

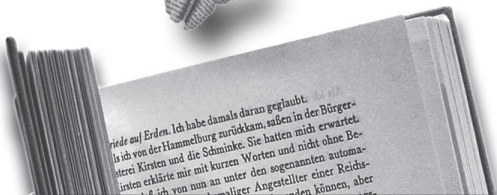
Mrs. Meyer's Magical Garden

A Novel.



A PLEASURE TO READ
IN ALL SEASONS — 

THE PICTURES CHANGE, THE STORY REMAINS.



Nikola Hahn

Mrs. Meyer's Magical Garden

A NOVEL.

Translated by Claudia Boulton



THON
erlag

*Someone who hears butterflies laughing
can tell how clouds taste.
Undisturbed by fear, he will discover night
beneath the moonlight.*

(Carlo Karges, Novalis)





Autumn.

Omnia rerum principia parva sunt.
The beginnings of all things are small.

Marcus Tullius Cicero

CHAPTER ONE

The colourful leaves drifted gently down onto the pavement one by one, directly in front of the old villa's entrance. At least Eli presumed they did because to actually see the tree, she would have had to lean out of the window of her room which was not her room any more. She looked at the tree one last time: a gnarled English Oak. She knew that from Pa. That crooked wooden body had to be ancient, even older than the house, which was quite old too. Oh, Pa could really tell magnificent stories! Eli missed him already, even though they had not yet parted. He would accompany her to the new home, as Ma had gravely explained. Eli cringed when she felt his hand on her shoulder.

"So, it's goodbye to the old warrior is it, Ronia Robber?"

Eli held back her tears and turned to face him. "The old oak is going to grow another hundred years, even without me", she explained bravely.

Pa stroked her hair. She hated it when others did that, but coming from him she loved it. Just as she loved it when he called her Ronia. That was their great secret. Not even Ma knew that she was really and truly named after the heroine in Astrid Lindgren's story: Ronia the Robber's Daughter. She who lived in the crumbling Matt's Fort in dark Matt's Wood who was adventurous, brave and one of a kind. Just like Eli.

Pa had whispered that he had done this secretly as Ma would feel that Ronia was not the right name for a decent girl. She had mused for many an hour quite how he had managed this without Ma finding out, because eventually she always found everything out.

"E-li-sa-betha!" she heard the voice from the hallway. "We have to get going!"

Eli did not like it when Ma stretched her name out like that. Actually, she did not want to be called Elisabetha at all. Eli was just about okay. If she could choose, she would have everyone call her just Ronia.

The door opened. Ma came in. She pulled a face. "I should have guessed that you two were dawdling again."

Pa just closed the window and said nothing.

The new school was really daft. In the classroom, the only free seat was next to a plump girl, bespectacled, with hair brushed awfully neatly, whose name was Emma and, to cap it all, regrettably lived nearby. Yes, Emma was just as daft as the whole school. And the teacher was daft and the new street and the new flat in the dull mouse grey box of an apartment building more so still. In fact, the whole area was daft: monochrome terraced houses, everywhere, all the same, each with an identical miniature garden or shabby concrete buildings, just as the one in which they now lived. *No trespassing!* a dented sign said, meaning the little patch of threadbare grass beside the entrance. Judging by the myriad of little brown heaps, the local dogs did not care a bit. There was not even an oak tree here! Eli could only see half the trees because the others were hidden behind the high wall across the street. Shrubs grew along this wall with an open space in front, unnaturally barren and with the mandatory prohibiting sign. Obviously they expected to build on it soon. The largest tree behind the wall had bright yellow leaves. They looked freshly painted. That yellow tree was about the only really beautiful thing in the whole street.

After school, Eli listlessly climbed the stairs to the new flat which was directly under the roof. She missed the creaking of her old wooden staircase, the shabby floor boards in the timeworn flat, the echoes in the corridor when someone spoke and those high airy ceilings with white stucco giving one the impression of living in a castle. Previously, Ma had never liked things to be scattered around, but now she did not seem to care.

The new corridor was narrow and dark. Even during the day, lights were needed to have any hope of seeing anything and the coats did not magically disappear behind mysterious gliding doors, but hung

helplessly in the open on a rickety coat rack. Eli hung up her jacket and went into her room: narrow alley-like with a small chink of a window looking onto the street. Eli opened it to let in some autumn sun. She missed Pa so much, it almost hurt.

