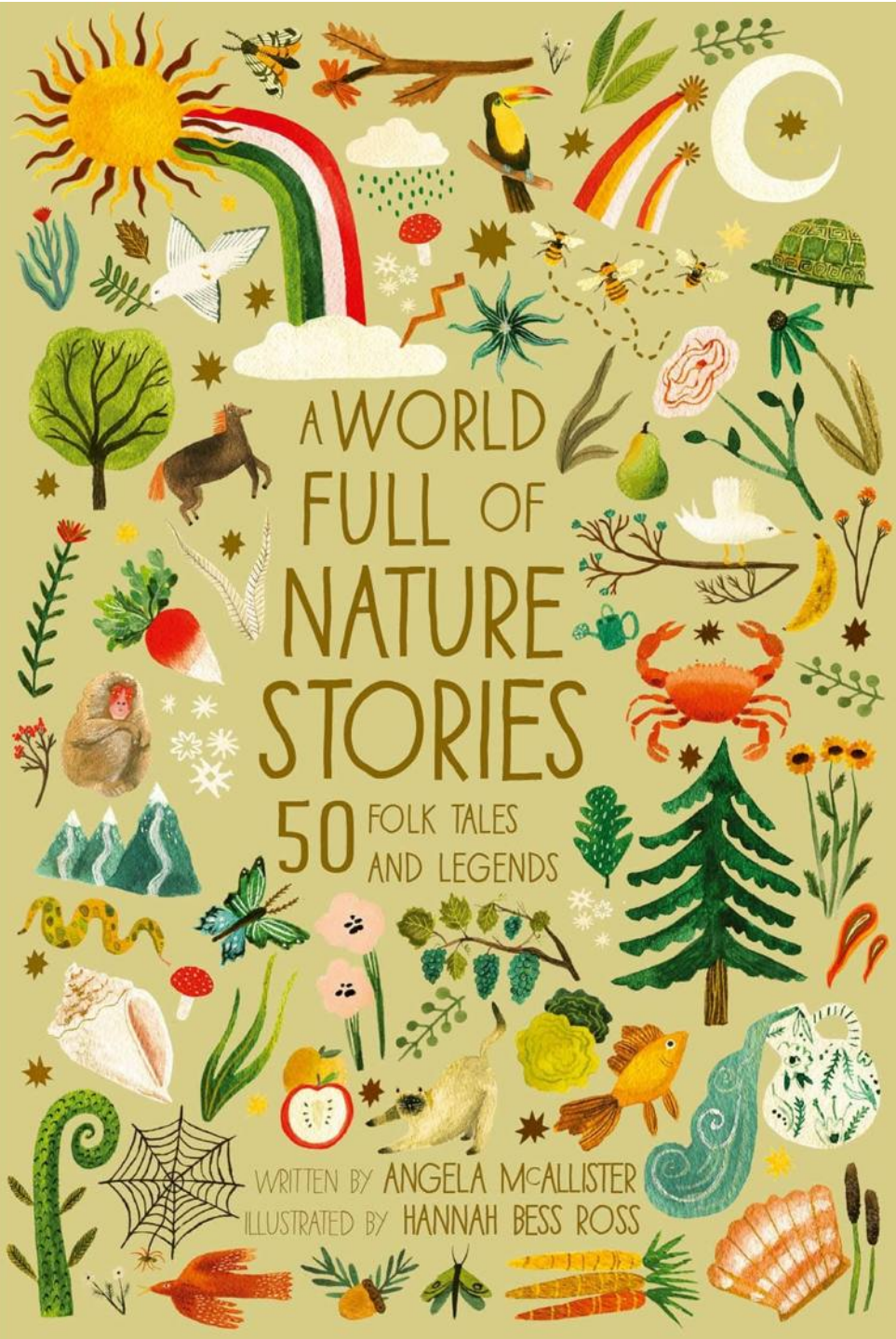


A WORLD
FULL OF
NATURE
STORIES

50 FOLK TALES
AND LEGENDS

WRITTEN BY ANGELA McALLISTER
ILLUSTRATED BY HANNAH BESS ROSS



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Frances Lincoln
Children's Books

