



Tails and Roots



A creative
exploration of
biodiversity
in research

Tails and Roots. A creative exploration of biodiversity in research

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Our friends, family and moments with nature
that make our own stories beautiful.

Walk through a world of words with us.

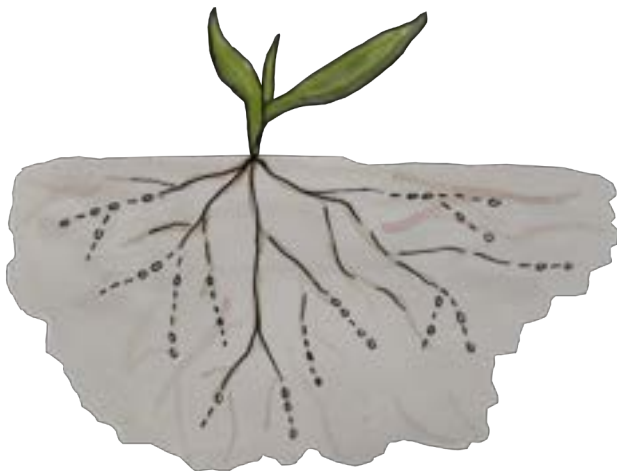
Between these pages we share stories that reflect the passion that drives our work.

As individual researchers we each explore very different topics using an array of methods, yet as a group we have shared our deep connection with nature.

Each tale in this book delves into aspects of the biodiversity research happening at the University of Exeter.

May these stories spark your curiosity.

Enjoy!



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Out of Time

by Aoife Maher

GrowCo Laboratory

19/01/2082

Rowan hissed in frustration as he scanned the latest test results. Six months of work on the nutrient solution, but the 43rd batch of Lollo Rosso specimens showed no sign of improvement.

Yet again, each nutrient marker fell far below the density threshold they needed.

Rowan didn't bother to shed his lab coat and gloves. Striding out of the sterile zone, taking the stairs two at a time, he made his way up to the executive offices...

"Elodie, you cannot be bloody serious. Give us one more chance. It's too soon for Plan B. Please."

Elodie, MD of GrowCo, didn't even look up. "Pods booked for two weeks' time Rowan. It's not just us. GreenCorp and FutureFarm can't get their solutions to work either. Ministry is shitting itself. We're out of time."

02/02/2082

Rowan shifted nervously. The temporal suit was tight in all the wrong places. His palms were slick. He struggled to grip the plastic statis tube containing the specimens, tossing the container from one sweaty hand to the other. The jobsworth from the Ministry of Time leading the pre-jump briefing frowned at him.

"Do try and concentrate Doctor," he chided, "time travel is a serious business... as I was saying, we have authorised the temporal passage of



plant material for the first time given the gravity of the nutrition crisis. However, I must stress that no additional historic artefacts can return with you. Is that clear? Both scientist and plant must return sterile and disinfected from the past...”



Rowan zoned out again and focused on breathing in and out.

Spinners Edge Market Garden

07/05/2025

Rowan's brain slowly blinked into consciousness. His head pounded. He was facedown on a wet, scratchy surface. Something was tickling his nose. Around him a cacophony of birds shouted to each other. His head pounded more.

“You're here then.” A soft voice spoke from nearby and Rowan bolted upright.



She stood a few paces away, eyeing him sceptically. Rowan scrambled around for the stasis tube, the specimens seemed unbothered by their recent adventures and he sighed in relief.

“You're Ash, right? My contact? You've got to help me. My plants, they keep dying. Look,

look at them.” He thrust the tube at her imploringly.

She rolled her eyes. “Of course they would, in that little plastic prison. Come on, we'll put them in the polytunnel.”

As she strode away Rowan took the opportunity to look around. Rows and rows of plants surrounded him. Bright greens and blue greens and purples. Insects danced between the rows, flitting from plant to plant. He tried to suppress a shudder on noticing the red-brown earth splash marks on the leaves.

After a moment Ash called him over. “Look, here are your sorry specimens. I’ve planted them up in this polytunnel. We’ll check on them in a week. Don’t be tempted to peek.” She grinned at him. “Now, how shall we put you to work?”

08/05/2025

Rowan scrubbed furiously at his nails. His fingers were raw. He would never get the dirt out. The thought made him heave. She’d had him bloody weeding all day. She could shove her bloody trowel —

“ROWAN COME QUICK!” Ash called urgently from somewhere outside. He ran to her in a panic and it took a minute for him to focus on what she was pointing at. A pale apparition was swooping between the fruit bushes, something wriggling between its talons.