“Now I have to pay everything double!” he had moaned whilst arguing with Ma about rent, heating cost and varied “other expenses”. Even visiting rights had caused a squabble. Eli did not like it when her parents disagreed, but she supposed it was still preferable to them not speaking to each other at all.

Outside there was not much to see: a rusty old flower lattice in front of an empty windowsill and some dull weathered roofs. But the sky was beautifully blue and the sun projected fascinating patterns into the street. From beyond the high wall the yellow tree blazed across at her. Eli grinned. Since when did a wall impose an obstacle for Ronia? She would go straight away and have a closer look. Sadly Ma arrived home first.

The very next day Eli pretended to go home directly after school. But she actually waited behind the entrance door until she could be sure that she was rid of Emma. Luckily, no one was about when she left the house. Pretending to be bored she strolled across the barren area and inspected the wall. It was built of roughly trimmed stones, overgrown with moss and so high, that Eli was unable to see beyond it. In the town this type of wall surrounded rich people’s gardens which was why Eli and her friend, Susi, had imagined being invisible and being able to just walk straight through them. The only way of gaining a glimpse of the inside was usually through the typical mighty wrought iron gates. But here there was no such thing, just an abundance of thorny bushes and terraced houses left and right. The piece of land beyond the wall seemed to be very large, the entrance probably from the street parallel.

It took Eli a while to find the right turning only to be disappointed to find the gate blocked-off with rush mats. These bore the ubiquitous *No trespassing!* sign and below *Parents are responsible for their children!*. This was obviously a clue of curious things yet to be discovered and therefore well worth the risk of looking for an opening to

sneak in. Susi also thought the same; the reason why they had been in trouble a short time previously. First with the owner of the house, then with Ma and finally that evening with Pa on his return home from work. Of course, that did not change the fact that such signs were a deliberate siren call for the inquisitive. The art was obviously just not to be caught in the act. So Eli decided to stand on tiptoe, but that did not help. The garden behind the wall remained hidden.

“You better go away!” someone called out from behind her. She was startled and turned around. It was plump Emma, had she followed secretly?

“Why?” Eli asked.

“’Cause it’s forbidden.”

“Have you been in?”

“Of course not!”

Eli thought of Susi and turned to leave.

“Where are you going?” Emma asked.

“Home.”

“May I come along with you for a bit?”

Eli shrugged and strolled nonchalantly off down the street. Emma tried to keep up whilst maintaining a steady stream of chitchat. She talked of school and how she could help Eli with her homework, but Eli was not listening. She was with the lovely yellow tree and wondering how she could get into the garden. Eli stopped and looked at Emma.

“Aren’t you just a little bit curious?”

“About what?” the plump girl asked.

“Well, what really happens behind that wall!”

Emma pulled a face. “Just loads of weeds and a tired tumble-down old house.”

“So you have been in!” Eli exclaimed.

“No, well yes, okay... old Mrs. Meyer used to live there, but she died. And my mummy says it’s about time that they got rid of that eyesore.” She sounded as if she would be even happier than her mummy about the demolition and from that moment on, Eli was sure that Emma was definitely not going to be her friend. Anyway, she no longer wanted a friend. And, besides, she would prefer to be completely

by herself in this world. Then at least she would not have to feel sad when all the others were no longer around. Maybe she could go and search for Matt's Fort with Pa next weekend?

"I'm glad we're in the same class", Emma said.

Eli thought, I'm not, and left. When she got back home, Ma had not yet returned. Her mother now had to work, but she was happy to be free. At least that was what she told her friend Bridget on the phone. Eli did not feel free; more like trapped in her little room. Although, on reflection, it was not really that small compared to Ma's.

"I only need it as a sleeping space", she had explained smiling. "But you definitely need a proper space to do your homework."

This proper space was a niche below the window, just about large enough to take Eli's desk. When she looked up from her homework and ignored the ugly rusting lattice, Eli looked directly at the sky. And if she stood up, she could see the street and the wall opposite with assorted colourful bushes behind – and of course the yellow tree which shone like a beam of promise: Ronia was definitely going to find the entrance and courageously explore all that was to be found in that old Mrs. Meyer's garden! Now she just had to be careful not to run into Emma.