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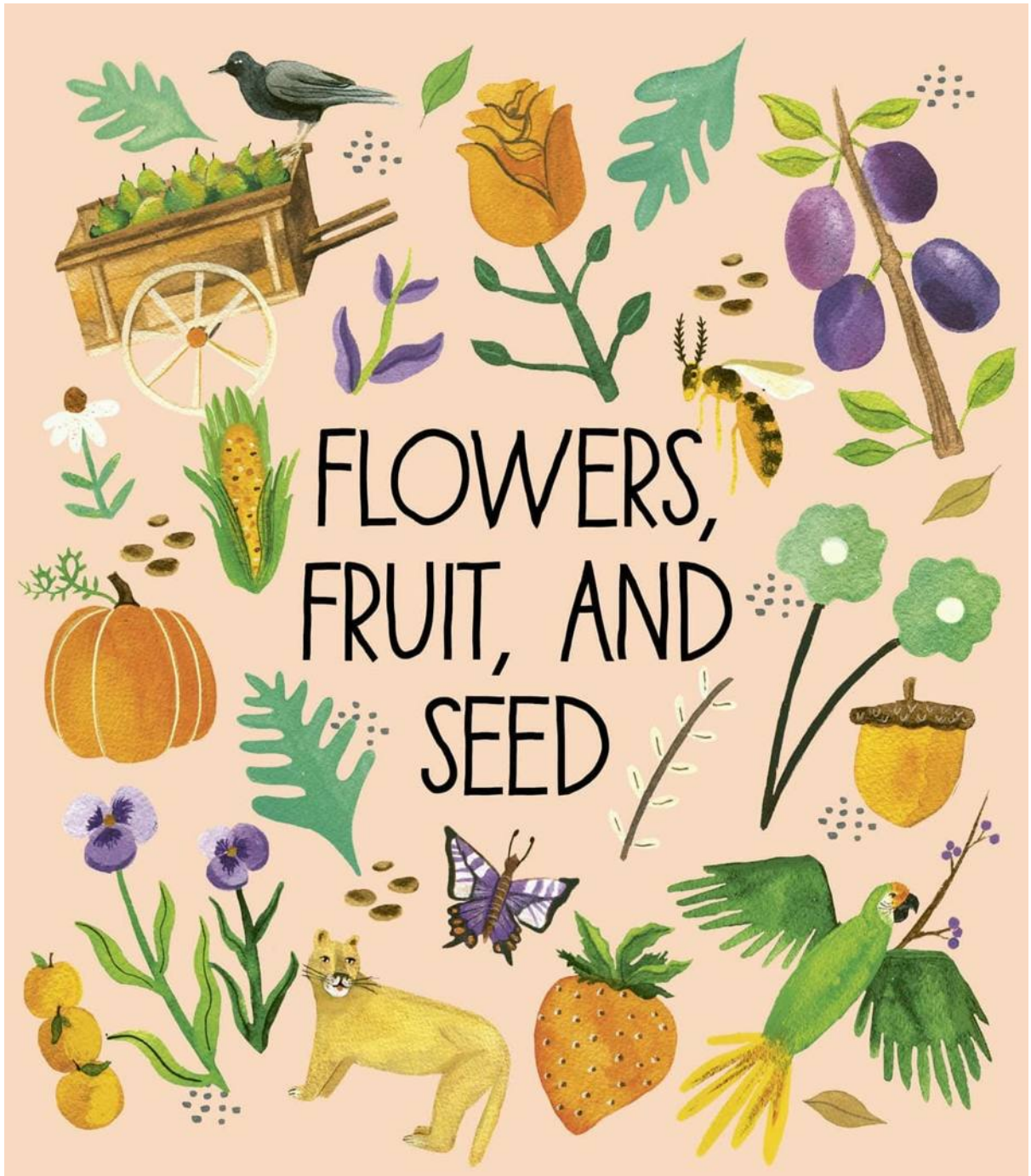
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EUROPE

A STORY FROM SPAIN

THE QUEEN OF THE FLOWERS

Once upon a time, an olive tree and an almond tree grew in a beautiful garden.

One night, a moonbeam shone down among the flowerbeds, and a shimmering fairy with a golden wand appeared.

The fairy waved her wand and, at once, the flowers in the garden began to stir. With a rustle of leaves, the carnations became fine ladies wearing scarlet gowns, the geraniums were gentlemen in suits of green, the lilies turned into young girls dressed in white silk, while the violets became children in purple velvet. The Flowers strolled about the garden in the moonlight, greeting each other.

Then Rose, Queen of the Flowers, appeared. Everyone admired how beautiful she looked in her long, pink robe. The olive tree twisted its branches into a throne and, when she was seated, the almond tree bent low to make a canopy above her head.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” said the Queen. “Once again, spring is here and for one night this good fairy has worked her magic.”