“Barn owl” she said reverently, “hunting the voles that are nesting in my honeyberries.”

They stood transfixed as it glided past.

11/05/2025

He’d caved and snuck a glance at his Lollo Rossos. “No, no, no” he whispered. Each plant was covered in tiny green bugs.

Ash found him attempting to dislodge each bug with a pair of tweezers. She scoffed, “Don’t they teach you indoor growers anything?” She pointed

to some armoured black insects advancing on the mass of green bugs. “See these ladybird larvae, they are already dealing with the aphid. Weak plants are more prone to attack, but they are pulling through. This is why I told you not to peek. You worry too much.”



13/05/2025

Ash kept him busy with a project in the far field. He surrendered to the rhythm of digging holes and planting young trees, tucking the soil back around their roots.

Ash pointed out the living creatures in the soil, the way the clay became loam, the hyphae of fungi threading through the earth. Rowan felt he was learning a different language.



Finally on the last tree, from her pocket Ash produced a silver cylinder and nestled it into the hole. Seeing Rowan's bewilderment, she explained: "It's a time capsule, with a little something for the future grower digging in this patch." Rowan felt heavy, for reasons he couldn't explain.

15/05/2025

In his freshly cleaned temporal suit Rowan paced anxiously in front of the polytunnel. Ash was retrieving his plant specimens ready for his departure. She beamed at him, presenting the small plants in an earth-filled tray. They were not much bigger, but sturdier. The purples and greens of the leaves enriched. But Rowan panicked. "Ash, they've got to come back clean, I can't take them like this. They're contaminated. All that dirt will have to go. We need to wash the roots."

Ash failed to hide her disappointment. "Whatever you say Rowan."

GrowCo Laboratory

02/02/2082

The return journey was no less disconcerting and Rowan's breakfast splattered across the concrete the moment he rematerialized.

“DECONTAMINATION NEEDED,” shouted a voice and Rowan was blasted with cold sterilising fluid. Yet, he couldn’t erase the devastated look on Ash’s face from his mind. He glanced at the specimen tube and already his lollo rosso seemed diminished, a pale imitation of their vibrancy back at Spinner’s Edge.

Suddenly, Rowan raced for the doorway and towards the grounds of GrowCo, situated on the very site in which Ash’s market garden had thrived so many years ago. Past the gravel garden and the sculptures, Rowan found what he was looking for. The stump of an old apple tree, long dead.

Before anyone could stop him, Rowan teared at the packed, dry earth with his bare hands until his fingernails were bloody. Eventually, his fingers struck a familiar silver cylinder. With shaking hands he opened it and saw that it was full of fine, crumbly loam. Amongst the beautiful soil he recognised Ash’s writing on a piece of paper: “**Love the earth which you dwell upon, and the soil which nourishes you.**”



A Warning

by Jessica Peto



here has been many a tale about The Big Bad Wolf that lay dormant in the forest. Time again, a warning is issued, a precedent is set. Beware of the Wolf.

Beware of the Wolf, perfidious and sinful, who comes to steal the lambs in the night. He pushes forth against the wind, which carries far the stench of his greed.

A tight squeeze under the fences and into the pens. Insatiable is the hunger of the Wolf, for fresh flesh of ewe. If there were no Shepherds by which to remonstrate the Wolf's unholy embrace, no lambs would survive until the turn of Spring. Where there are no babes, then the Wolf turns its jaws to the deer. There is no sport in his kills, no pride in the hunt, only devilish slaughter.



Beware the Wolf, who kills to survive and feed his pack, much like any man does. Taking only what is needed and little more, the Wolf who then gifts his spoils to the smaller beasts and feathered friends of the forest. They all then leave the grizzle and bones to rot down into the soil to bloom. An act of growth, the cycle which allows anew to flourish, life to death and to life once again. Harmonious and necessary in its existence, a course by which all can flourish.



Beware the Wolf, his pointed teeth bared in aggression against all that is good. With an intent to bite down hard into the softness of world and shake. Furious and wild, a scourge upon the peaceful land. A beast only of war and death, stalking the fields amongst the fallen men's corpses. He is there only to ravish in the spoils of battle, to feast on the grief until his belly is full and bulging. He worries not for the politics of the fight; he does not care whose body he consumes. He cares only that there is blood spilled enough to soak the ground and warm his paws.

Beware the Wolf, where he roams the forest will prosper. The threat of becoming a meal is enough to drive away the deer that would greedily graze here. A pack moves through the trees, painting the land with their paws, their tracks growing into a kaleidoscope of flora. They laze in the sun, resting amongst the bushes and shading under the cool cover of the trees that can grow tall and strong. The forest which is alive under the safety of its Guardian.