Unfortunately, this was more easily said than done as Emma seemed overjoyed to have finally found someone whose nerves she could test on a regular basis. Eli did not like her, but she could not bring herself to show her aversion more openly than she had done already. So she was forced to endure Emma's tedious chitchat every morning on her way to school and every afternoon on her way back, always giving a sigh of relief when they finally said goodbye. Emma lived with her parents in one of those dull terraced houses bordering the wall of Mrs. Meyer's garden, indeed this was the sole reason why Eli had finally agreed to tag along and take a look at her room in the first place. Similar to her own, it was located under the roof, but what a difference: Emma's room was large and bright and even had its own little balcony from which you could gaze into Mrs. Meyer's garden! Actually, you could only guess what was there because trees, shrubs and bamboo blocked the view. Eli could merely make out a small part of an ancient roof between the abundant autumn colours.

“Did Mrs. Meyer live on her own?” Eli asked.

Emma shrugged. “No idea. I was still little when she died. My mummy says she was odd.”

“Why didn’t you ever invite her over for a piece of cake?”

“We didn’t know her and anyway, people said it was better not to get involved with her.”

“But why?” insisted Eli.

“Oh, what do I know!” shrugged Emma and looked at Eli slowly shaking her head.

“Why are you so interested? She died ages ago.”

Eli remembered the story about an ancient garden that Pa used to read to her, with an old lady who declared that the flowers were her children and of all the good garden spirits who had wanted to help. Eli had longed to know how a good garden spirit looked. Not even Pa had been able to tell her that. Maybe one of them was hiding in Mrs. Meyer’s garden?

“Want t’ play with my dolls?” Emma asked bluntly.

Eli shook her head. “No. I’ve got to go home.”

Ambling down the street she started to whistle. Something she had learned from Pa.

“You teach that child all kinds of mischief”, Ma had exclaimed, but she had been smiling when she said it. That had been long ago, but Eli could remember exactly that it had been on a warm sunny Saturday afternoon. They had visited Elephants in the zoo and on returning home a shiny blackbird had sat singing in the oak tree.

“Can you do that, too?” Pa had asked. “Whistle like a bird!” And then he had shown her how; she copied him and the blackbird had joined in. And then a brown one came along and even managed to whistle with a mouth full of worms, and Pa had said sternly: “One doesn’t sing with one’s beak full!” Eli laughed so loudly that the blackbird became scared and flew away and the brown one almost dropped its worms, but managed to disappear into the wild vines to feed her little ones.

Eli had reached the barren piece of land and strolled in an openly nonchalant way past the prohibiting signs towards the wall. She was just about to inspect the shrubbery, when she heard a familiar voice.

“You are going to be in real trouble when they catch you!” Emma pointed demonstrably at the sign and looked at Eli in the same way Ma used to look when she had done something particularly naughty. She offered Eli a lollypop. “Like one? Raspberry flavour.”

“Just leave me alone!” snapped Eli.

Emma’s eyes filled with tears.

A cry-baby, on top of everything else! Eli thought about continuing regardless, but this awful Emma would surely squeal on her.

“See yer”, she said and left.

It took an awfully long time until Saturday finally came around. Pa picked Eli up after breakfast. She had hoped that the three of them would go out and do something together, but Ma did not react to Pa’s presence in any way. And so it was that the two of them drove into town by themselves. Despite being snubbed by mum, Pa was in good spirits and he invited Eli to an ice cream parlour. The ice cream tasted excellent, but not as good as it had when Ma had been with them. Eli had been looking forward to see Pa and now that he was here she missed Ma.

“Shall we go to the zoo?” he asked. She shook her head and wished herself far away.

On Sunday morning it rained. Through all the greyness Eli had difficulty making out the glowing yellow tree behind the wall. When she leant out of the window, water from the broken drain pipe splashed onto her face and she vowed that as soon as it stopped raining Ronia would go into Mrs. Meyer’s garden – no matter what!

Two days later the sun shone again and not even Emma could stop her because she was in bed with the flu.

“Don’t you think you should go and visit your new friend?” Ma asked.

“She’s not my friend!”

“She is a very nice girl”, Ma said. How would she know? She had only ever seen her twice! Anyway, Eli had the impression Ma did not pay attention to what she was saying as much as she had done whilst they still lived in town. Sometimes she even forgot her promises. The

telephone calls to Bridget also became shorter. Eli imagined being free would be different.

“Well okay”, she gave in. “I’ll visit Emma.”

The visit was a short one. Eli said that she had something important to attend to which, strictly speaking, was not even a lie.

