything. Apples fell from the trees. Hops and vines trailed over the hillsides. Grain grew golden in the valleys. Bees and butterflies fed on the herbs and flowers that grew in great swathes along the highways and byways. The fishponds glimmered silver with shimmering life. And there was civilisation. The population was small but cultured and literate. They illustrated holy books, they worshipped a god of love by singing and processing and they tended the land with care and knowledge. Their buildings soared to heaven and their beloved dead were revered and remembered. They were experts in making beer, bread and honey.

Ish was delighted. This truly was the Land of Sustainability with a past, a present and a future. He made notes and wrote books and drew maps. He followed the source of the streams from trickles high in the mountains to where the water gushed over waterfalls down to the sea.

He heard that the Captain was pleased with his work. Ish was given a bigger cabin and better food. He was able to command more people and he began to show others his findings and encourage them too to learn. Ish was happy with this atmosphere of permission and permissiveness, he could explore and develop, create and share. A small voice though told him to be careful, not to share everything, that some things might get stolen or even destroyed.

Ish would have liked to stay ashore on this land with its beer, bread and honey for longer and to invite others to join him, to learn from the inhabitants and their centuries

of knowledge. But his companions were starting to lose interest.

The Captain was calling everyone back aboard. The mate and the bo'sun and the purser told Ish that the Captain had become obsessed with monsters out in the ocean and wanted to sail on. Others said, now we've seen the Lands of Sustainability, let's look for somewhere else that might be more interesting. Others accused Ish of pushing his beliefs at the expense of others.

He couldn't convince the Captain and the crew on his own to explore the island more and to make better and clearer maps. Ish was worn out.

They set sail again. This time the weeks turned into months and the months turned into years. Once again, the ship entered uncharted waters. The weather was unpredictable. Rumour had it that the Captain was convinced they had to vanquish a Hydra coming up from the Underworld.

The ship sailed in circles, it hit rocks and was stranded and had to wait for the next storm to set it free. Ish was asked to move from his fine cabin with its servants and elegant furniture to another below decks.

And then not just one but many Hydras appeared and struck the sides of the ship. It took all the strength of the crew to slay the beasts by hacking off their many heads one at a time.

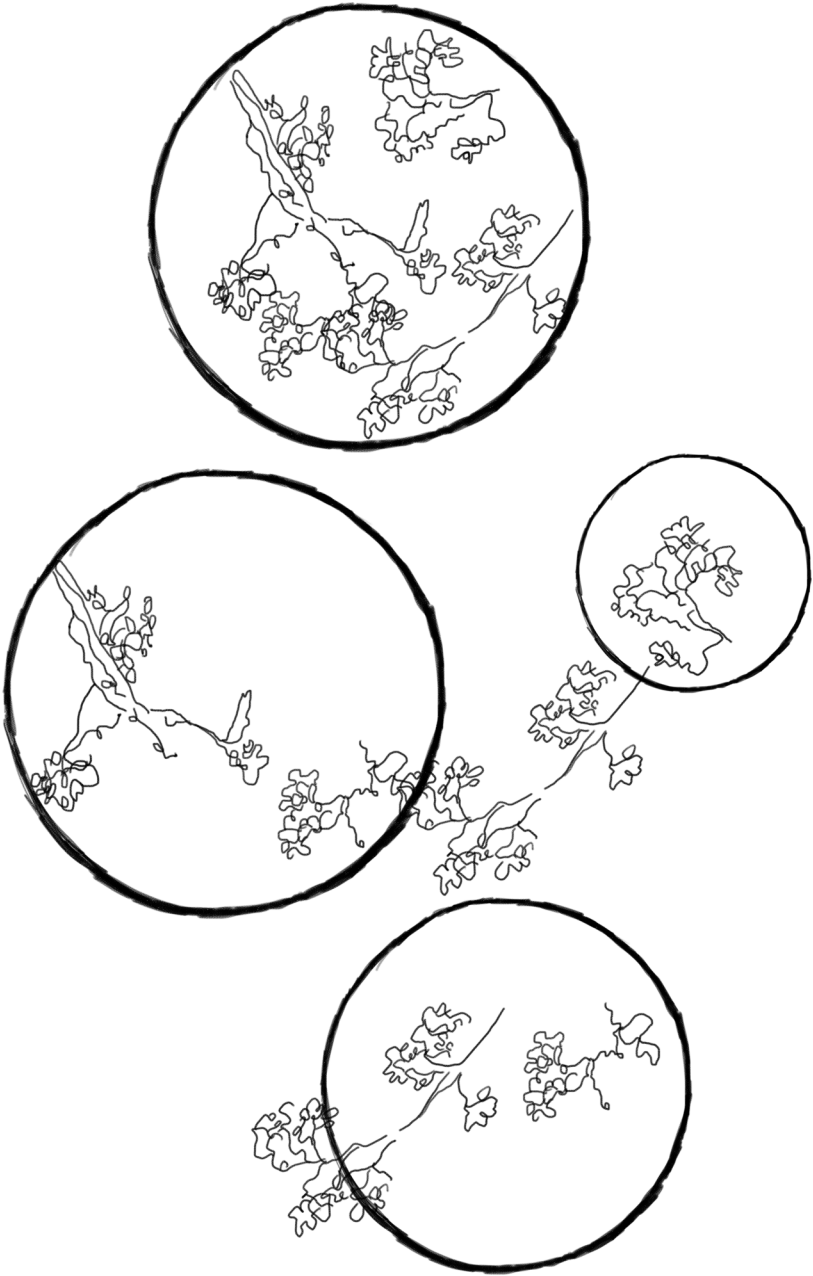
Tired as he was, Ish didn't give up spreading the news of the Lands of Sustainability. Once when the ship was sailing calmer waters, the whole crew came to listen to his discoveries and ideas, to look at his maps and some volunteered to assist him in their own time when they could be resting.