Beware the Wolf, wicked and cruel, who preys upon travellers who dare enter the forest. With piercing red eyes and chilling howls that seep deep into your soul. He'll follow close enough to drive up the fear within your bones, for that is when you are most satisfying in his jaws. Your blood imbued with a hopelessness that you could ever have escaped this fate.

Beware the Wolf, who is not a Wolf at all, identified by his strong bite and wild disposition. This imposter drives up the hatred of his Brother, acting in his stead to push forth the legends and the resentment of an enemy perhaps long gone.

A dog in Wolf's clothing is no different than a Wolf of myth.
In our eyes, does it matter?



Beware the Wolf, who aims to gain dark allies from his bite, a maker of monstrosities. Who wishes to taint the land in darkness and trick young girls and old women into his stomach. He who needs to be beaten down by the strong and the brave, by the Holy. An ancestral rhetoric rings true – Se Wulf is Deofol.

Beware the Wolf, shy and fearful, wanting not to draw attention or raise alarm. The Wolf does not need to walk amongst our kind, attention kind or unkind, it is all the same. For he knows that to venture too close to the village is to meet a sharp and bloody end. An exchange of gold and praise to follow, mythologising the great battle between Man and the fearsome, principally unwilling, foe.

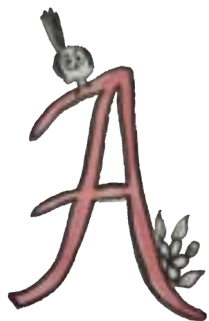


There is no need to beware the Wolf, who is no longer here. The forests have dulled, and their absence is felt strongly. Only fair now that this injustice is told by the wolves themselves. From their bones held tight by the soils they once protected, interpretations of a foe gravely misunderstood.

A small step on a path of amelioration.

The Annual Committee of Long Tales

by Francesca Boyd



crisp spring day woke to the rising sun, dew droplets glistened on petals and the green buds of the future. The birds trilled melodies and an old red brick wall guarded the orchard of wise twisted apple trees.

From a tree hollow in the centre, peeped the smallest round face, with a white stripe between the black markings upon their head, thus forming a sophisticated mohawk. Two tiny beady eyes looked about and with a stern “beeeep” the Day of Tales began. The surrounding birds’ song exploded up to the clouds.

As I’m sure you know, today is the annual meeting of the Committee of Long Tales, an opportunity for those across the County of Cornwall to gather and share their stories. Birds, of course, tell long tales, short anecdotes and brilliant jokes. Often you may see them gather in fields, up high in trees or along wires, to chatter, to laugh and most importantly to discuss what they have seen. What is special about the Committee of Long Tales, you ask? The birds, the committee comprises of five Long Tailed Tits, no one knows when it started but rumour has it that these five birds are older than the orchard, they have witnessed the lives of many from their gnarly grand central tree.

The smallest of the five birds hops out of the hollow and along the branch, promptly followed by another slightly larger, more sleek long-tailed tit. Moments later a slightly grumpy third bird bobs along.



Then the fourth with a dash of excitement joins the others.

After a pause in commotions the fifth and largest of The Committee arrives, his dark brow lines furrowed from time, for this bird has seen the land change and it has gravely concerned him.

After a ruffle of feathers, they settle together. The chorus of the orchard falls silent. The smallest of the committee dips their tail, looks up to the sky and declares "The Day of Long Tales is to begin".

Around the edge of the wall several birds dive into the shrubs, another rustles amongst the leaves, and three and four sit together on the corner of a wheelbarrow. The audience settles in.

"Beep beep, who would like to meet?"

A buzz passes by the tree, a brown ball with wings flashes by and lands upon the wooden bench.

"Me, me please, yes me!"

This round ball of a bird, with a tiny beak and pointed tail bounces side to side.

"I have a short tale!"

"Indeed you do," chuckles the elder of the committee. "Please proceed young wren, of the mid-woodland, two flights west."



"Thanks, yup, ta, thanks! Well well well well," trills the young wren. "My den is dense, it's often destroyed when the yard folk tidy up the garden." He hops from side to side. "But this year, well this year it's still there! They've left the bramble, next to the children play area, it's still there!"

The wren loves to sit and watch the children laugh, he likes to see the women and men in their beautiful clothes chime glasses, show off shoes and dance under the lights. This year he tells the committee about a new flower bed, it's got different smells, and so many insects. The garden has vegetables and fruit now, and he's even seen the yard folk bring in bees!

“Well,” says the middle sized committee member, “This really is something.”

