THE
WOOD
WHERE
MAGIC
GROWS

Also by Andy Shepherd

The Boy Who Grew Dragons

The Boy Who Lived With Dragons

The Boy Who Flew With Dragons

The Boy Who Dreamed of Dragons

The Boy Who Sang With Dragons

The Ultimate Guide to Growing Dragons

Andy Shepherd

The Wood Where Magic Grows

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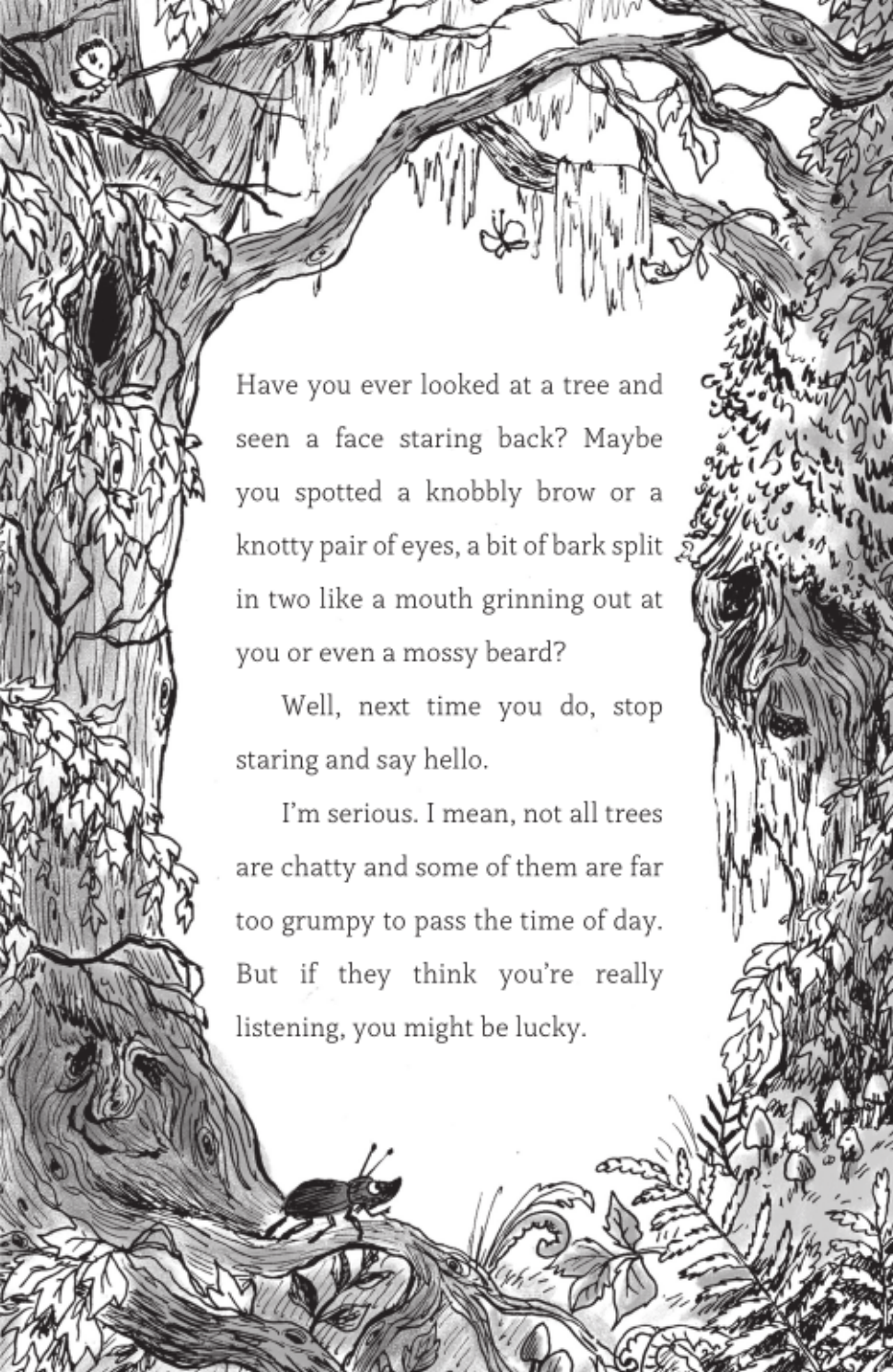
