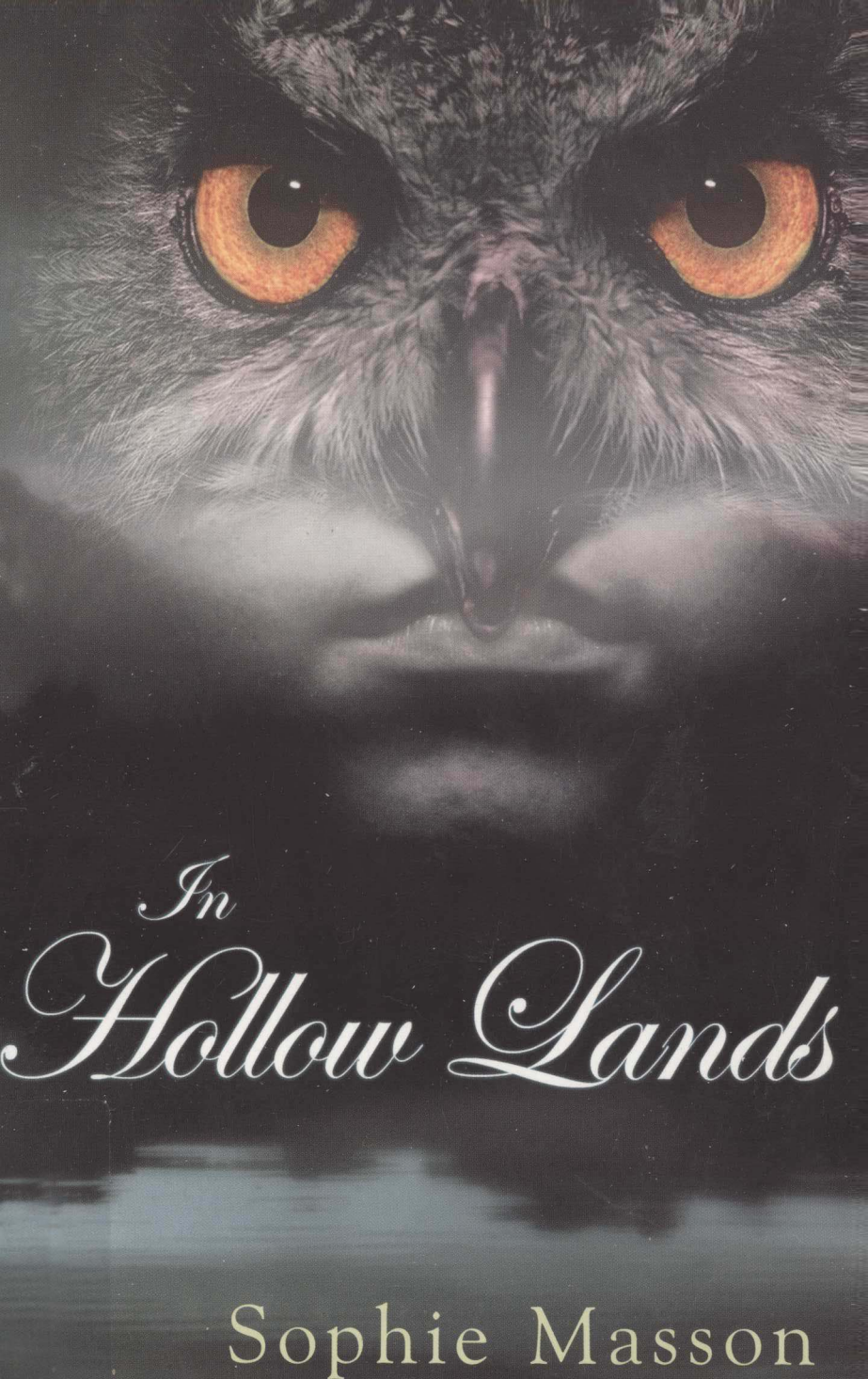
In
Hollow Lands
Sophie Masson

In Hollow Lands

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In Hollow Lands

Sophie Masson

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To Bertrand, who loves the songs of Brittany

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

The Song of Wandering Aengus
W B Yeats

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CARABAS

Sophie Masson

They hated her. She knew that. She could see it in their eyes, their twisted faces.

