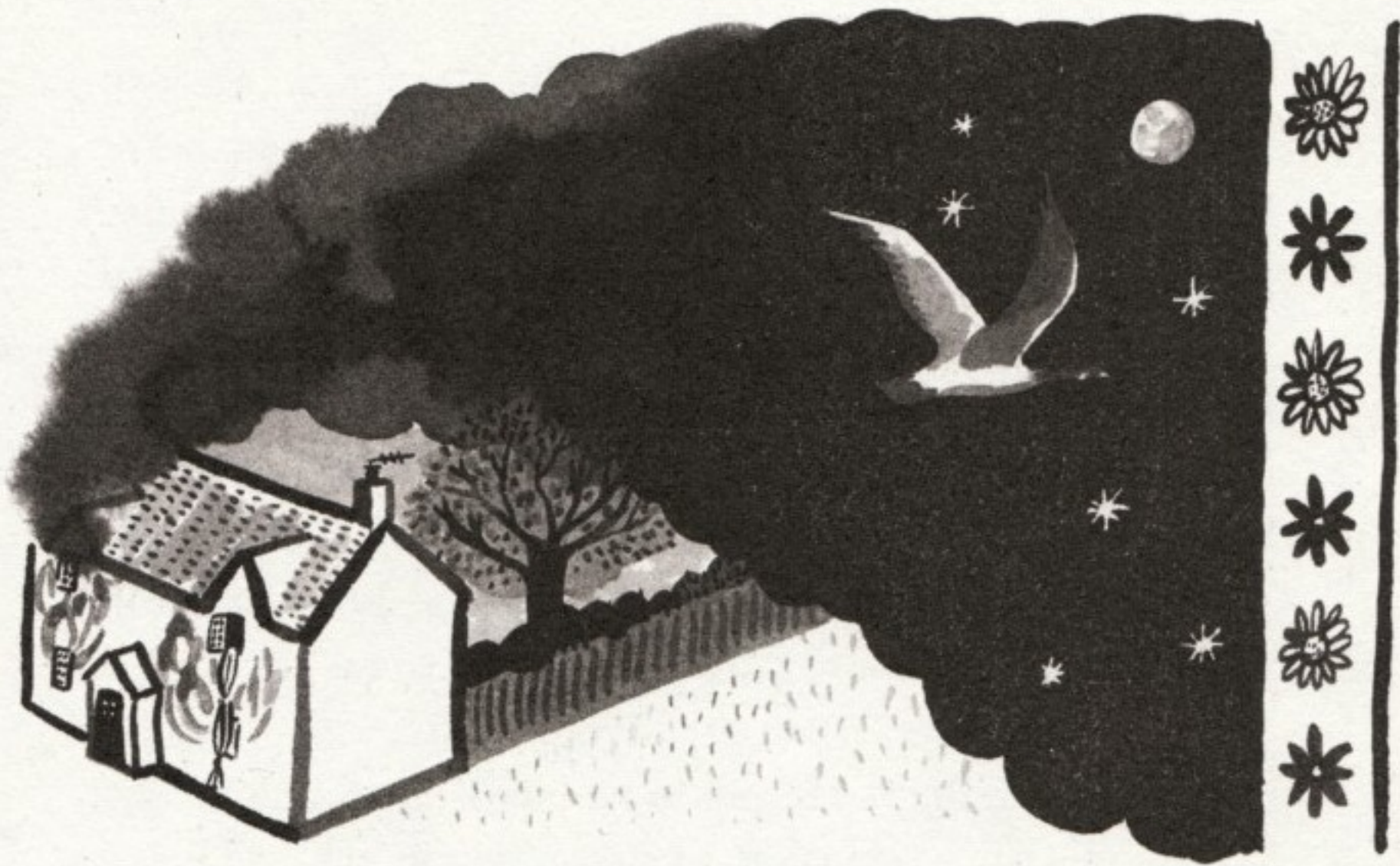


LAUREN ST. JOHN



THE  
WHITE  
GIRAFFE





# 1

People like to say that things come in threes, but the way Martine looked at it, that all depends on when you start counting and when you stop. For instance, she could say that one bad thing happened along with three good things, but the truth was that the one bad thing was the very worst thing in the whole world, another was so small she didn't really notice it at the time, and something else that she first thought was bad luck later turned out to be the best kind of fortune anyone could wish for. Whichever way you added it up, though, one thing was certain. The night Martine Allen turned eleven years old was the night her life changed completely and was never the same again.



It was New Year's Eve. At the time, Martine was asleep in bed and she was dreaming about a place she'd never been to before. The reason she was so positive was because it was too beautiful ever to forget. As far as the eye could see, there were lawns lined with exotic flowers and trees. Behind them, rising into a clear sky, was a mountain made majestic by granite cliffs and lush green forests. Children were laughing and chasing moths through beds of dusky-pink flowers and, in the distance, Martine could hear drums and soaring voices. But for some reason she felt apprehensive. Dread prickled her skin.

All at once, the sky began to boil with a turbulent violet light and a thick tablecloth of steel-gray cloud raced down the mountain. The day turned from sunny to sinister in seconds. Then one of the children shouted, "Hey, look what I found!"

It was a wild goose with a broken wing. But instead of helping it, some of the children began tormenting it. Martine, who could never bear to see any creature hurt, tried to stop them, but in the dream they turned on her instead. Next thing she knew she was on the ground crying and the injured bird was in her arms.

Then something very peculiar happened. Her hands, holding the wild goose, heated up to the point where they were practically glowing, and electricity crackled through her. She saw, in a swirl of smoke, black men in horned antelope masks and rhinoceroses breathing fire, and heard voices as old as Time. She knew they wanted to speak to her, but she couldn't hear what they were saying. Suddenly,