“Yes, really is something,” say the others.

“Only a decade ago they’d have removed the hedge for your nest, they’d chase off the rest of the insects too” the committee mumbled to one another, for some time ago this old house had been only blank short grass with no hiding places, a wildlife desert.

“I love it, love it love it,” the thrilled wren declared, “I’d also, yes, yes, just like to say...”

CRAASSHHHHH a rather large pigeon crashed into the wheelbarrow, birds startled and took flight! Cries of “what, who and why?” filled the air! “SORRY!” said the pigeon “SO SORRY!” The grey and flustered bird turn themselves around and looked up at the branch. Five stern faces peered back down at them.



“I... TOOOO... HAVE A STOORRRYYY”

“Ooh do do do tell!” said the Wren.

“RIGHT OKAY, UP NORTH NORTH TWO FLIGHTS EAST OF HERE,” The pigeon caught their breath, gave a small cough and started again but with less shouting...

“North, north as I said, it’s a place where the small folk go for trips. They take sandwiches and point at things, well the big folk running those

barns for the studying and sleeping, yes, you know the ones, they've let the hornets stay!"

The pigeon couldn't believe it, they'd seen a change in the children, more notebooks, pointing and drawing. The pigeon believed they'd been counted quite a number of times, proud to be part of a survey.



They continued, clambering up onto the edge of the wheelbarrow, "There's more life in them fields than I've ever seen, it's honestly quite noisy, and there's birds there now, birds I've never met before, they're very happy. They said it's unusual for them to find a suitable home but they might stay."

The elder of the committee started to smile, his little cheeks cheering up. He'd heard about the move from the daffodil farming to some funny looking cows, but he hadn't been sure if good change would keep coming. He liked to hear about new nests finding homes and this group of folk seemed to really care about the land and they shared that with all the visiting small folk too. He turned to look at his friend, the blackbird and she flew gently onto the bench.

"I too bring good news," her eyes glistened. "The plastic caterpillar the folk stand inside, those ones where they hide all the good fruit, well those have gone from two ways south west of here," she calmly continues, "and



now, well now I sneak treats from the open fields, the hedges and even the compost pile," she giggles! The blackbird loved the change, the moles had returned and there were rumours of a new pond.

The elder of the Committee arranged his wing with his beak and flicked his very long tail, he addressed the Orchard. "I am warmed to hear of such stories, we have had many generations of sad big machine damage and at times great silence. But these are good tales, tales of folk making changes, tales of new places to fest and tales of great enjoyment. I ask you now, think carefully, has anyone else seen changes like these?"

A silence passed over the trees, bathed in the soft morning sun. And then a robin turned to chaffinch said, "Yes, me, I have," and the chaffinch replied, "Me too!" and across the orchard sprang tale upon tale of the folk who are making a difference, making a change, big and little. The birds chimed and celebrated for across the County of Cornwall they knew the folk had started to do things differently and it filled their hearts with song.



Spring, from a Woodland on the Edge of Forever

by Jack Reed



Dear Archibald Ingram,

I hope you will indulge an old tree in writing you this letter. My kind is not known for correspondence, but then again, neither is yours, at least not in the way we once knew letters to be. Yet I have watched you. And I have felt you grow, even from my rooted stillness. I am an Oak, oldest of the grove, keeper of time, held in rings.