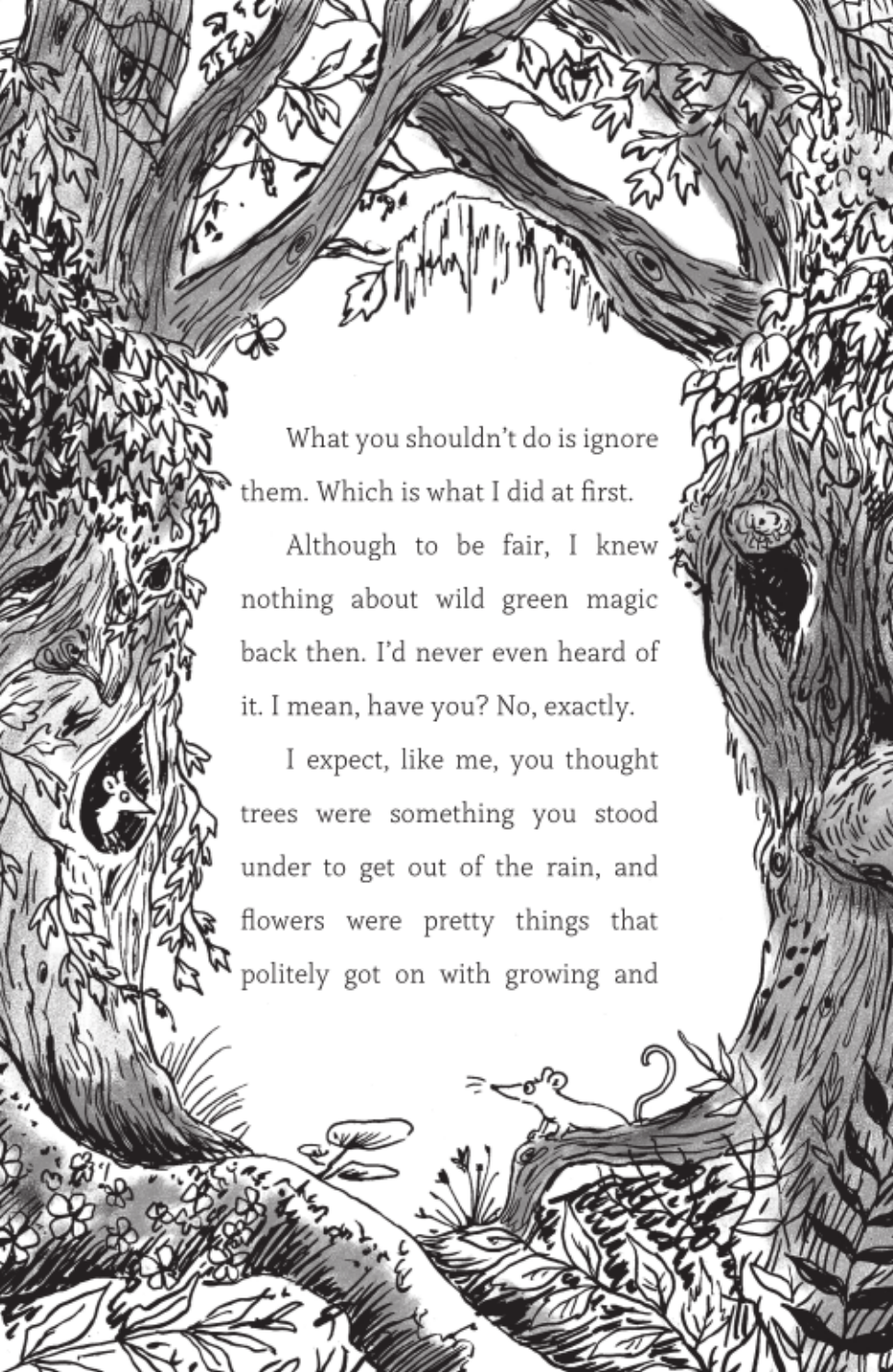
For Ian, Ben & Jonas
all my love always x



Have you ever looked at a tree and seen a face staring back? Maybe you spotted a knobbly brow or a knotty pair of eyes, a bit of bark split in two like a mouth grinning out at you or even a mossy beard?

Well, next time you do, stop staring and say hello.

