

THE FOREST OF DREAMS

MERVE ATILGAN

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MERVE ATILGAN



At the end of the day, when the world falls quiet
and the stars begin to twinkle, I let my thoughts and
feelings float to the sky, where they transform into
the strangest, most magical moments.



As my mind begins to soar,
little frogs leap around
my stomach and crows
swirl above my head.

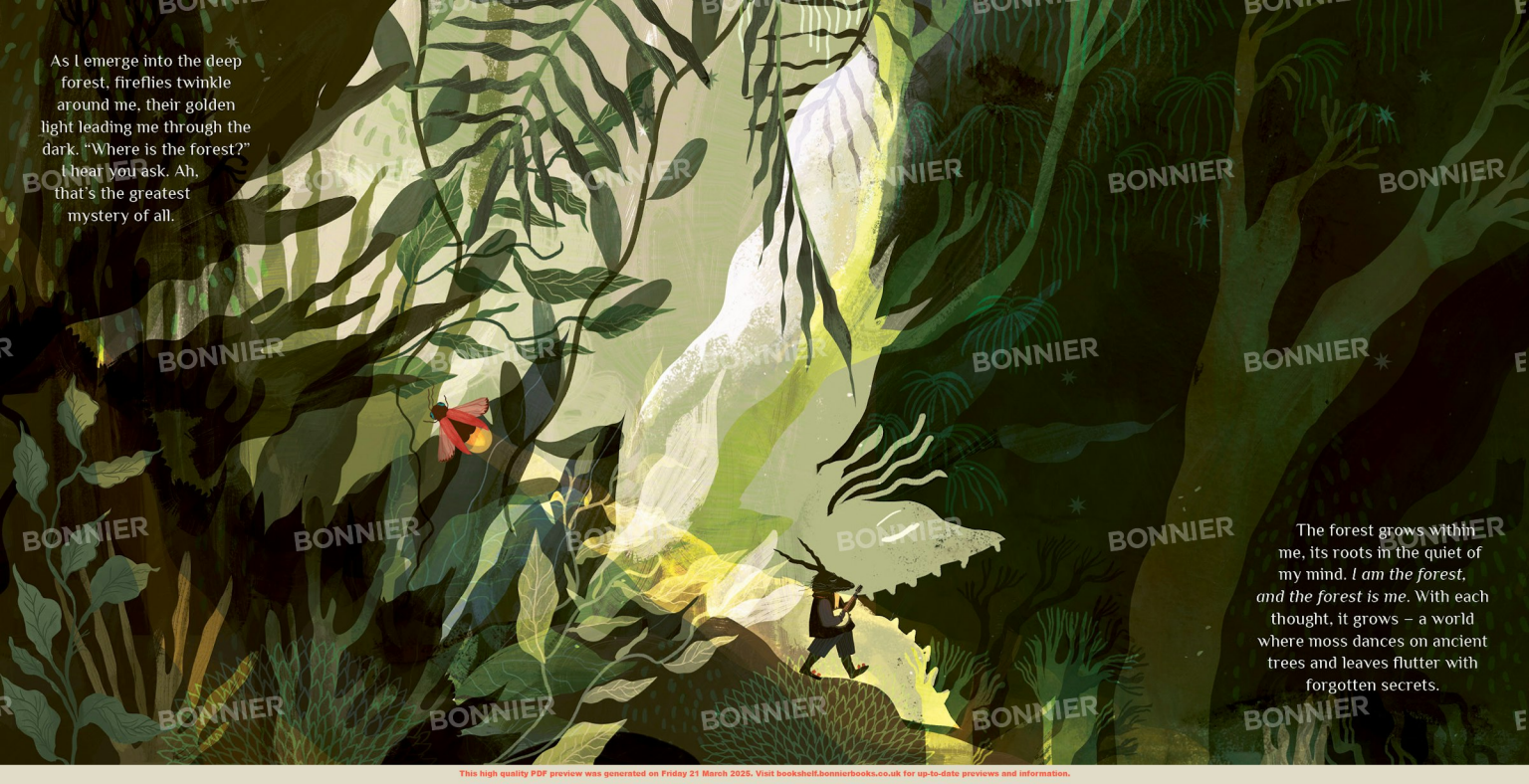


Everything feels wild and
wonderful, like anything
could happen.



In the blink of an eye, with a soft *whoosh*,
I slip through a hidden path, following the
great snake's trail. Its rose-tinted scales
shimmer, coiling through gnarled roots
into the enchanted woods.

Every time, it feels like stepping into
a dream spun by the forest itself.

A vibrant, stylized illustration of a dense forest. A waterfall cascades down a rocky ledge in the center, illuminated by a bright, golden light. A small figure, possibly a child or a small creature, stands at the base of the waterfall, looking up. The forest is filled with various types of trees, including tall, thin ones and large, leafy ones. A red and black butterfly is perched on a leaf in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is magical and serene. The word 'BONNIER' is repeated in a light, semi-transparent font across the entire image.

As I emerge into the deep
forest, fireflies twinkle
around me, their golden
light leading me through the
dark. "Where is the forest?"
I hear you ask. Ah,
that's the greatest
mystery of all.

The forest grows within
me, its roots in the quiet of
my mind. *I am the forest,*
and the forest is me. With each
thought, it grows – a world
where moss dances on ancient
trees and leaves flutter with
forgotten secrets.