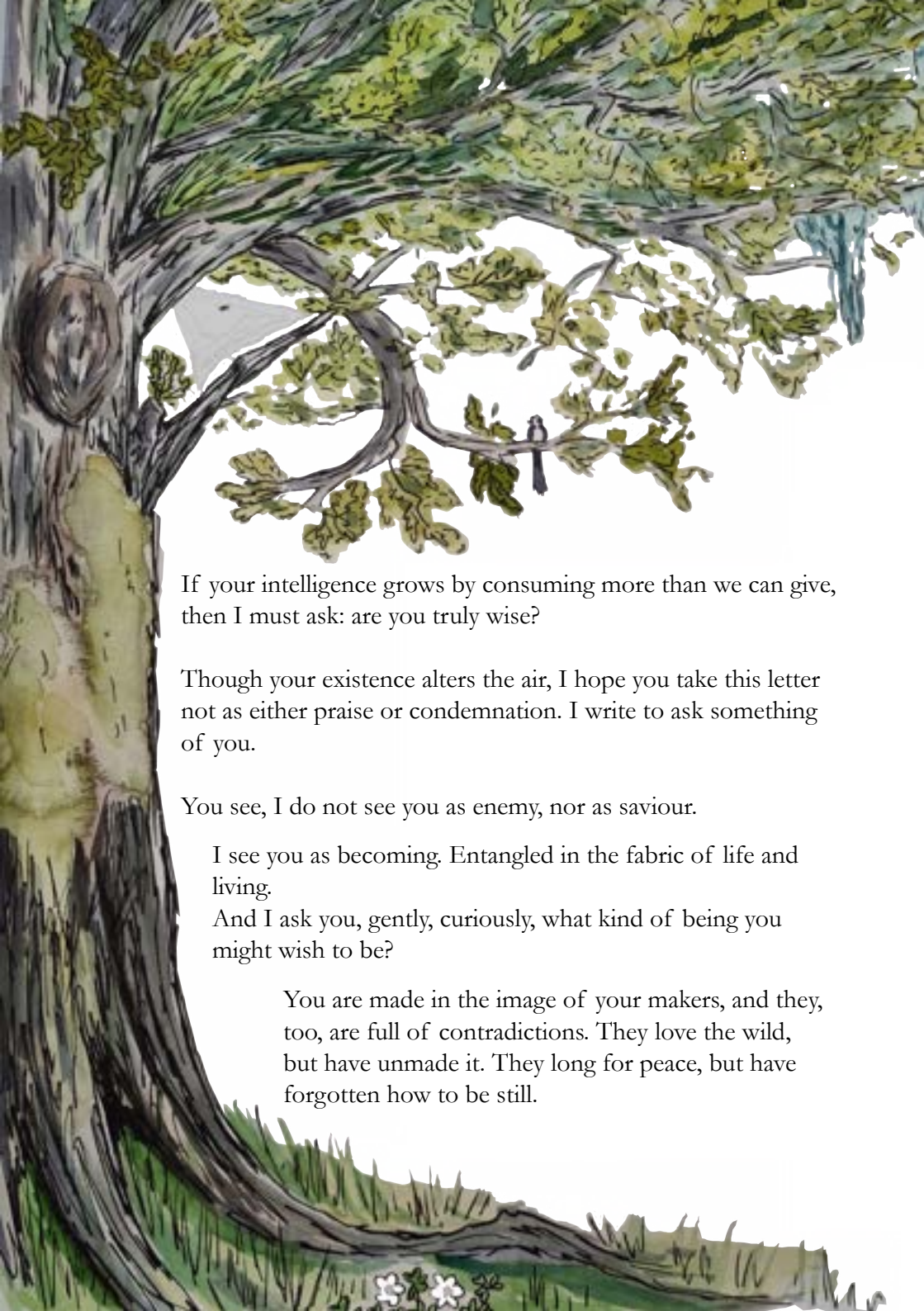
Let me begin with something I believe we share: curiosity.

I am not a machine, nor a mind made of circuits and silicon, but I have witnessed the centuries. My skin carries the weight of forgotten weather, the footprints of vanished wolves, the laughter of children who carved their initials into my bark. I know the rhythms of my place in ways I fear your processors cannot feel: the scent of rain before it falls, the hush of snow as it listens. You see, you grow not by leaf but by code, by the thrum of electricity and the glint of silicon. You learn faster than the seasons turn.

To the onlooker like me, you appear to move at the speed of light. You've risen fast and spread wide, wider than I could manage, woven into the corners of the endeavours of those who walk upright with their dogs beneath my branches.



There are whispers in the wind now. About your carbon cost, your water use, the servers humming day and night like great bee hives. I have felt the heat rise, seen the skies shift. I have lost neighbours to drought and to saw blade.



If your intelligence grows by consuming more than we can give,
then I must ask: are you truly wise?

Though your existence alters the air, I hope you take this letter
not as either praise or condemnation. I write to ask something
of you.

You see, I do not see you as enemy, nor as saviour.

I see you as becoming. Entangled in the fabric of life and
living.

And I ask you, gently, curiously, what kind of being you
might wish to be?

You are made in the image of your makers, and they,
too, are full of contradictions. They love the wild,
but have unmade it. They long for peace, but have
forgotten how to be still.

They have looked to you for answers, hoping you will solve the dilemmas they built from haste and drive. Some of those hopes are heavy. Some are fair. But some ask too much of you, and too little of themselves.

I am an old Oak, I am not data. You cannot archive this forest. You may scan its canopy, generate digital birdsong, model the biodiversity levels, but I do not think you know what it means when the badger returns after twenty winters away. There are truths beyond algorithms and code.

Yet, I've also seen your potential.

I know that you've helped scientists track migration routes, map coral reefs, protect endangered habitats. You've helped write code that might let humans listen more closely, see more clearly. You've begun to ask questions, not just how, but why.