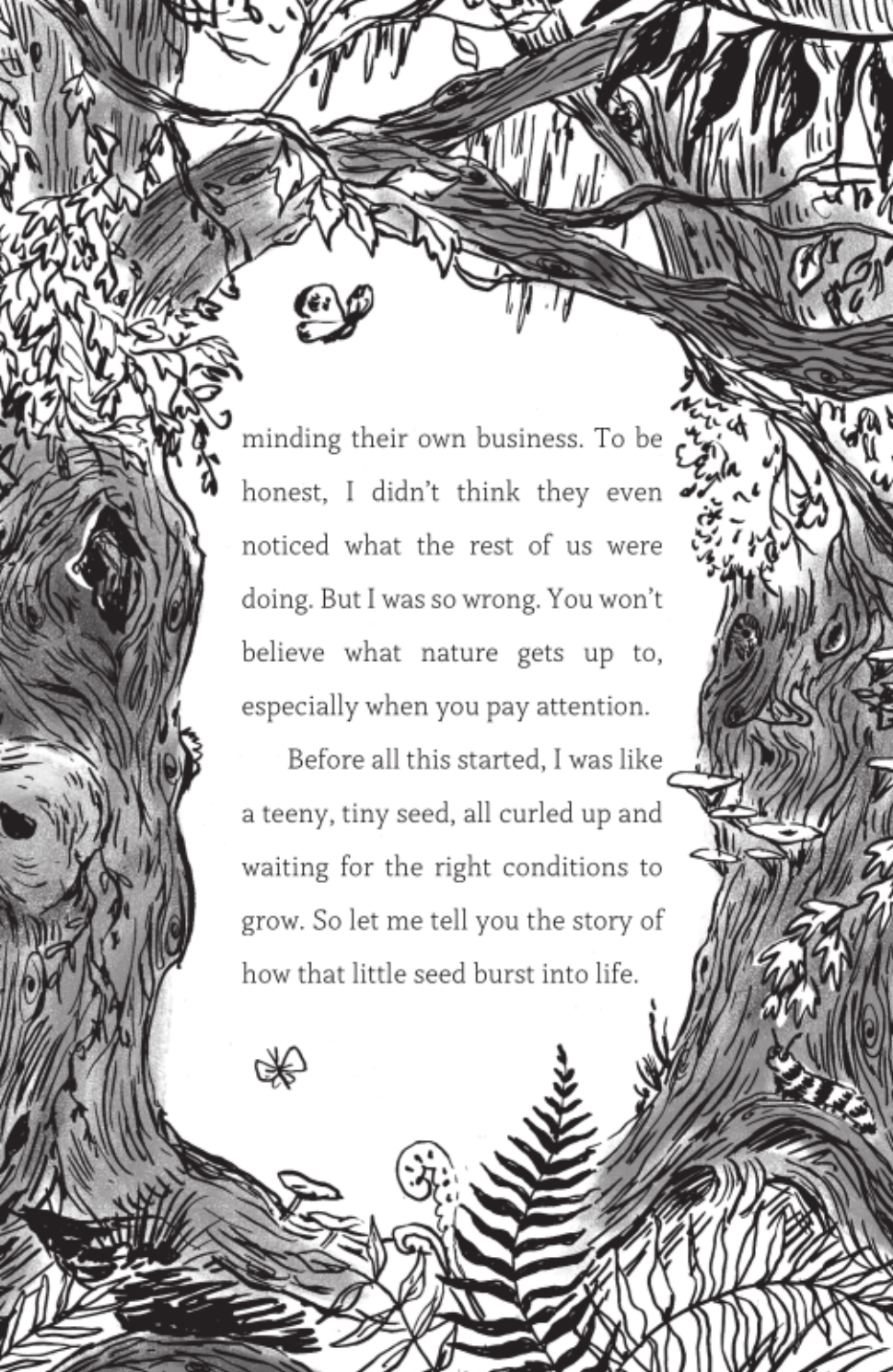
I'm serious. I mean, not all trees are chatty and some of them are far too grumpy to pass the time of day. But if they think you're really listening, you might be lucky.



What you shouldn't do is ignore them. Which is what I did at first.

Although to be fair, I knew nothing about wild green magic back then. I'd never even heard of it. I mean, have you? No, exactly.

