

## Trees, Woods and Literature

Now, Marban, will you be telling me what tree you're most disposed to, she said, for they must be all well known to you and you walking along through the forests from Waterford? What tree am I most disposed to? Marban said. Well, taking all in all, it's the holly, for it sheltered me in the cold March nights. And he called to her to admire one near by under whose branches they would find it hard to squeeze themselves. And Marban never said a truer word than this, Alec interjected, as I know well myself; the holly is as good as a broken house to a man on a winter's night. Luachet thought the leaves looked dark, and she didn't like the thorns, and later in the evening she stopped before a birch and said: That tree is more beautiful than the holly. And Marban answered her that the birch rose up as sweetly as Luachet's own body, and he said that the wind in the tree was as soft as her voice. It's the most musical of trees; his very words as reported by my grandfather, who got them from a book. Now what tree is that naked one? Luachet asked. That one, Marban answered, is the ash, the last one in the forest that the summer clothes. The most useful of the many that God has given us, he added, and to help the time away he told her it was the ash that furnished the warrior with fine spears. And when they came upon a hazel copse, he told her of the nuts that would be ripe for gathering in the autumn. And when they came to some poplars, he said the poplar and the aspen were useless trees, one as the other, the poplar giving but poor shade to the wayfarer, and the aspen not doing much better, a ragged, silly tree, shivering always as with ague. I like the willow better today than I did yesterday. How is that? she said. And he answered her that as soon as they came to a willow he would tell her. See, he said, how faithfully he follows the brook, as faithfully as I shall follow you, Luachet, listening to the talk of your mouth, bending my ear to it, the way the willows listen to the rippling water. And she asked if there was no tree he did not love at all. He said there was one, the pine, for it sheds only a fibrous litter in which nothing grows. A pine wood is without birds or animals, the marten is the only animal one meets in a pine wood.

From *A Story-teller's Holiday*, by George Moore. (Reprinted by kind permission of J. C. and R. G. Medley).

George Moore was born in Moore Hall, Co. Mayo in 1852. He was educated in England, tried painting in Paris, then moved to London and took to writing. He influenced the development of the novel in English. He came to Dublin in 1901 to help restore the Irish language (of which he knew not a word) and left, disillusioned, in 1911. His ten years in Dublin form the basis of his three-volume masterpiece *Hail and Farewell*. (1911-1914). He died in London in 1933. Moore Hall was burned down in 1923 and the desmesne with the crumbling walls of the great house now form part of Lough Carra state forest.