When the people of her village discover Catou's unusual gifts, she is banished forever with only Frederic, the miller's son, as company.

But now she is free to follow her true nature, to turn her gifts to her advantage. Before long, she and Frederic had found their path into the opulent Court of Tenebran, to its strange powers, its mysteries and its terrifying challenges . . .

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CLEMENTINE

Sophie Masson

There is something I must tell you. The romantic secret of it has burned brightly in me, the dream thrilled in every pore of my skin. So bear with me, and come with me, into a place long ago and far away . . .

Aurora, daughter of the Count of Bois-Joli, and Clementine, the woodcutter's child, have been friends for sixteen years. Until, one day, they stumble on a castle they never knew existed . . .

A century later, Lord Arthur, a young scientist, feels himself strangely drawn into the legend of the sleeping castle of Bois-Joli, and finds that science is no match for a magic that has lain untouched for over a hundred years . . .

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'the detail of court life and ways is enthralling. A fabulous novel . . .' Adele Geras, *TES*

Part One

One

A long hot summer is always followed by an early, biting winter, so they say. But that year, the wise old sayings about the turning of the seasons looked mighty foolish indeed. Late October, and the twin children of the lord and lady of the manor of Raguenel, Tiphaine and Gromer, could still run around barefoot with their friends, and splash through river shallows without feeling at all cold. The leaves on the trees had barely begun to turn, and there was still a balmy feeling to the wind that was as lovely as it was surprising. No-one on the manor, not even the twins' ancient tutor Dame Viviane, not even the oldest villager, a bent man so old that he looked more like a *ðuz*, a dwarf, than a man, could remember a year like it.

The clement weather was not universally welcomed, however. Some people, professional glooms all, crept about gazing suspiciously at the cheerful blue sky, and muttered that the end of the world was nigh, and others still prophesied hopefully that 'You mark my words, winter's going to have a real bite to it! It's not right, this weather, it just isn't right! You mark my words,

the roads will be full of frozen corpses in a few weeks hence, and the wolves will come back to Stone Wood and wreak havoc on the village!'

Tiphaine and Gromer and their friends didn't waste time worrying about the weather, though. Winter, with everyone solemnly indoors, reading improving works and gossiping by smoky fireplaces, would be here soon enough. They ran and jumped and fished and walked and hunted and danced and sang and generally spun out each hour of extra daylight as long as they possibly could. Nobody tried to stop them: the villagers, busy with the hundred and one preparations farmers must make before winter, looked indulgently on all the children, and did not ask them to do too many chores. Dame Viviane did not attempt to make the twins start the lessons which usually began again in autumn; and their parents, the Viscount and Viscountess Raguenel, were still far away at the Court of the Duke of Brittany. Usually, they returned by mid-October to the manor, but this year they had sent word that they would not return till well after All Saints' Day, if the weather held. If only the weather held! It was like a spell!

And the spell hung over Raguenel that year, like a great warm globe, touching everything with a golden light, a soft mellowness that got into your bones, making the whole manor seem even more beautiful than ever. Raguenel was neither the biggest nor the smallest of the Breton manors, but certainly one of the prettiest and most pleasant. Its lord, the Viscount, was from a junior branch of the great Breton family, the counts of Dinan, though his wife the Viscountess was a foreigner, being French. Like most manors in

those days, it was a mixture of farm, orchard, forest holding and riverland. The village, which held about sixty souls or so, was clustered most attractively around the green, where stood the little stone church of Saint Gwenole. There was a small mill and the manor-house, which was large and comfortable, stood not far from the river. The manor was a perfect place for children; the river was neither too swift nor too sluggish, but just right for swimming in, and the wood nearby, known as Stone Wood, because of the stone circle, called Ti-Korriganed, that stood in its centre, was small enough not to be too frightening, but dense enough to be a place of adventure. There were no wolves there any more, or bears; the villagers' incessant battle against marauding wild beasts had finally been won some years back.