I expect, like me, you thought trees were something you stood under to get out of the rain, and flowers were pretty things that politely got on with growing and



minding their own business. To be honest, I didn't think they even noticed what the rest of us were doing. But I was so wrong. You won't believe what nature gets up to, especially when you pay attention.

Before all this started, I was like a teeny, tiny seed, all curled up and waiting for the right conditions to grow. So let me tell you the story of how that little seed burst into life.

1
Attack of the Friendly Green Octopus

I love my bed. Apart from a week in the summer when we go and stay in a caravan and the sometimes sleepovers I have with my best friend Rafi, I've slept in it ever since I was little. It's perfectly moulded to my shape.

But I wasn't lying in my bed. I was in a bed that squeaked and groaned and kept jabbing me with its springs, like it couldn't believe I had the nerve to sleep in it and I should get out and go away, thank you very much.

'It's very noisy,' whispered a voice, and I almost jumped out of the not-my-bed, having totally forgotten Cal was in the room as well.

'Are you asleep?' he said.

Which was a daft thing to ask because I was sitting up staring at him, trying to stop my heart hammering.

I shook my head.

'I've been counting all the places I could be trying to sleep that are noisier than here,' he said, wriggling out from the covers. 'Like behind a gushing waterfall. Or at a whizz-fizzing fireworks display. Or curled up with a bellowing buffalo.' He sat cross-legged on the quilt and started tracing a finger round the diamond pattern in front of him. 'It was more interesting than sheep.'

'I think the sheep are meant to be boring,' I said. 'That's the point. They're supposed to bore you into sleep.'

He looked up, his eyes growing wide with understanding. 'I wish I knew stuff like you do,' he said, as if I'd just imparted the wisest piece of advice the world had ever heard. 'How did your brain get to be so big?'

I thought he was making fun of me, but he sat there looking like he actually expected an answer. And I sat

there wondering what to say, as I often did with my new little brother.

My mum and Cal's dad had what they called a 'whirlwind romance', and me and Cal had been flung together in the whirl of that wind and now we were here in this house, sharing a room.

Or rather a bed, as Cal leaped onto mine with a startled, 'What was that?'

I glanced over to the window just as another tap sounded.

Cal didn't take his eyes off the flowery curtain and grabbed my arm.

The tapping continued. Slow and steady.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Then a bit faster. *Tap. Tap. Tap.*

Then it paused and there was a *scratch*.

Cal didn't like that one bit.

Normally I'd have been just as alarmed as he was. But I wasn't. Not because I'm brave, but because I remembered the tree I'd seen earlier. It had been so dark

when we arrived that Mum had held up her phone torch to lead us through the back gate to find the key we'd been left. The tree stood right by the house, a knobbly branch slung over the back door like a protective arm, while another leafy limb stretched up towards the windows above. Mum had needed to bend to avoid the leaves as she fumbled with the lock.

'It's just a branch knocking against the window,' I said.

But Cal was not convinced.

The *tap tap scratch* was getting louder. More insistent.

'It's a thing,' he said, voice quivering. 'A scary thing. A monster. And it sounds like it wants to get in.' His hand squeezed my arm even tighter. 'You won't let me get got by the monster, will you, Iggy?'

I groaned along with the bed as I unpeeled his grip, got up and crossed the room.

I pulled back the curtain with a flourish, like a magician performing a vanishing trick.

A branch was tapping and scraping at the window, its

leaves all smooshed up against the glass like they were peering in at us.

'See, it's just the tree,' I said.

Cal peered out suspiciously and when he saw there was no monster sprang out of his hiding place.

'You scared it away!' he cried delightedly. 'I knew you would!'

'There *are* no monsters,' I said. 'It's the tree that's been tapping.'

'Trees don't tap,' he said with absolute confidence.

'And monsters do?'

He nodded furiously. Then whispered, 'What if it comes back?'

I decided to open the window, hoping it would push back the branch and make some room between it and the glass, but the tree sprang in through the opening, leafy limbs tumbling past me. I hurriedly tried to lift some of the branches back out, but just as I managed to get one onto the other side of the sill another trailed through. It was like wrestling a friendly green octopus!

Cal started giggling.

And I did too as the leaves tickled my face.

'Come and help,' I urged as a cascade of shiny green ivy looped around my feet.

Together we finally managed to get the tree and the ivy back on the outside, and I pulled the window closed.