When Eli sneaked across the barren space this time she carefully looked around, but there were only a few people about and no one was taking any notice of her. She followed the wall to the right until she reached some thorny bushes. Somewhere behind was Emma’s parents’ garden, but there was no way of getting through. Eli walked in the other direction but there, too, the wall disappeared into impenetrable shrubbery.

After searching intensively, Eli managed to find a spot with almost no thorns. She fought her way through and unexpectedly ended up in a kind of natural tent: spindly branches and thorny tendrils formed a hollow, the back of which was formed by the wall. In one place a few stones were missing and the gap was just big enough for Eli to fit through. She was so happy, she almost clapped her hands. The stones felt cool and were covered in soft moss. It smelled of earth, leaves and mushrooms. As with the near side, the far side of the wall was covered by tall shrubs preventing access. If you were not specifically looking for it, there would be no way you could find it.

Eli looked around curiously. Everywhere trees glowed in rich, warm colours. The grass was knee-high and in a weed-choked bed there were flowers in bloom of which she did not even know the names.

The radiant yellow tree stood close to a house which had almost completely disappeared under ivy and thorny branches. Wooden stairs led to a covered patio where Eli noticed two faded wicker chairs and a table. And a rocking chair that moved.

“Good afternoon, Elisabetha. Or should I say Ronia? How nice of you to visit me.”

Eli was startled and stared at the old woman who sat in the rocking chair. She was wrapped in a blue and red check blanket on which her hands rested like shrivelled winter apples in spring. Her face resembled a map of creases and wrinkles and her white hair was

twisted into an intricate knot. At least Eli presumed so, as she could not actually see it but Grandma Mary used to do her hair like that.

“Please ... I’m sorry”, she stuttered. “I’m terribly sorry. I ...”

The wrinkles seemed to be amused.

Eli paused. “How come you know my name?”

“That’s my little secret. Two names – that’s really tiring. So, what should I call you?”

“My Ma says Elisabetha. My Pa says Ronia, but only in secret. Everyone else calls me Eli.”

“And what’s your favourite?”

No one had ever asked her that. “Well ... Whichever you like.”

“No. You decide, my dear child.”

Eli actually hated it when people called her *dear child*, but the old lady made it sound like an honour. Eli debated if Pa might agree if a stranger called her by her secret name. Probably not. She climbed up the steps. The creaking sounded familiar. “Alright, Eli. And what’s your name?”

“I’m Mrs. Meyer. But if you like you can call me Auntie Mildred.”

Calling perfect strangers Auntie was even worse than being a *dear child*. “I’ll call you Mrs. Meyer.”

Mrs. Meyer pointed to the wicker chair; Eli sat down hesitantly. “Emma says you died.”

“Well, well. So that’s what your friend says, is it?”

“She isn’t my friend.”

“And why not?”

“Because!”

Mrs. Meyer’s wrinkles were enormously amused.

“Why are you not telling me off?”

“Why should I?”

“Because I , ... well, climbed into your garden.”

“This isn’t my garden.”

“But, ... don’t you live here?”

“I’m only visiting.”

Eli looked towards the open patio door. “Then who?”

The old lady lightly put her index finger to her and whispered: “You’ll see.”

Eli felt herself getting goose bumps. This Mrs. Meyer was nice enough, but at the same time a little peculiar. She remembered how Ma had always warned her not to get involved with strangers and that terrible things might happen if she did. But Ma had talked about men, not women and surely did not mean old ladies such as Mrs. Meyer. Eli thought that anyway at a pinch she could run away. Mrs. Meyer surely was not very steady on her feet. On the other hand: she would not harm her, would she?

“Have you got a husband?”

Her wrinkles twinkled. “Oh yes! Well, I had one, a while ago.”

“Did you get divorced?”

“Oh no” Otto and I were married for sixty-six years. And then he died.”

Eli tried to work out how old someone must be to be able to be married for such a long time. Grandma Mary died when she was sixty-three and she had been married to Grandpa Friedhelm, but he had died such a long time ago that Eli only knew him from photographs. And Grandma Augusta was sixty-five and had raised her child, Ma, quite comfortably without a chap, which she proudly pointed out every time she visited. And Ma? She had not even managed ten years with Pa... Could someone really be married for sixty-six years?

“Do you have children?”

Mrs. Meyer nodded. “Two daughters and a son, but they live far from here.”

“Aren’t you sad to be all on your own?”

“But you are here.”

“I’ll leave soon.”

“You will come back.”

