

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Children

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Lucy in her Secret Wood (A Story Inspired by Wordsworth's wild child Lucy Gray)

Excerpt from Chapter 4 – Lucy in her Secret Wood by Christina Pagès

(Lucy, an 8 year old, has been abandoned in the woods by her stepdad after being locked away in a small room for most of her life. This is her fifth day in the woods.) After washing out her clothes in Brook and hanging them over some branches to dry, Lucy began to climb back up the bank, only to find herself staring into another face.

It was a boy carrying a fishing net and a bucket. He was a little taller than her with a face that was round and brown like a nut. He was smiling at her in such a friendly way she forgot to be scared.

“Hello. What’s your name?”

She almost said “Nuisance,” but caught herself in time, “I’m Lucy.”

“My name is Will, and I’m almost ten. How old are you?”

Lucy hesitated. She had never been quite sure about her age, so she said, “About eight.”

“When’s your birthday?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” The boy was looking at her in surprise with his eyebrows way up, almost into his hairline. “How come? Haven’t your parents told you? Haven’t you ever had a birthday party?”

Lucy shook her head. “I haven’t got any parents. And no, I’ve never had a party.”

The boy’s face had changed, and he was climbing down the bank now, looking at her as if she were some strange animal. “You mean you’re all by yourself? Alone? Here in these woods?”

Lucy wished she hadn't said anything. If she hadn't answered him, he would have just gone away without knowing about her. He had to know that nothing needed to change.

"I'm alright here. I like being alone. Besides, I have lots of friends here."

"Really? Like who? I've been coming here to fish every time I stay with my Grandma, and I haven't seen a single person. This place is so alone I call it my secret wood."

"I don't mean people - friends," Lucy said. She said, people, as if they were all nasty and then remembered that Will was a person and felt uncomfortable. "I mean everything here is my friend – this Brook, those trees, those flowers, the clouds ..." She broke off, not wanting to mention Grandpa tree or Alone because they were too special to talk about. "I love everything here." Lucy was surprised to hear herself say that word. She couldn't remember saying it out loud before, except in a private conversation with Rabbit.

The boy was standing close to her now, his brown eyes staring into her face.

"You're strange. And you speak in a funny way – like you're reading aloud from a book or something. You must not be real. Are you real?" He reached out and touched her lightly on the arm. "Yes, you are. Though I still think you must be a dream. Look how blue your eyes are, and your hair! It's down to your waist! Don't you ever cut it?"

No-one had ever talked to Lucy about how she looked, and the only mirror in her old room had a blurry patch all over it, so she wasn't sure what she looked like. Her eyes had seemed kind of grey in her mirror. Of course, she knew her hair was black because she could see it, bouncing around her. As for how long it was, and how blue her eyes were, well, she didn't know how to respond, so she just said, "I've never cut my hair. I don't know what to cut it with. Does it need cutting?"

Will stared at her again and then laughed. "Well, you'd better find some scissors before you trip over it!"

Lucy liked his laugh. She liked how his brown face creased up and crinkled his eyes, and how he sounded like Brook gurgling over a particularly large rock. She found herself liking Will, which surprised her, because, after all, he was a human.

“Hey, Lucy, let’s sit over there on that moss and talk. I brought a picnic with me. Are you hungry? I’ve got enough for two.”

Was she hungry? What a question! Will had to be magic, just like her wood. Why else would he have turned up at this very moment, when she was so starving?

Lucy smiled at him. She couldn’t remember smiling into another face before; perhaps she had smiled once or twice when the Lady came to her room to read to her, but never like this with Will, never.

“I’m pretty hungry,” she said, trying not to sound too eager about it, and began to climb back up the bank behind him.

“This is my favourite place to eat,” Lucy said, pointing to the sandy circle around her silver tree. “I like eating here; it’s not damp like on the moss.”

“Good idea,” said Will as he settled down and began to unwrap a big bundle. “My Grandma always gives me too much food for a picnic. ‘You’re a growing boy; she tells me all the time. Eat, eat, put some fat on those bones’.”

Will looked over at Lucy. “I don’t know what she’d say about you. You’re really skinny.”

Lucy felt a bit embarrassed. “You mean I have too much skin?”

Will bent over the half-unwrapped food and roared with laughter. “Skinny means really, really thin, silly. It means you have no fat on you at all. Lucy, you’re so strange – with your shiny blue eyes, your crazy hair, and not even knowing that word. Where have you been all your life?”

Lucy might have been offended if she hadn’t been looking at his face which was full of wonder – as if he was seeing a strange-coloured bird for the first time and waiting to see how it would fly.

But she couldn't say all the things that came into her head, so she just said, "No-one has ever told me I was skinny. Can we eat now?"

"Of course." Will took a huge sandwich out of the package and split it in half. "Here you go."

Christina Pagès Brief Bio:

Her children's book, *The Mountain Boy* (Summerland Publishing 2007) is the first in a series called "Nature Children."

Her Middle Grade/YA novel, *Lucy in Her Secret Wood*, (August 2016) is the 2017 recipient of the Literary Classics Eloquent Quill Award and Gold Award, Readers' Favorites' Silver Award, and Pinnacle Achievement Book Award.