We fell back onto our beds, Cal still laughing as he shook leaf debris from his hair. It took ages for him to get all the giggle out and finally drop off. Then, just as he

started snuffling, the tree started tapping again.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

When it got louder, I knew I had no choice but to open the window to try to push the branches away.

But the weird thing was that when I crossed the room and opened the curtains, there were no leaves or twigs pressing up against the glass at all.

In fact, the arms of the octopus tree were stretching in the other direction completely. They all pointed away from the house, down the garden.

Except for one twiggy stem that pointed straight at me, curling upwards at the end like a beckoning finger.

2
The Tiger Who Came to Breakfast

I was woken in the morning by a tiger leaping across the room and landing on me.

'Why are you still in bed, blobby-head?' the tiger roared. 'Let's go exploring!'

I batted the stripy tail away from my face where it was being swished to excellent effect. Cal, who wore the tiger onesie me and Mum had bought him for his birthday pretty much permanently, added another 'Blob blob blobby-head' just for good measure.

Just so you know, apart from when he's hiding from monsters, Cal's generally very bouncy. That was

something else I was still getting used to.

That and waking up in a completely different room of course, a room that actually looked more like a greenhouse. There were plants everywhere! They were lined up on the floor and a whole table against one wall heaved with pots, each one holding a bedraggled-looking flower.

And it wasn't just plants, there were animals too. Well, wooden ones. There was a very upright duck standing by the door like a guard that we'd nearly tripped over when we came in and several mice peeking out from between the pots.

'Look what I found!' Cal declared, and held up a tiny wooden elephant nestled on his palm. 'I'm going to call her Tiny. I think that's her mummy over there.' He pointed to a slightly larger elephant, which had its trunk raised in salute.

Along with the duck, mice and elephants there was

also a bushy-tailed fox with a coat of reddish wood and a paler grain running down its belly, and a miniature owl nestled in an eggcup.

The cottage's owner obviously liked bees a lot too, because they were everywhere I looked. Painted on the plant pots, flying across a mug left on the floor, and there was even a really pretty wooden one with gold-tipped wings next to a watering can. It was far bigger than any bumblebee I'd ever seen, with a body the size of a ping-pong ball. If a bee that big buzzed in my face I might just run a mile. I secretly hoped insects weren't all mutantly bigger here than in cities.

The bee wasn't looking at me though; it was staring up at a pair of wooden bookend squirrels who were turned away from each other as if they'd been squabbling, their tails held haughtily in the air. Neither of them was doing a very good job of looking after the books, as

several had tumbled to the floor.

Cal settled down on my bed with Tiny, the pocket-sized elephant, and chirpily presented me with a slice of bread. There was nothing on it, unless you counted the thumb prints gouged into it.

'Hurry up and eat,' he urged, bouncing up and down.

'Someone's bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at least,' Mum said, appearing in the doorway mid-yawn.

'I'm staaaarving,' Cal growled. 'Can we have pancakes? Dad *always* makes me pancakes.'

With his back to the door, Cal winked at me, or I think that's what he was trying to do; he actually just scrunched up both his eyes. I could already tell Mum wasn't believing a word of it.

Then Mitchell appeared behind her, a huge grin across his face. He was the tallest person I'd ever met and he had to duck to get through all the doorways here.

'Don't know about you lot, but I slept like a log after arriving so late and trying to find this place,' he said. 'Everyone sleep OK?'

I looked over at Cal who yawned. Between tickly trees and giggly brothers, we really hadn't had the best night's sleep.

Mum had told me it might take some time to get used to sharing a room after always having my own space. Right now she was looking at me with quite a lot of hope. Like us getting on OK on our first night somehow meant this new life, with the four of us together, would all be OK too.

'Yeah, we slept fine,' I said.

'Brilliant,' Mitchell said. 'Right, I'm off out to stock up on provisions.'

He gave Mum a squeeze and they both headed down to the kitchen.

'Hey, Iggy?' Cal called.

I turned back to see him with his own slice of bread stuck to his face, nibbled out holes revealing his eyes and mouth behind the doughy mask. He grinned, delighted at my wide-eyed stare.

But it wasn't the fact he'd taken to wearing food that

had left me so startled, it was that out of the corner of my eye I could have sworn I saw the nearest squirrel's bushy wooden tail flick!