“How do you know?”

She smiled. “You’ll see.”

CHAPTER TWO

As soon as Eli could think clearly, she found herself in her room at her desk. Through the rust-stained flower-lattice-grey she gazed at the orange-red painted sunset-sky. Old Mrs. Meyer had talked a little nonsense, but Grandma Mary had done the same and Eli had loved her anyway. She had felt a great sense of comfort and security, inside in winter on the stove bench, outside in summer between the beds with myriads of colourful flowers. Grandma Mary even grew vegetables; carrots and lettuce and radishes and even herbs that had a lovely aroma and tasted even better. And all those many goodies! The raspberries and strawberries Eli used to nibble directly from the bush, the nuts that tumbled from the tree in autumn and apples that needed to be stored in the cellar for a little while and smelled of sun and summery earth even in the depth of winter. And then, one day, Pa had come home and said Grandma Mary now lived with the dear Lord in his heavenly garden. Eli had not understood, and it seemed Pa did not either, because instead of answering her questions, he had read her the story of the old garden.

Grandma Mary's garden had had everything, except cherries. She had said that a cherry tree would be too big, and for a proper harvest you needed at least two. But in her previous garden she had had one and her neighbour next door had one too so they harvested buckets full of sumptuous red cherries every summer. Eli opened a tattered book which she had often read with Pa and looked at the pictures. One could find lots of clever answers to important questions in it. For example, where elephants came from or why it rains or even which trees grow in Germany and what their leaves look like. Eli smiled when she saw the illustration of the English oak tree. She kept browsing - and indeed: the yellow tree was a cherry! Grandma Mary

had often said that Pa had climbed into the cherry tree every summer and nibbled the cherries just like Eli had done with the berries. Only she did not have to climb for them. Pa had eaten so many cherries that he got tummy-ache. And he had cherry stone spitting competitions with the neighbour's boy.

"Your grandma didn't like that at all", Pa had said. "Although I always won." He had grinned when he said that and actually looked a bit like a naughty little boy.

"Why did you move from your former garden?" Eli wanted to know.

Pa looked sad. "Sometimes you have to leave a place you love because circumstances force it upon you."

Eli wondered aloud how circumstances managed to do this, but no one was able to give her a proper answer. Around that time, Pa sometimes looked sad and so did Ma and they either fought or did not talk at all. Eli suspected that something terrible might happen and that they might separate as her friend Susi's parents had done; hoping at the same that it would not come to that. And then it did happen after all and she had to leave her beautiful room just like Pa once had to leave the cherry tree garden. And yet, Grandma Mary had not divorced!

Eli closed the book and looked out of the window. The sky now seemed as rusty as the lattice and then all colour disappeared and the yellow tree turned grey. *It is about time they got rid of that eyesore*, she remembered Emma's words. How could someone say something so mean? And on top of that they had lied: Mrs. Meyer was not dead at all! And as long as she lived, no one could destroy her garden – or could they? Anyway, Eli preferred not to imagine what it would be like to look out of the window in the morning and not see the blazing yellow tree any more. Suddenly she had to laugh! Dearie me! She had totally forgotten that flowers and trees could fend for themselves and chase nasty people away! But she only knew that because Pa had told her the story of the old garden.

In this, the old garden was so large, no one knew exactly where it ended because it lay in the middle of meadows and woods and it did not have a fence. There were mighty trees and colourful flowers and a house where a couple lived with their children. The years passed

and when the children had grown up and moved away, the parents stayed behind. The town with its houses and streets kept squeezing in closer to the old garden and the parents, who were now grandparents, had a big wall built, so the trees and flowers would not be eaten by the town. When the old people died, the town had long surrounded the walls and garden and ate into the countryside beyond. No one had wanted the house, so they pulled it down and built an ugly block of flats in its place. Between the remaining garden and the block of flats they put a fence and again the years passed. The town grew into a city and the ugly block of flats became uglier and the old garden lay quietly behind the fence like a desert island in an ocean of houses

One day, a boy with his little sister and his parents moved into the ugly block of flats. From their window, the children could see the old garden and imagined what it would be like to play in it. The other children had told them a nasty gardener lived behind the fence and so no one dared venture in.

