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Opening Extract from...

The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow

Written by Jackie Morris

Published by Graffeg Limited

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For Judy Dyble, lady of song, and for Anji Baker who introduced us to each other. Also for musicians everywhere who carry on the song, and for the silences in between.

"A painting is music you can see and music is a painting you can hear."
Miles Davis

The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow.
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The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow

Jackie Morris



Foreword



I first became aware of the beautiful imagination of Jackie Morris over ten years ago when I received a Christmas card with a panoramic vision of snow, patchwork balloons and music-making pilgrims entitled "Flight of Fancy". The picture was so mysterious and enchanting that I immediately stuck it in a frame and placed it on our living room mantelpiece, and there it has remained ever since, centre-fold crease and all.

Morris' sixteen-year "flight of fancy" in her work for Help Musicians UK (previously the Musicians' Benevolent Fund) has been a slowly blossoming flower, each year yielding a tantalising glimpse into an enigmatic, free-flowing world with music at its heart. Each character, each landscape feels like the window into an unknowable story that is quietly carrying on in its own time and space, untroubled by the inquisitive eyes of onlookers gazing up from beneath the mantelpiece. I must admit to a tinge of sadness every time I've immersed myself in these pictures, that the secrets of their private cosmos would never be revealed.

So thank goodness Jackie Morris has decided to throw open that window and invite us in to the magical world of The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow.

The question of where folk tales have come from is one that has long occupied literary theorists and psychologists alike, but most agree that the strange, simple, twisted beauty of such stories must be a manifestation of the human subconscious itself. That being the case it follows that new fairy tales can only really be created if they are written sub-consciously. For most people that would presumably mean taking mind-altering drugs or hoping that a dream comes along at some point with narrative intact…

The brilliance of this book is that Morris has devised a far more interesting and fruitful method for tapping into the subconscious world of the folk tale. By letting her imagination run riot through her paintings over many years without any compulsion to provide a narrative context she has yielded the sign-posts for these stories. But since they have come bubbling up from her own sub-conscious it is only really possible for her to follow those markers and piece together the hidden stories of her own visual imaginings.

That she has managed to do so in such a compelling, lucid and bewitching way is not only immensely gratifying for readers and lovers of great illustrative art, but is also tremendously exciting for the future of artistic creation itself. Music, painting and words have long been close acquaintances, but in The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow Morris has discovered a way of bringing the three art forms together in a truly organic, intuitive amalgam.

Jon Boden, Sheffield, 2016



Introduction

The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow is a book worked backwards. The illustrations were commissioned Christmas card designs for the charity Help Musicians UK, produced at a rate of one painting a year.

The brief was always the same: anything, so long as there were musical instruments or musicians in it. Even with the first card there was an unwritten narrative behind the image of three kings, three ships and a star.

After a few years the narrative widened; characters began to move between the paintings, sometimes missing for a year or two, but entering again into the next year's card as if returning from a journey. As they gathered over the years, the stories flowed between the cards and the images became a window into a strange world.

Sometimes people would ask me if there was a story behind a piece of work, and what it was. I would reply, "you tell me." My feeling was that the images all spoke a different story to different people.

Now, here, between the covers of this book there is a new gathering, of images and stories. The words tell only a small part of what can be found in the images. These stories ask more questions than they answer. Look at the paintings and find within them more answers. The book is a harbour in which to rest, a catalyst for the imagination, and the stories are a series of lullabies for grown-ups.

My hope is that the threads of stories will wrap around the dreams of others and spin fine gold threads to catch the imagination.

Jackie Morris

Contents



8 *The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow*



18 *City of Music*



28 *The Time of the Wolf Moon*



12 *String of Stars*



22 *Cavalcade*



34 *The Towers of Song*



42 *Song of the Northland*



56 *Of Kings and Curses*



76 *The Jester and the Golden Hound*



48 *Song of the Angel Cat*



66 *A Lullaby of Ice and Snow*



90 *Winter Gathering*





The Quiet Music of Gently Falling Snow

Listen.

In the still, cold air of early morning there would be only silence, but for the quiet music of gently falling snow.

No leaves cling to the trees.
Beneath stone-hard ground snakes sleep, coiling in cold dreams.

Winter.
Not a bird stirs.

The only movement is falling flakes, and as they fall she can see each intricate pattern, each individual, unique. And as they fall she can hear the note as the crystal merges with others to become a tapestry of white covering the earth.

Many musicians had played that night, but she had arrived late.
Everyone was waiting.

It had not been hard to find. She had followed the path of music through the trees and slipped silent, unnoticed, between the notes of a fiddler's reel, into the warm, golden light.

The lion waited outside, for a while.

She had a way about her, could disappear into any crowd if she desired to be invisible. She wore this glamour like a cloak. And so, while the fiddler played up a storm to fill the waiting hours, she sat in a quiet corner, casting her eyes around, tuning her instrument.

When the dance ceased and the last echo of notes died away, people stood breathless waiting for the next song. She dropped her glamour of invisibility and began to play.

And her song told a story as her voice blended with the notes and all voices hushed and all eyes, all ears turned to her, for this was what they had all been waiting for.





String of Stars

Until they arrived, brought by the sea, there had been no music heard in the land for centuries; so long that even knowledge of what song was had vanished from memory.

Until they came, over the sea, the skies had been dark. No stars. Just an ink-black darkness and the restless moon.

They carried with them the return of song.

They carried with them the return of starlight.

They were guided on their journey by the moth-winged woman.

They arrived in strange boats on a wave of sound. As they travelled through the archipelago rumours went before them, so everywhere they landed they were met with a welcome. Starved of story, starved of song, knowing there was a great hole in their lives but not how to fill it, the words and music they brought soaked into the people as water soaks into parched earth.

Across the sea from the very edge of the world they had travelled and always their first song told of their journey, of how they were driven out, cast to the waves and the mercy of the sea.

Of how music was banned in their homeland.

Of how song was silenced.

Of how fear stalked the land.

For singers would sing of truth and beauty, and the new lord of the land had no use nor time for either truth or beauty.

He declared music a crime.

He decreed song to be punishable by death.

Even a mother who might sing her fretful child to sleep would be put to the sword for her song.

And as the players and dancers and singers all fled, one by one the stars diminished, the birds fled to other lands, the night became dark and silent, each night darker than the last.

And the players and dancers and singers were welcomed into a new land, at least for a while. But they knew how the world turned, as they sang their songs of truth and beauty.

For now it was good to live again in a land where they could teach lullabies to mothers, sing love songs for lovers, fill the night time sky with stars.