The Flowers nodded gratefully to the fairy, who fluttered her glittering wings.

“I have asked for her help,” said the Queen, “because too many creatures have been taking our precious nectar. We must decide who will be allowed to gather our nectar this year and who will not be welcome in the garden.”

The fairy waved her golden wand and a butterfly appeared, dressed in her prettiest clothes to meet the Queen of the Flowers.



“Tell me,” said the Queen, “why do you take our nectar from spring to fall?”

The Butterfly blushed. “I don’t wish to be greedy,” she said. “I only take what little I need to feed myself and never a drop more.”

The Flowers all agreed that the gentle Butterfly did no harm. “You will always be welcome in our garden,” said the Queen.

Then the fairy brought the Wasp forward. He buzzed proudly in his coat.

“And why do you take our nectar?” asked the Queen.

“I take your nectar because I’m copying the bees,” said the Wasp boldly. “I’ve been trying to make a honeycomb since the world began but there is still time to learn.”

The Flowers whispered among themselves. They didn’t trust the Wasp.

“How can you hope to build a honeycomb if you always eat the nectar?” said the Queen with a frown. “Go away, Wasp. You are not welcome in our garden.”

Then the fairy brought the Bee. The Queen noticed that he hadn’t taken any time to dress smartly and his coat was covered with honey and wax.



“I know what you are going to ask, your Majesty,” said the Bee impatiently. “You should be grateful that we bees gather your nectar. As we fly from flower to flower we spread your pollen, so that your seeds will grow. And humans take the honey from our hives so that they can enjoy

the scent of your blossom, even when your flowers are gone. It's thanks to the bees' hard work that you live on."

The Flowers talked among themselves. "How rude he is and how messy!" they whispered.

"Well," snapped the Bee, "If you are going to banish me from the garden please do it quickly, your Majesty I'm very busy!"

The Queen of the Flowers smiled. "I forgive your dusty coat and your impatience, Bee," she said, "because I see that you do good for others. Not only are you welcome in our garden, but to reward your hard work we shall never close our petals to you. The bees may take as much nectar as they wish."

The Bee bowed to the Queen and hurriedly buzzed away.

Then the Queen thanked the fairy, who waved her wand once more. The Flowers returned to their natural form and the olive tree and the almond tree stretched out their branches, just in time to greet the morning sun.

ASIA

A STORY FROM CHINA

PLANTING PEARS

One day a farmer filled his cart with pears and took them to the village market. Their delicious scent quickly drew a crowd and a holy man, dressed in rags, asked the farmer for a pear.

“Why should I give you something for nothing?” said the farmer crossly.

“You have hundreds of pears on your cart,” replied the holy man. “I only ask for one.”

But the farmer refused. “Make way for customers with money to spend,” he said.

People in the crowd started to argue with him. “Give the hungry man a pear!” they shouted. But still the farmer refused.

At last, a woman bought a pear and gave it to the holy man. He thanked her with a bow. “It puzzles me that this farmer can be selfish when he has more than he needs,” the holy man said to the crowd. “I have some pears myself and invite you all to share them.”

“If you have pears why don’t you eat one of your own?” asked a boy.

“First, I need a seed,” the holy man replied. He ate the pear he’d been given and planted one of its seeds in the ground.

Moments later, a shoot emerged and miraculously grew into a tree. The farmer pushed forward to see what was happening. Before his eyes, the tree grew flowers and then plump ripe pears, which the holy man picked and shared among the crowd.

The holy man chopped down the tree, lifted it onto his shoulder, and walked away.



The astonished farmer turned back to his cart. To his surprise, he saw that the cart was empty and one of its wooden handles had been chopped off. Suddenly, he realized that the pears which had been shared among the crowd were his own. “So what was the magical tree?” he wondered. The farmer ran after the holy man, but when he turned the corner, all he found was the handle of his cart lying on the ground.

NORTH AMERICA

A NORTH AMERICAN STORY

PAUL BUNYAN'S CORNSTALK

Paul Bunyan was a lumberjack of enormous strength and size. He was seven feet tall and six feet wide, and was the only woodsman who could stand between two trees with a double-edged axe and chop them both down at once.

Whatever Paul Bunyan did was BIG. However, this nearly caused a disaster when he planted corn and pumpkins in his vegetable patch.

