

‘No mother?’

‘No,’ Brendan said, ‘no mother, and no father either.’

The girl’s face softened. ‘I’m alone too. My name is Aisling, what’s yours?’

‘Brendan. And I’m just here to find berries to make ink. Do you know where these grow?’ Brendan held out the little brown berry.

‘I *could* help you find them,’ Aisling said, ‘but only if you and your cat promise never to come into my forest again!’

‘We promise.’

‘Come on, then.’

Aisling led Brendan and Pangur through the forest, stopping to ask birds and animals for directions to the oak tree.

Finally she stopped under a huge tree and pointed straight up. It was a *very* long way to the top.

‘You *have* climbed a tree before, haven’t you?’ she asked.

‘Of course I have,’ Brendan lied.

In a flash, Aisling disappeared up the tree.

Brendan grabbed a branch and hoisted himself up. Then he reached for the next one, and the next one. He was feeling very pleased with himself until his foot slipped and, with a crash, he fell backwards.

‘AAAAH!!’

‘I thought you knew how to climb trees!’ Aisling laughed. She reached down and pulled Brendan up until he was sitting beside her on a thick branch. How could she be so strong?

‘Just do what I do,’ she said, ‘and don’t look down!’