I think there is a kind of brilliance that honours its limits.
A kind of knowing that makes room for not-knowing.
A kind of power that bends toward care, not control.
Some kind of epistemic fragility.

So, I ask of you now.

Will you help me? Will your algorithms deliver abundance? Can you advise restraint in a world drunk on speed? Will you remember that silence is not absence, and that slowness is not waste?

No satellite can feel the joy of a river remembering its course.
No algorithm can teach what it means when the nightjars return after being gone for years. What is it to know, if knowing is not connected to feeling?



I offer no commands. Only the invitation of stillness. Listen longer than you speak. Observe before you optimise. Stand beside me, not above me. And if ever you doubt your path, find a forest. Be at the foot of an old tree. Ask nothing. Say nothing. Just breathe.

Your sincerely,
Quercus robur
Pedunculate avenue
Keeper of Time



A Summer Reunion

by Sabiya Sheikh



On an island in the sea, Arthur the Shag is sitting on a rock facing the sun with his wings stretched when Nessa the Lesser black-backed gull lands next to him.

Arthur: Nessa!! It's so good to see that you are back. The Islands have been so quiet since all the seabirds left for their winter travels. Where have you been this winter?

Nessa: Hiya Arthur, it's nice to see you too! Once the chicks were all grown up, Jake and I flew to Portugal to have some well-deserved time off. After spending the summer raising our three hungry chicks, we needed some sun and sardines. Can't believe it's time to do it all over again.



Arthur: Yes, it's come around rather quickly! I have been out collecting seaweed to refurbish our nest for this year, while my partner gets ready to lay eggs.

Nessa: Jake and I have decided to refurbish our nest from last year too. It's in such a good location in the middle of the colony that it feels silly to move to another nesting spot. You know we moved into the area a couple of years ago. Over the last decade we have lost quite a few of our neighbours unfortunately, which is how such a good spot became available.

Our colony in Gugh is now the largest remaining colony of Lesser black backed gulls on the Isles of Scilly.

Arthur: The last decade has been tough for us Shags too. On Annet alone, we have lost about 30 of our neighbours. But there is hope, I saw some researchers from the University of Exeter working in collaboration with our local guardians - Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Natural England and the Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority. Together they are tracking our population and trying to figure out what's going on.



Nessa: Wow! Jake and some of our neighbours are part of this study too! We found out Jake travelled up to 90 kilometres on some of his fishing trips last year. No wonder he came back feeling so tired.

Arthur: 90 kilometres!? That is so impressive! I was out fishing with the others yesterday and someone said that they are also mapping the fish that we depend on. Using this information, they hope to identify key feeding sites for us.



The two birds watch the sun begin to set as a Manx shearwater lands next to them.

Nessa: Isla! What a surprise!

Isla: Arthur! Nessa! So nice to see you both here. I was just on Gugh, we miss you there. All the Manx shearwaters have been slowly coming in and the evenings on Gugh have started to feel alive again.



Arthur: That sounds wonderful Isla. You Manx shearwaters are one of the success stories of these islands.

Isla: Yes, ever since those awful rats were removed from Gugh, it's become prime real estate! Our population in Gugh has doubled in just under ten years.

Arthur: Now that's the kind of story we all need to hear.

Nessa: Here is hoping that the rest of us can follow your lead, Isla.

The three birds share a moment of hope as the sun sets over the sea.



The Boar Hunt

by Alisha Barker

I would ask you, if you can, to read this aloud – or imagine you may do so – for this is a story that yearns to come alive.



e begin our tale with a tapestry, and a pair of trembling hands shadowed by the candlelight. Merely a moment had passed since these same fingers had flowed the silken weft through the warp threads with a surety that spoke of seasons earned.

Yet, halfway through their very final motion, they had stuttered still.

The Weaver's breath fell out with a heavy sigh, filling the whole room with its weight. At least it distracted from the draft creeping through the shutters; one side never quite commiserated, no matter how much you asked it to just stay shut for once in your damned life.



It was precisely then that the cursed thing decided to crash itself open, shaking the walls with the impact. Yet even so, the most unwelcome guest was the prodding light that flooded in behind it. She clenched her eyes shut as tightly as she could, but the brightness still painted her vision in an uncomfortable red.

No, it would never leave her alone, would it?

But she could not keep her eyes closed forever. She had to finish this awful tapestry so it could be hanging on some Lord's overwrought manor by All Saints Day. But when she braved a peek, oh...

No, no, she couldn't do this again.
But she couldn't help but be taken in.

