



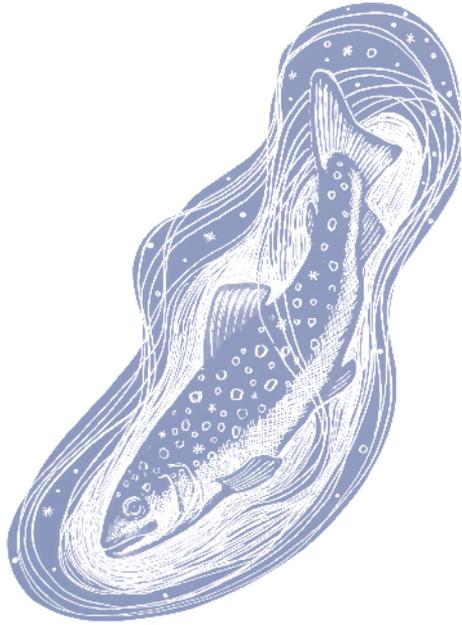
WILD FOLK

Tales from the Stones Jackie Morris & Tamsin Abbott



THE
SILVER
TROUT'S
TALE

FOR ROBERT MACFARLANE,
WHO FOLLOWED THE RIVER



She sits, still, beside the river.

He wanders, hollow lands and hilly lands,
barrows and burial mounds,
circles and stones,
searching.

Did he question how
she knew his name,
a stranger, who,
as fire burned inside his mind,
had come to this place?

Apple blossom at the time of red berries –
river's edge
day's edge
mothlight
and starlight
and the time of full moon
in daylight sky,
the time of wild magic.

A hazel wand,
a berry bright,
stars aligned,
owl flight.

She sits, still, beside the river.
She remembers the lure
of the berry, bright
its taste in her mouth,



the lift and the shock
as water became air
and, silver, she rested
on riverbank.

Full moon.
Bright moon.
Light on the water,
and falling star,
as she turned,
silver scales shimmering,
lungs tasting air.

How did she know his name?

She watched him
kindle flame from gathered twig,
blow the flame to dance
with light.
Fireglow glimmered on her dress,
silver like the scales she wore
in riverlife –
apple-blossom crown resting
on wet hair.

She swayed in the current of air.
He looked up,
across flame-light.
Rising moon made a halo
for her head.





The Silver Trout's Tale

Dark beauty,
silhouette,
apple blossom.
Desire.

Mothlight
bats fly
otter's breath
heron's cry.

Into this moment she spoke his name,
then turned upstream
and ran,
fading as the morning star
into the mist,
taking his heart,
his longing,
his breath, away.

He wandered,
hollow lands and hilly,
asking, searching,
seeking, yearning,
for the apple-blossom beauty of her
that never faded in his memory,
wishing only to
hold her hands,
to kiss her lips.
He searched, following
the paths of moths.
He followed dreams and streams,

from Swallowhead Spring to Winterbourne,
 across narrow becks and
 rivers wide,
 and down beside the sea he spoke
 with fishing folk.
 In spring, seduced by scent,
 he found himself in orchards
 blossom-heavy
 and whispered to the bees
 who danced a pattern
 that sang of his longing.

*She sat still,
 on riverbank, beside the trees,
 as water moved,
 restless.
 Through long summer days,
 sun-warmed, short nights
 through autumns,
 harvest moon heavy, full,
 leaf fall
 berry bright,
 listening as river song
 changed with the seasons
 with falling rain
 with winter freeze
 with summer drought
 with autumn leaves.
 When ice wrapped river's bank
 in glowing light,
 when summer seeds caught in river's flow,*

The Silver Trout's Tale

*still she sat,
statue-still,
waiting.*

Birds came and went, and some
brought news of him.
And all the while the water rushed,
restless, full with life,
towards the sea.

And still he searched,
beneath the fairy hills,
in caves, water-carved from stone,
through winter freeze
through summer rain.
At Callanish he asked
the Shining One,
who simply pointed back,
along the path
his footprints left
through spiderwebs
rich with diamond dew.

In northern lands he
spoke with Coventina,
drank at the well where
the white hart drinks,
listened, watched,
hope in heart,
to rook call,
raven flight,







jay feathers
eyes bright
with longing.

And when the acorns came
he spoke with the spirit
of the Whiteleaved Oak,
whose leaves sang,
'Go back.'

Through borderlands to Cymru,
to Alba, and the islands,
and Albion, where,
his horse lame,
he paid a silver coin
and Wayland made bright shoes.
But when he asked the smith
about the silver lady of his dreams
he stilled the hammer.
A wren sang into the silence.
Looking skyward, he simply said,
'Go back.'

With these words hammering in head,
to Kernow, where, on a stone
he found a labyrinth.
Weary now, with wandering,
in hollow lands and hilly,
he lingered,
traced the pattern's pathway in,
the pathway out,

and in his mind –
'Go back.'

Old now, weary with wandering,
fire still burning in mind,
body aflame with the pains of age,
fire in joints,
hair thinned and grey
and back bent,
eyes dimmed,
he sought again the place,
of hazel wood and rowan berry,
and bright stream.
Moonlight on water,
moths on the wing,
trout rise,
owl call and
the slow flight of heron,
as water moves and
she sits, still,
apple-blossom crown,
otter curled in arms,
still as fresh as that first day
when stars were fading in
the brightening air.
Through clouded vision he saw,
or thought he saw,
the moth-like stars,
the glimmering in gloaming,
the girl.
She called him, by his name again,





but words were lost in river flow.
A third time, and
held out her hand
as he stepped towards the vision
and placed his old, unsteady hand
in hers.
As otter slipped to stream,
she cradled his body,
sat him down
in moonlight-dappled grass,
and he wished only now to
die in the curve of her warm arms.
Here, where water flowed,
between the light of night and day,
she took out a comb,
began to comb the ragged grey,
and with every stroke the hair
grew longer, thicker, stronger,
darkened in the wakening light.
And each movement of the comb
eased the fire inside the mind,
dulled the burning joints until,
as stars flickered out,
blinded by day's light,
he became again the young man
who, so long ago,
had hooked the berry to a thread.
She turned his face towards the light,
and kissed his lips,
and held his hand.