Only once in the year was the wood out of bounds: on the eve of All Hallows, or All Saints' Day, October 31st, and the day after that, All Souls' Day, or the Day of the Dead. No-one in their right mind would go there in that time, and especially not on Hallowe'en; for Stone Wood, and especially Ti-Korriganed, was then a place between worlds. Ghosts, demons, witches, the fairies called *korrigans* in Brittany, dwarfs and mary-morgans, as water-spirits were called, and many other kinds of strange beings would emerge into Stone Wood and dance around Ti-Korriganed. If a human being strayed too close, they would get caught up in the dance too, and never return to the human world, or return so changed that they were like walking dead. On those days and evenings, then, people in Raguenel stayed well away from the wood. They went to Mass in the little stone church of Saint Gwenole, which was of the

same weathered grey as the megalith, and they prayed for the souls of the dead, and for protection against the other strange denizens of the Otherworld.

Not all of those beings were wicked, of course, or hostile to human beings, but all of them were unpredictable, and thus could be dangerous. It was best to leave them in possession of Stone Wood at that time – for by some kind of unspoken agreement, the otherworlders did not try to invade the village. There were other times – four in all – when the otherworlders could be seen, and not just felt as unseen presences, but it was only on the Day of the Dead that all of the spirits came out together. Normally, the demons and witches and goblins and ghosts kept well away from the korrigans and mary-morgans and dwarfs, for they were, if not always enemies, at least wary of each other.

Tiphaine and Gromer had turned twelve that summer. It was to be their last carefree year as children. They had lived on the manor all their lives and known nothing else, but next year they would both be gone from Raguenel. Gromer would go to a manor near the great forest of Broceliande, where the lord was a friend of his father's. There, he would have to learn the hard tasks that would make him first a squire, then a knight, and eventually lord of Raguenel himself. As to Tiphaine, she would have to learn the life of a lady at the Duke's court, and to attract the attention of some well-born man, for her mother had great plans for her. She certainly did not want her lovely daughter marrying some hedge-squire or Breton-speaking clodhopper! No more bare feet for

Tiphaine, or short, loose shifts; no more flying hair and swims in the river and fits of laughter that showed all her small sharp teeth. She would have to learn to stand tall and straight, and smile politely at gormless suitors and dull officials, and broil on hot summer's days in heavy velvet and silks. Neither Tiphaine nor Gromer would be able to play with the village children in the same wild and free way any more. If it had been left up to their mother, the Viscountess, of course, they would have been packed away from Brittany long ago. Not being from Brittany herself, she was a little shocked at how peasant and knight, lord and villein, seemed to mix much more freely here than in her own country of France, but had agreed reluctantly that the children were to be brought up as country Bretons until their twelfth birthday, on the condition that then they must learn the ways of the Court. The Duke's court was very much influenced by the French court and also that of England, though of course Brittany was independent of both. And so the Viscount had agreed that he would go with his wife every spring and summer to the Duke's court, and keep up the reputation of his family. He knew that his children must eventually learn all the secrets and wiles and traps of the big wide world, though remembering his own happy childhood running wild at Raguenel, he wished that he could keep them there a little longer.

There would be no more Dame Viviane for the twins, either; they would have outgrown the old woman and all she could teach them. Dame Viviane's knowledge was not, or even mostly, out of books; it was country knowledge, of simples and herbs and

stars and how to spot a fox's earth and a badger's tracks, and a wealth of stories about korrigans and mary-morgans and all kinds of other beings. She had taught the children to read and write, true, but she spoke French only haltingly, with a strong Breton accent, and did not know anything of the new, fashionable things the Viscountess deemed essential, and so had been told that her services would no longer be required. The Lady of Raguenel would be glad to see the back of her; though Viviane looked like a kind old woman, with a cheerful, appley kind of face, there was something almost cold in the depth of her black eyes when she looked at the Viscountess, which made that lady feel quite chilled.

Nobody knew where Dame Viviane might go afterwards, though the Viscount had, in secret, offered her a little cottage on the edge of the woods, which she had declined with a little smile. Though she was certainly Breton, she was not from Raguenel, for her accent was not of those parts. Perhaps she might return to her original home, or perhaps not. The one thing she would not do was gracefully retire to a convent, as so many older women did. It was not a bad life, a convent, the Viscountess had suggested to her once, but the old woman had looked at her so coldly that she had uncharacteristically shut her mouth on the rest of the sentence. 'Heavens,' she had said crossly to her husband, a little later, 'she looked just like a witch!' The Viscount had laughed a little uneasily; under the Court veneer, he was still very much a Breton, and did not think it at all impossible that Dame Viviane might, indeed, be a witch.

She had come to Raguenel one bright Midsummer