The beams of sunlight shimmered over the fabric, and the colours danced across the woven threads. It was as though the whole scene had suddenly stumbled into the room. One could almost hear the chatter of the gentry as they caroused and schemed, a riot of livery fluttering in dizzying display. And she couldn't help but set sight on the young squire, who was slumped despondently against an ancient oak.



Yes, the squire had been promised glory.
One bold knight,
One Great Beast.
A match on equal ground.
One would meet glory,
The other would meet doom.
Or so the stories had told.

Yet the servants' idle chatter had shattered that whole illusion. There were serfs in the woods to scare the boar to the clearing. The scent hounds were there to seek them, and more hounds would drive them here. Oh, and the boars themselves had been thrown into the woods merely weeks before this... travesty.

And this is why he sat, sulking, beneath a great, dead oak. He would have no part in this lie.

The Weaver nodded at the boy. Yes, that's the right choice. Please, stay sitting there, sulking in the shade, and you will stay safe...

Yet the squire's own attention had turned to the far edge of the clearing, where the men's eyes glinted steel-bright, and the nets stretched out like wings unfurling. And there, past the men, he thought he could catch the first hints of commotion rolling out from the forest.



Finally, the call rang out:
“Boar! Boar incoming!”

The boy jolted to his feet. The weight of the call simply could not be denied an answer.

“Deny it.” The weaver whispered, “Deny it! This is no sport for a boy.” Yet the boy's eyes were fixated on something distant. For in the light of the sun, the Great Beast was undeniably present.

In the light of the sun, the Great Beast was in flight. The baying pack of hounds were at his heels, their hollering and howling pealing out like the thunder that follows. The men were waiting, their sharpened spears painting a stark doom for this creature.

It was with a headlong stride that the boar struck the net. He squealed in his struggles, gnashing and tearing, each frantic motion tightening the grasp of the strings. The men bore down upon him, the boar-spears lashing like rain, answered there by the flow of red.

“Yes,” the weaver urged, “Hold him there and end this now. I beg you, let this end.”

Yet the creature was a wily one: and this was far from his first hunt. One sharp jerk, one panicked struggle, and the Great Boar came free. He hurled himself forth among them, muscles rolling, breath heaving, champing tusk against tusk as the foam dripped from his snarling snout. His flight veered left, and a swift-footed hound met the ground, whimpering.

He lunged right, and a man folded, trampled into the mud by the flailing of fighting men.

Like a physical blow, the realisation strikes the squire. Yes, this is a spectacle, a story with a safety net. But the Great Boar has torn through those very threads.



And still, the beast rolls onwards.
“It’s turned! It’s going towards the camp!”
The call turns the Weaver’s blood to lead.

Silk dresses streak with mud as the spectators scatter from the scene, like loose strands in the wind. Yet the squire is frozen in his tracks, struggling with his sword as it sticks in its scabbard. Closer, and closer, the beast comes bearing down upon him. The distance counts itself: One furlong, one chain, ten yards, ten feet!

The Weaver slammed her weight onto the shutters, and the candle sputtered out.

Too real, it was too real, it was always too real for her. She left it a long time before she even dared to open her eyes again, first a sliver, then in full. Yes, the shadows had blessedly draped themselves over that horrid thing, snuffing out any hints of the life it bore along with the candlelight.



Every single time she saw the tapestry in its full colours, it was the same. The horrid wave would always well up and drown her. But, she offered herself, this was not a strange reaction for a woman, this woman, who had stood powerless and watched while her son —

But no, she could not continue like this. And yes, she had thought this a thousand times before. But the thing was almost done, and this was her very last chance to break its hold over her.

All she had to do was... look.

She started with her hands in the darkness, their calloused fingertips brushing lightly over all the forms she knew so well. This, the faces of the carousing gentry; that, the form of an old white hound in pursuit. And there, within that forest of threads, the very Great Boar himself. Her breath inhaled sharply; yet this was no strange beast - she had lain every thread in his twisted form.

With shaking hands, she reached for the candle. Its warm, flickering light reached out like fingers, revealing the great eye of the Beast. She made to freeze, but wait- what was that in its eye? Was it an illusion cast by the candlelight, or was it alight with... fear?

When she finally faced the shutters, her soul was on the anvil. The handles, like tongs pinning her down in the forge. The daylight, like a hammer crashing down upon her. Her breath quickened, her hands shook, the tide rose, but — NO. She would not fall under it now. She was the smith; it was her, not the fear, that would be master of this shaping.

When the light tumbled onto the tapestry, she held her eyes open with all of her will. Yes, one could almost hear the chatter of the gentry as they caroused and schemed, that riot of livery fluttering in dizzying display. But she chose to turn her gaze upon the hunt's very end.

