

DEDICATION

Copyright

Text copyright © Joseph Coelho 2020

Illustrations copyright © Kate Milner 2020

First published in Great Britain in 2020 and in the USA in 2021 by
Otter-Barry Books, Little Orchard, Burley Gate, Herefordshire, HR1 3QS
www.otterbarrybooks.com

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electrical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the United Kingdom such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Barnard's Inn, 86 Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1EN

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-91307-478-4

Illustrated with pen and ink

Set in FF Folk Rough and Wunderlich

Printed in China

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

THE GIRL WHO BECAME A TREE



A Story Told in Poems by
Joseph Coelho

Illustrations by **Kate Milner**



Otter-Barry BOOKS

You have one saved message...

A STORY OF A GIRL

A story of a girl
with a hurt she can't express.
A tale of a creature?
A tail of deepest red.

A journey in a library
where a forest lurks.
A message that is stolen.
A fable of growing hurt.

THE LIBRARY

Its original use
overgrown in history.

The grey block-work,
a barricade of teeth.
The building is round,
wooden shelves line its rotundity
like ribs inside a vast torso.

It is a library
but also
 it is alive,
 it breathes,
 it is a wood.
 It is a forest.

Its shelves have been wrestled
from every type of tree
to house these books:
black Ebony entombs
The Horror.
Bright Pine hugs
The Poems,
black-brown Cedar wraps
The Mysteries,
as broad Oak clasps
The Histories.

The tables were hacked from Burmese Teak
to withstand all scratching.

It is a library but also not.
A library of knots.
Its heart always a murmur.
The rustling of pages
could be mistaken for leaves.

Whenever Daphne enters after school,
she takes three deep breaths
of the library's woody scent.
Listens for its pulse.
Closes her eyes and sees the forest
that's just a page-turn away.

THE LIBRARIAN

I never **really** chat to him.
I never really chat to anyone any more.
Teacher says, “You **need** to speak up,”
says, “If you need to talk to **someone**, I’m here.”
But I don’t need **to** do anything,
I don’t need to **talk to** anyone.
The librarian always tries to talk.

The librarian.
Sets aside horror books for me,
ghost stories by MR **James**,
twisted **being**s by HP Lovecraft,
hauntings by Shirley Jackson.
The librarian **noticed** what I read.
The librarian got me talking.

The librarian.
Hands me a book of Greek myths,
tells me if **I** like horror
“You’ll love these.”
It’s a book I **don’t** want.
Tales of **transformations** and angry gods.
The same copy
I’d read with my dad years ago.
I flip to Apollo,
a **cant**ankerous god of change,
of art and **healing**, music and lightning.

I find our page,
still dog-eared, the tale of Daphne.
Dad loved it cos of the tree.
I want my ghosts.

The librarian.
Stares with black beady eyes,
gives me another **option**,
a huge battering **ram** book
about monsters in movies.
Tentacled monsters, things from the deep,
ghosts and ghouls.

I have a Hallowe’en **memory**,
a **andle-wax** drip memory,
me and Dad
dressed up as a huge **creepy** Cthulhu –
Lovecraft’s tentacle god.
I was **up on** his shoulders,
he was covered in **stuffed** stockings.
It’s like the librarian reads my thoughts.

I throw him a tiny smile,
take the book
and head to my corner.