



News from Houghton Mifflin Books for Children

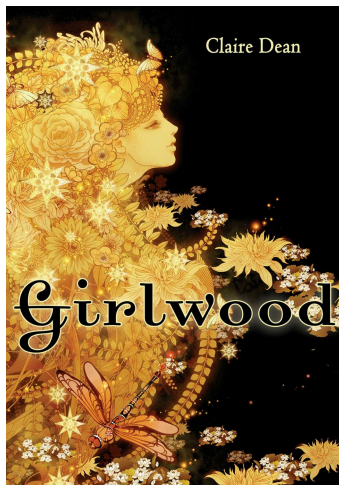
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“Dean's celebration of the earthy, living magic that exists ‘everywhere’ . . . will lure YAs.”—*Booklist*

“This is exactly the kind of book I would have loved as a teenager. It emphasizes the healing power of animals and nature which has helped so many young people cope with their problems all over the world. It will help young readers to understand that it is okay to be different. And that every individual can play a role in making this a better world.”—Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute, UN Messenger of Peace

## *Girlwood*

By Claire Dean



Polly Greene has always been considered strange, a girl who can see a person's true colors. An outcast at school, Polly is more comfortable foraging for medicinal plants with her grandmother or trekking deep into the woods. But all that changes when her older sister, Bree, vanishes in to the woods. The only one who believes that Bree can survive, Polly begins to leave food for her sister and finds a hidden grove, surrounded by a wall of thorns, which she names Girlwood. Along with an odd but endearing circle of friends, Polly tries to help her sister through the harsh, snowy winter, and at the same time, protect her beloved Girlwood from a developer planning to build houses in the grove. In the process, she discovers the resilience, the magic, and the hope within the woods, within her family, and within herself.

Dean was inspired to write the book for her young daughter, who wanted a book with “some magic, and fairies, and girls.” When her daughter was entering junior high, Dean took her and three friends, plus their mothers, to a small cabin in the woods, where the girls built a hut,

crossed a treacherous river, and created their own wonderland near a stream. At night, with a full moon overhead, they sat around a campfire and exchanged wisdom, laughter, and even some tears. Nothing too fancy or complicated, but her daughter and their friends and mothers still call this one of the most magical and intimate weekends of their lives.

*Girlwood*, with its mix of magic and realism, encourages readers to take a new look at the natural world. To encourage this environmental awareness, Dean created a website ([www.clairedean.net](http://www.clairedean.net)) which contains information about edible plants, environmental action points, auras, and tips on holding a threshold ceremony.

On threshold ceremonies—which can be held to mark a birthday, a rite of passage, or a new challenge—Dean says, "We've lost so many of the natural markings and celebrations we once had, and it really does seem to make a difference to my children at least. Not only do they feel important, but they feel connected to their parents, and their friends' parents, and to the earth. They really do feel part of a circle, they get dirty, they take ownership of a piece of woods or mountain, they feel as if they've been let in on an ancient secret, they find power in themselves. It's been lovely for me to watch them bloom."



*Claire Dean* writes from a bright green house behind an ever-growing garden in Idaho. Next up is a story for her son.

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