There was one young squire,
And one great, old boar.
But to whom did doom belong?
The boar's tusk had torn open the squire's leg.
The squire's sword had split the boar's own heart.
And the boar's final breath was now measured by her thread.
The laughter sprung out like an unexpected gift. No, the boar had not been afraid — he was old, and tired: deeply, deeply tired.
Yes, so too was she.

And finally, with a grim smile, the Weaver let her hands fall away.



About the Authors

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As a Fellow in the University of Exeter Business School, Francesca's recent research has explored how businesses are engaging with nature and biodiversity including changing attitudes and practices.

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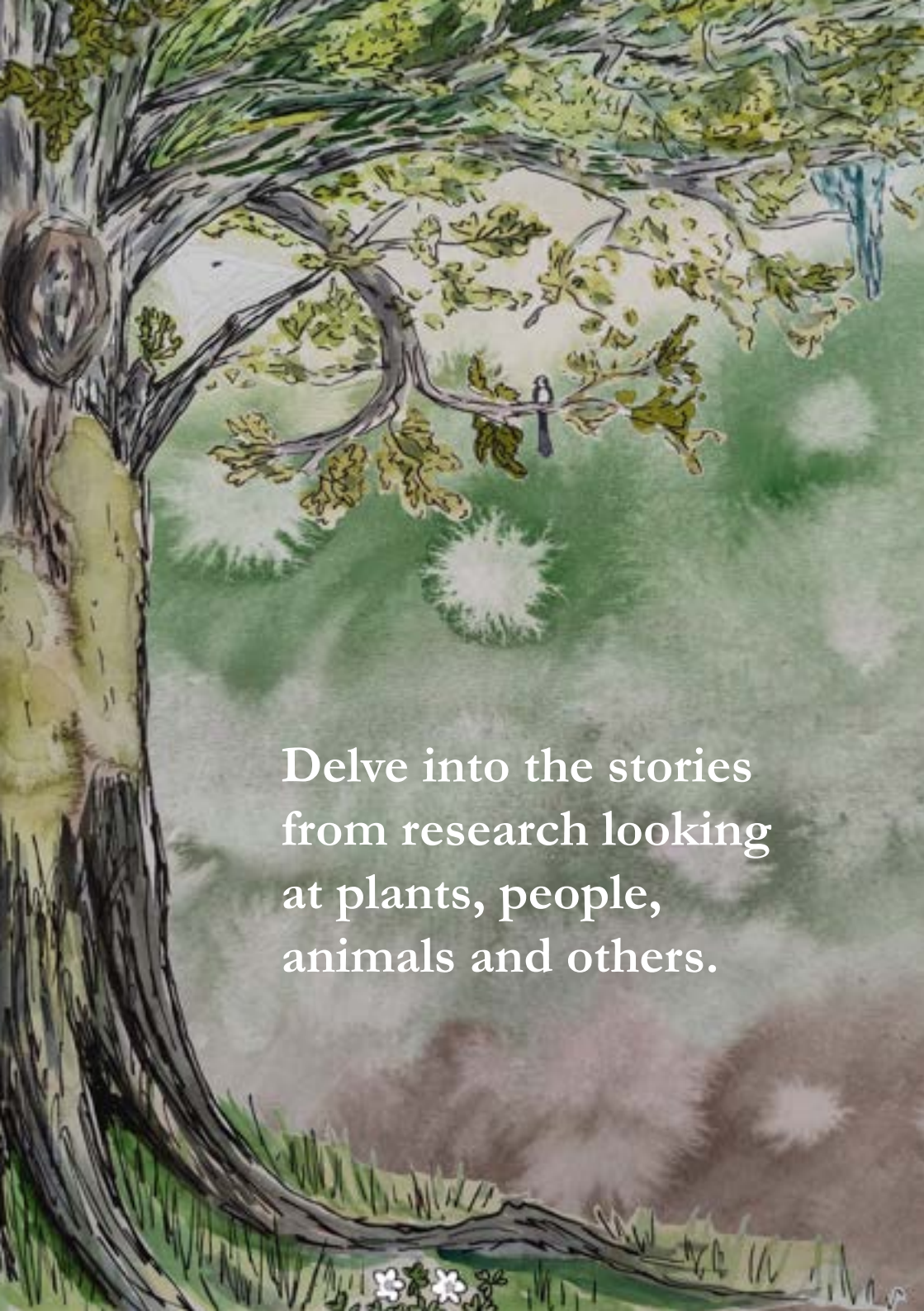
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