One of the cornstalks grew very fast. Before the others had even sprouted, it was as tall as a man and in two weeks it was as big as a house. In three weeks that cornstalk towered like a pine tree and people came from miles around to stare at the sight.

The same thing happened to one of the pumpkin vines. It grew so fast that it broke out of Paul Bunyan's vegetable patch and spread all over the town. It snaked into barns and houses, so that some people had to cut their way out of bed in the morning. It even blocked the streets with gigantic fruit.

Then the real trouble began. As they continued to grow, the roots of the cornstalk and the pumpkin sucked so much water out of the ground that they caused a drought. Fields dried out, springs dried up, and rivers shrank until they were no more than a trickle. Eventually, even the water in the lakes began to disappear and fish were left hanging in the air.

Paul Bunyan's neighbors knocked on his big door and asked him to get rid of his corn and pumpkins.

"Well, I don't want to cause anybody trouble," said Paul Bunyan and he agreed to chop down his cornstalk and pull up his vine. But that was easier said than done.



First, Paul Bunyan went after the pumpkin vine. He spent four hours chasing it all over the town and the farms until at last he managed to trap it in a barn. He hitched the end of the vine to his giant ox and told it to pull.



The ox ran off, but it was a hundred miles away before it could tug that vine tight and pull it out of the ground.

Next, Paul Bunyan sharpened his axe and eyed up the cornstalk. The gigantic cornstalk had grown as thick as a redwood tree and still it kept growing. Paul swung his axe and made a deep cut. But before he could make a second cut to chip out a wedge, the cornstalk shot up another six feet. He tried again and, just as before, the cut on the stalk shot up out of reach.

“The only way to kill this cornstalk is to climb up and chop off the top,” said Paul Bunyan. He hung his axe from his belt and began to climb.

A crowd of people gathered to watch below. All day and all night they crowd waited, but Paul Bunyan didn't appear.

Next day, Lars Larsen shouted, "Paul!" but there was no answer.

The following day Erik Erikson and Hans Hansen shouted, "Paul!" but still there was no answer.

On the third day, everyone in the crowd decided to shout together. "PAUL!" they hollered. At last, they heard a faint voice far above.

"When are you going to chop off the top of that cornstalk?" the people yelled.

"Hasn't it reached the ground yet?" shouted Paul. "I chopped it off three days ago!"

When they heard this, everyone took to their heels to get out of the way.

Sure enough, moments later, the top of the cornstalk crashed to the ground and after it came Paul Bunyan, climbing down the stalk.

Before long, water returned to the fields, rivers, and lakes, but everyone agreed it was a narrow escape. So Paul Bunyan never planted any corn or pumpkins in his vegetable patch again.



EUROPE

A STORY FROM FRANCE

THE ACORN AND THE PUMPKIN

Old Jacques was a simple country man who knew very little about the world and was perfectly happy with that.

One sunny afternoon, he was sitting on a bench in the shade of a great oak tree when he happened to notice a bird hopping along a low branch. The little bird pecked at a pair of acorns and then flew off to a field of golden pumpkins growing nearby.



Jacques frowned thoughtfully. “Something’s not right here,” he said to himself. “Those beautiful big pumpkins are growing on the ground and yet here’s a mighty oak tree that bears tiny acorns no bigger than my thumb.” He scratched his head. “It seems to me that when God made the world he got things in a muddle. A fruit as grand as a plump, golden pumpkin should grow on the branches of a great oak tree and little brown acorns should grow on the ground, among the earth and stones, for they don’t deserve any better.”

Jacques nodded to himself. “Yes, I do believe that would have been a much better arrangement.” Then, feeling proud of his improvement on God’s design, he shut his eyes for a nap.

While he was asleep, an acorn dropped from the tree and hit him smack on the nose. Jacques woke up with a start.

“Ouch! What hit me?” he cried. The little acorn had rolled into the scarf around his neck. Jacques picked it up and smiled. “Well, thank goodness you weren’t a pumpkin,” he chuckled, “otherwise I’d have a broken nose and two black eyes! Maybe God did arrange things for the best after all.”

And, feeling content with the world just as it was, he left the acorn beneath the tree and went off to find a safer place for an afternoon nap.

EUROPE

A CZECH STORY

THE TWELVE MONTHS

There once was a widow who had a daughter named Holena and a stepdaughter called Marushka, from her husband's first marriage.