I dive into the deep forest, where the paths are as
curious as they are endless. I walk upside down,
sideways like a crab, sometimes even on my head!
Why not? It's all part of the magic –
this is my forest, after all.



If you wander here one day, beware the
playful roots; they might just whisk you
away, tumbling... straight into the sky!



After the rain, mushrooms sprout everywhere – in the nooks of trees, under rocks, in the most unexpected places. Some mushrooms look at me with curious eyes, while others hide shyly from my gaze. Don't ask me, "Can mushrooms be shy?" I already told you – this is a very strange place.



On days when I feel a little lost, I follow an unexpected path, winding through the darkest corners of the deep forest, until I reach the Greenwood witches. Their secret trail is called the Path of Semi-Invisibility. Here, sometimes your feet vanish, or your arms, or even your whole body – half-hidden, half-seen, like you're part of the forest itself.





If you stumble upon the witches' cabin in the forest, don't be afraid. It's just their mischievous magic.


Owls hoot softly, standing guard, a sleek black cat watches from the shadows and a mysterious cauldron bubbles by the door, swirling secrets into the air.



We chant around the fire, the witches' voices weaving together in a rhythm that feels ancient and alive. Their eerie tales echo in the flames, sounding scary at first, but ending in laughter.

Sipping tea made from forest herbs, warmth spreads through me, as if the forest itself is sharing its magic.





Some days, I know exactly where the forest
will take me. I visit the big brown bear by
the white lake, and we compete to make the
loudest, strangest noises, our sounds
echoing through the deep forest.

When we're tired, we rest,
leaning into each other, gazing
at the mirror-like surface
of the calm lake.

Maybe, one day, we'll
summon the courage
to dive in...

Sometimes, when the Lake People
hear our calls, they rise to the surface.
We bend into different shapes,
dancing to the music
of the seaweeds.

I try follow the frogs' strange dance moves.
Though I'm not as flexible as they are, somehow,
I keep up. If we get tangled, we simply keep
dancing, our laughter rising up until we
can't help but laugh even harder.



In the forest, I have many friends, each as unique
and full of life as the trees that surround us.

There's the anxious white rabbit, always darting about,
forever in a hurry, as though he's racing toward some
important place. One time, I tried to keep up, running
faster and faster – until I found myself hopelessly
tangled in a maze of vines.



Then, there are the twins –
the two mischievous toads,
always up to something, their
eyes gleaming with tricks.



On rainy days, we explore the swampy wetlands
together, hopping from stone to stone. We find
hidden puddles to jump into, splashy adventures
that end with us covered in mud as the
rain falls softly around us.



The red fox is my most mysterious friend. If you look carefully,
you might spot his fiery fur slipping in and out of the trees,
always one step ahead, always knowing where to go.



One day, he led me to a dark corner of the deep forest
I'd never seen. The air was thick with whispers, and there,
we found a hidden grove full of glowing creatures.





It felt like we had uncovered a secret world, where the forest's magic was alive. Tiny glowing creatures danced between light and dark, flitting around us, sharing their hidden joy with the forest's quiet heart.





There, we discovered that Darkness is a big,
beautiful friend – a quiet companion who makes
light possible. Without Darkness, the stars
couldn't sparkle, and the moon wouldn't shine.
In their gentle embrace, everything else
glows a little brighter.





On long winter nights, when the darkness stretches longer than the light, and the whole forest is blanketed in snow, I travel north to find my friends, the Children of Light. They live in the coldest corners, where the snow never melts.



With the Children of Light, I dance around
the fire, our movements weaving bright trails
through the endless night. We celebrate the
dark, until the sun slowly rises, its warmth
kissing the world awake once more.



The days when the forest calls me home are
filled with magic – sunny, rainy, muddy, snowy,
and always full of wonder. Maybe, one day,
I'll join the forest marching band with my bugle
that I'm still learning to play. But that's a
story for another day...





As the light fades and the world becomes dark, I curl up under the tree's soft roots, feeling the warmth of the earth beneath me. And there, in the quiet, I let myself drift into a dreamless sleep, as the deep forest whispers around me, always watching, always waiting.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

The book tells the story of a forest and a little girl, though it's unclear whether the forest is real or imagined – because it's *her* forest. Whenever she feels bored, sad or happy she can step straight from her room into this magical world.

This idea of an imaginary forest was something I often dreamed of as a child, a place where I could escape and find adventure at any moment. The girl's adventures are also inspired by the walks I took with my grandfather through the forest. Those moments shaped my love for nature and the magic of the world around us.

This story is a reflection of my own childhood, of the wonder I still carry with me and of the quiet, timeless connection to nature that I share with the little girl in the book. It's not just her journey – it's mine too.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Merve Atilgan is an Istanbul-based illustrator and artist specialising in children's book illustration, concept art and character design. A graduate of the Maltepe University Faculty of Fine Arts Department of Animation in Cartoon and Animation, she describes herself as half elf, thirty per cent alien and twenty per cent earthling with a sprinkle of stardust. With a passion for creating from a young age, Merve has worked as a freelance illustrator for children's books, posters and magazines. Her debut author-illustrated picture book, *Derin Orman (The Forest of Dreams)*, was originally published in Turkish and was selected as a finalist for the 2023 Golden Pinwheel Awards.