Ish thought it would always be this way. When storms struck or monsters reared their heads, the Captain and crew had no interest in maps and exploration and the Land of Sustainability was far from their concerns. When the sun shone and the sails billowed in easy breezes, they would gather around Ish, listening to his ideas and feeling their hearts filling with joy.

Finally, they returned to port and Ish was given shore leave. He once again made his way to the inn in the small English city. The woman behind the bar greeted him by name and as soon as she'd served his pint, the imposing man appeared once again as if by magic.

Are you still a member of the crew? he asked. By the skin of my teeth, replied Ish.

What have you achieved? asked the man. Might you captain your own ship soon? No, said Ish, but look. He opened his seaman's trunk and inside there was pot after pot of seedlings, of beautiful small plants, familiar and exotic, leaves and tendrils sprouting and curling and small fruits beginning to ripen.





THE WOMAN WHO WOKE UP



The tailpot palm is between thirty and eighty years old when it flowers for the first and only time in its life.

The same can be said of people, not everyone blossoms in their teens or twenties. This story concerns a woman whose life became remarkable, however unremarkable it may seem from the outside.



Once upon a time there was a girl who had two parents from different countries. They were different from the girl and different from each other. Neither parents were at ease with reading and writing and the girl wanted to learn. The girl's relationship with her mother was difficult. The girl grew up in the cold country of her father, knowing little of the warm Mediterranean land of her mother.

The girl was restless and disappointed. She didn't go to university at the usual age and she lurched from job to job. She struggled to find a thread, to settle, to belong.

She always wanted to be somewhere else.

Sometimes she would try to tell someone how unhappy and restless she was but her voice was carried away on the wind. People would turn thinking that they had heard something but then shake their heads and continue on their way wondering what it was. The girl would say to herself, I've never been heard, perhaps it will always be this way.

Years passed and sometimes she did this and sometimes she did that. She grew into a woman and even went to the faraway country of her mother and travelled its highways and byways. Even though she was timid and afraid of speaking she stood up and taught English to groups of sixty at a time. She realised she had a voice, she had courage, but still she was restless like the waves on a choppy sea.

There were wise guides in the world, some in unlikely places. She worked in an office run by a person who opened her eyes to the idea of sustainability and that thought never left her. Her view of the world changed.

And then there was a disaster and an opportunity. And the woman's world changed. She could study at last and this was a pivot around which her world changed. This was the biggest thing that happened to her.

She went to India and met another wise guide. She found a place at the centre of sustainability in the centre of the

university where her voice would be clearly heard and listened to. She felt heard for the first time in her life.

And not only did the world change but the woman changed. She moved from womanhood to elderhood and found her autonomy and creativity blossomed like a rare plant. The restlessness evaporated and she was content with what she had. She knew at last that ambition wasn't for her, that material things weren't important, that she could live within her means. She realised that achievement is relative and she'd achieved many things.