The mother was very fond of Holena, but she hated Marushka for being prettier than her own child. She scolded Marushka and made her do all the housekeeping, with no rest from morning till night. Meanwhile, Holena was spoiled and did nothing but fuss about her clothes and eat cake.

As time went by, the mother hoped that hard work would spoil Marushka's beauty. But despite the hot water and soapsuds, the smoky fire and greasy pans, Marushka continued to grow prettier while Holena became uglier day by day.

"Nobody will want to marry Holena if they see her sister," the mother thought. "I must find a way to get rid of her."

One snowy winter's day, Holena decided she wanted violets to decorate her dress. "Go to the forest and pick some, Marushka," she demanded.

"But violets don't grow in the snow," said Marushka.

"Do as your sister asks," snapped the mother. "And don't come back empty-handed because I won't let you in!" She pushed Marushka out of the door and bolted it behind her.

"That will be the last we see of her pretty face," she chuckled.

Marushka trudged off through the deep snow, weeping bitterly. For hours she searched the forest, shivering in her thin dress, until she noticed a flickering light among the trees.



Stepping closer, she saw twelve men sitting on large stones in a circle around a fire. Some were old, some were middle-aged, and the others were young. They were the Twelve Months. The oldest, Great January, had a long, snow-white beard and held a staff in his hand.

Marushka stepped forward, trembling with cold. "Please, kind sirs," she said shyly, "may I warm my hands at your fire?"

"Come, my dear," said January. "Make yourself warm. But why are you here?"

Marushka explained that her sister had sent her to find violets. "If I return home empty-handed my stepmother will lock me out of the house and I shall die in the snow," she said.

January listened thoughtfully, then he said. "Brother March, you take the staff."

One of the younger months took the staff and waved it over the fire. At once the snow began to melt and the sky turned blue. Leaf buds appeared on the trees and fresh grass grew. It was springtime. To Marushka's delight, violets began to flower beneath the beech trees.

"Pick them quickly," said March.

Marushka gathered a bunch of violets, then she thanked the Twelve Months and hurried home.

Holena and her mother were surprised to see Marushka return with the violets but they didn't say a word of thanks.

A few days later, Holena decided that she wanted strawberries to eat. "Go to the forest and fetch some, Marushka," she demanded.

"But strawberries don't grow in the snow," said Marushka.

"Do as your sister asks," snapped the mother. "And don't come back empty-handed because I won't let you in!" She pushed Marushka out of the door and bolted it behind her.

"Now we shall be rid of her," she muttered.

Once more, Marushka trudged through the deep snow, shivering in her thin dress. Just as she thought her numb feet could go no further she came upon the Twelve Months sitting around their fire.

"Please, kind sirs," she said, "may I warm my hands at your fire once more?"



Great January welcomed her. “But why have you come again?” he asked.

Marushka explained that her sister had sent her to find strawberries.

January turned to the month sitting opposite him. “Brother June, you take the staff,” he said.

June took the staff and waved it over the fire. At once the snow began to melt. The sun shone, wildflowers bloomed, and birds sang in the trees. It was summer. Nearby, Marushka saw a patch of ripe strawberries.

“Pick them quickly,” said June.

Marushka filled her apron with strawberries, then she thanked the Twelve Months and hurried home.

Holena and her mother were astonished to see Marushka return with the strawberries but they didn’t give her a word of thanks.

The following day, Holena decided that she wanted apples to eat. “Go to the forest and find some,” she told Marushka.

“But apples don’t grow in the snow,” said Marushka.

“Do as your sister asks,” snapped the mother. “And don’t come back empty-handed because I won’t let you in!” She pushed Marushka out of the door and bolted it behind her.

“That’s the last we’ll see of her,” she said with a grin.

Once more, Marushka trudged through the deep snow, shivering in her thin dress. Just as she thought her numb feet could carry her no further she came upon the Twelve Months sitting around their fire.

“Please, kind sirs,” she said, “may I warm my hands at your fire once more?”

Great January welcomed her. “Why have you been sent out into the snow this time?” he asked.

Marushka explained that her sister had sent her to find apples.

January turned to one of the older months. “Brother September, you take the staff,” he said.

September waved the staff over the fire and the snow began to melt. This time ferns and ivy grew and a cold wind shook leaves of copper and gold from the trees. It was fall. Nearby, Marushka saw an apple tree laden with fruit.

“Pick some apples quickly,” said September.

Marushka could only reach two apples so she picked those, then thanked the Twelve Months and hurried home.