But the boy was brave and made a plan to outwit the gardener. Indeed, both siblings managed to get into the garden without being seen and when they found no one there, they turned to mischief. They ripped leaves from the trees and trampled on the flowers; they turned beetles onto their backs to make them wriggle, they tore down spiders' webs and threw stones at the birds and caused much desolation all around. When it got dark however, they could not find their way back out and suddenly the old garden came to life: the animals could speak and the flower spirits rose and together they decided that the children had to die for their cruel acts. That's when Eli became really scared, because even though the boy and his little sister had been quite nasty, she felt pity for the two and was relieved when the beech fairy granted their wish. She shrank the children until they were teeny-weeny and sent them on an adventurous and dangerous trip beneath the earth. They visited the earth mother, met the father of the oceans and were guests in the Tower of Winds. From there, they finally flew to the old lady's garden who called the flowers her children and where the good garden spirits lived.

And a little later they were very nearly eaten by greedy mice. But only nearly.

The story of the old garden was at once exciting and creepy, but also funny and a little sad and when Pa had finished reading it, he had to immediately start all over again, and then for a third time. After that, he refused to read it any more. After all, there were other interesting stories. That was quite true, but the children's experiences were just as exciting as Ronia's adventures in Matt's Wood and Pa had had to read that one so many times until Eli knew it by heart. As he left, through the window, she could hear the wind whispering in the oak tree and she ceased to be Eli; she was Ronia. Through the dark Matt's Wood she ran to the old garden. The boy and his sister were waiting for her and together they climbed up the cherry tree, all the way up to the highest branch where the biggest and sweetest fruit hung. And then they chewed as noisily as they possibly could and laughed and spat the stones skywards.

"Eli - you're not supposed to dream, do your homework instead!" Alarmed, Eli looked towards the door.

"Dinner's ready", Ma said. She looked tired.

The following day was a "Lateautumnpicturebookthursday" as Pa would put it. The sun shone from an electric blue sky and Eli looked out from her school desk. Emma slid a little note over, but Eli pretended not to see it.

"Want t' play with my new doll?" Emma asked on the way home.

Whenever she was not busy solving mathematics problems, Emma could dress and undress Barbie dolls for hours on end. Eli hated Barbie dolls, but hated maths even more. But most of all she hated Emma! Simply because she was constantly pestering Eli so she was unable to go into Mrs. Meyer's garden. Eli had thought about telling her everything, but decided against it. It was her big secret that Mrs. Meyer was still alive. Suddenly she had an idea on how to get rid of Emma. She put on an apologetic expression and explained that she would not be able to come out to play because she had to go to tennis. Emma hated anything and everything to do with sport or exercise in general. Predictably, she immediately pulled a face.

"I am starting to take regular lessons now", said Eli. "With my own personal coach." She had no idea what a personal coach was, but it was

exactly what Bridget had said yesterday evening and Ma had explained she did not have money to waste on such frippery. Somehow Bridget did not seem to appreciate this judgement and did not stay long.

“What a pity”, said Emma.

Eli was glad her trick had worked. All she now needed was to wait for the right moment to creep into the garden. She squeezed through the gap in the wall, her heart thumping. Would Mrs. Meyer still be sat in her rocking chair?

She was. “I’m glad you’re visiting me”, she said, repeating her previous days greeting.

“I’m happy, too”, Eli said.

“And why then do you look as you do?”

Eli peeked in the direction of Emma’s balcony. What if that silly-billy found out that instead of practising tennis with her coach she was sitting on the terrace with the not-so-dead Mrs. Meyer? As if the old lady could read her thoughts she said: “Don’t worry, this garden is so overgrown, no one can see in from outside. And if we don’t talk too loudly, no one is going to hear us either.” She lowered her voice. “We are in a forbidden world.”

Eli had no idea what Mrs. Meyer was talking about. She pointed at the blazing yellow tree whose coat of leaves had thinned out quite a bit. “That’s a cherry tree, right?”

“You wished for a cherry tree”, Mrs. Meyer said, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that wishes came true immediately.

“This tree is only here because I wished for it!”

Mrs Meyer shook her head. “It was already standing here when I was your age.”

“You know what I wish for even more? That Ma and Pa don’t fight any longer and that we all live happily together again.”

The old lady smiled, but this time her wrinkles did not join in. “There are things that are and things that will be. But there are also things that aren’t and won’t ever be. I think Nick’s calling.”

“Who’s Nick?” Eli asked.

“He’s over there, the old lazybones.” She said it in a way which made you feel that there was nothing more endearing than an old lazybones. “I’m sure he’d be very happy if you went and said hello to him.”