the bird stirred. Martine opened her palms and it shook out its wings and flew into the violet sky.

In the dream, she looked up smiling, but the other children didn't smile back. They stared at her with a mixture of horror and disbelief. "Witch," they chanted, "witch, witch, witch," and they began to chase her. Martine fled sobbing up the mountain, into a dark forest. But her legs were unimaginably heavy, hooked thorns tore at her ankles, and she was losing her way in the cloud. And all the while it was getting hotter and hotter. Then a hand grabbed her and she began to scream and scream and scream.



It was the sound of her own screams that finally woke Martine. She shot up in bed. It was pitch dark and it took a few seconds for her to realize she'd been asleep. None of it had happened. There was no mountain and no bird. She was safely in her bed in Hampshire, England, with her parents sleeping soundly across the corridor. Heart pounding, she sank back into the pillows. She was a bit dizzy and she still felt very, very hot.

*Hot?* How could it possibly be *hot*? It was midwinter. Martine's eyes flew open. Something was wrong. Frantically she fumbled for the bedside lamp, but for some reason it wasn't working. She sat up again. An orange light was flickering beneath the bedroom door and gray ribbons of smoke were drifting up from it.



# “YOU HAVE TO TRUST, MARTINE. EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON.”

The night Martine Allen turns eleven years old is the night her life changes completely. Martine’s parents are killed in a fire, so she must leave her home to live on an African wildlife reserve with a grandmother she never knew she had. When Martine arrives, she hears tales of a mythical animal living there—a white giraffe. They say no one has ever seen the animal, but it does leave footprints behind. Her grandmother insists that the white giraffe is just a legend, but then, one stormy night, Martine looks out her bedroom window straight into the eyes of the tall silvery animal. Could it be just Martine’s imagination, or is the white giraffe real? And if so, why is everyone keeping its existence a secret?

“St. John provides plenty of unexpected twists.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“This heartwarming story unfolds into a legendary tale full of intrigue and what life demands of a young chosen one.”

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