The woman now knew that all through her twenties, her thirties and her forties she had been asleep. Now in her fifties, she was waking up for the first time.

The woman stretched like Briar Rose in the castle. She woke up and removed the blinkers from her eyes. She saw not only that the world is a remarkable and beautiful place but her role within it is remarkable and significant. She is more conscious, more aware, more interested, more creative, making more connections.

The woman has come a long way from her roots and when she looks back at where she started and where she is going, she has no regrets.

She's no longer restless but in her heart is a small voice that from time to time calls her. The voice is saying she might one day return to the Mediterranean land of her



mother, to live in a small place and teach and write and do something artistic.

Now that she is awake, she can see possibilities and knows that there are plants that flower late but then never stop, putting out bloom after bloom, scenting the warm night air.



LITTLE ACORNS



Back when the world was just beginning, the humans and the animal people and the plant people could all speak to each other. At that time, there lived a brave young woman.

How do we know she was brave?

Because her favourite word was 'yes'.

When she was invited to step into the forest, she said 'yes'.

When a wise man asked her to perform a task, she said 'yes'.

When they said, leave your comfortable work and step into the unknown, she said 'yes'.

She was brave. She didn't wait for instructions.

When she saw a door that was ajar, even a little way, she pushed it further open.

Then, lo and behold, there was another door that also opened, and another and another.

When she met someone, she would talk to them.

She would find out their interests and their passions. Then together they would set off into new territories, exploring the world and making maps of where they'd been.

Remember, this was back when the world was young and the human people and the animal people and the plant people could all talk to each other.



The brave young woman asked an acorn whether they could work together.

The acorn replied, I must warn you.

About what? asked the brave young woman.

The acorn explained, once I start to grow, I need space. My roots will spread down as far as my crown will spread upwards. My branches will reach outwards and my trunk will grow more massive with every passing year.

Other people saw the acorn growing and joined the young

woman in tending it. They watered the roots and trained the branches. They cut down smaller trees to give it space and everyone admired the beautiful tree that emerged.

The brave young woman was concerned that her helpers knew how worthwhile their work was. Without you, she said, this oak tree would never have grown so tall and beautiful.

Every autumn, the oak tree dropped acorns that grew into smaller trees and more helpers came to nurture those trees.

As she looked at the grove of oaks, the brave young woman was proud. So much had been achieved by her and the others. The trees were thriving. But was it enough?

She wondered, what next? Should she talk to other plants? To animals? To the earth itself?

She wondered, should I stay here? Perhaps there were places to visit, doors to open, new ways of being brave.

She also wondered, what happened to me? What have I done these past years? What do I want to do next?



The young woman decided to go for a walk, to walk and

think, think and walk.

She walked through the groves of oaks and praised each tree for its flourishing. She thanked each of her helpers for their attention to the trees and then she left the forest.

She could see a range of hills in the distance and headed for the highest point. She followed the path as it zigzagged up to the ridge and then followed it to the top where she could look down at the valley.

And there she saw her forest. But what had seemed huge when she stood inside it, suddenly seemed small. The trees which had seemed so tall when she was next to them suddenly looked tiny. And the many busy helpers, with their strong arms and strong legs, were barely visible, like the tiniest of ants.

Well, thought the brave young woman, I have created a forest but what next?

Below her, she could see deserts stretching in one direction, prairies in another, the vast blue ocean in the distance and behind her, a mountain range.

Well, said the brave young woman, there is no need to wait. I'm alive to possibilities. I'm creating my own future. I have purpose.

And there on her mountain-top, she heard the call.



ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTE

Like drawing lines around words, I have been thinking about images as spells. And by spells I mean using the textual lines of a drawn image to hold the same power as words written or spoken. In this way, an almost literal illustration of the text somehow creates more holes and hidden meaning, and therefore further illumination.

I try, in this book, to make images that are themselves trying to become spells. Images that you can hold onto as objects, but still have the ability to evoke and move, without setting up comparison or opposition with text.

The book is designed with big left hand margins to allow for notes and scrawling, and nice space between lines of text, to encourage reading aloud.

The heading font, Fondomento, is a font based on an English calligraphic font. I hope this imbues the world of Victoria's writing and the sustainability team with the new mythology that it creates.

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