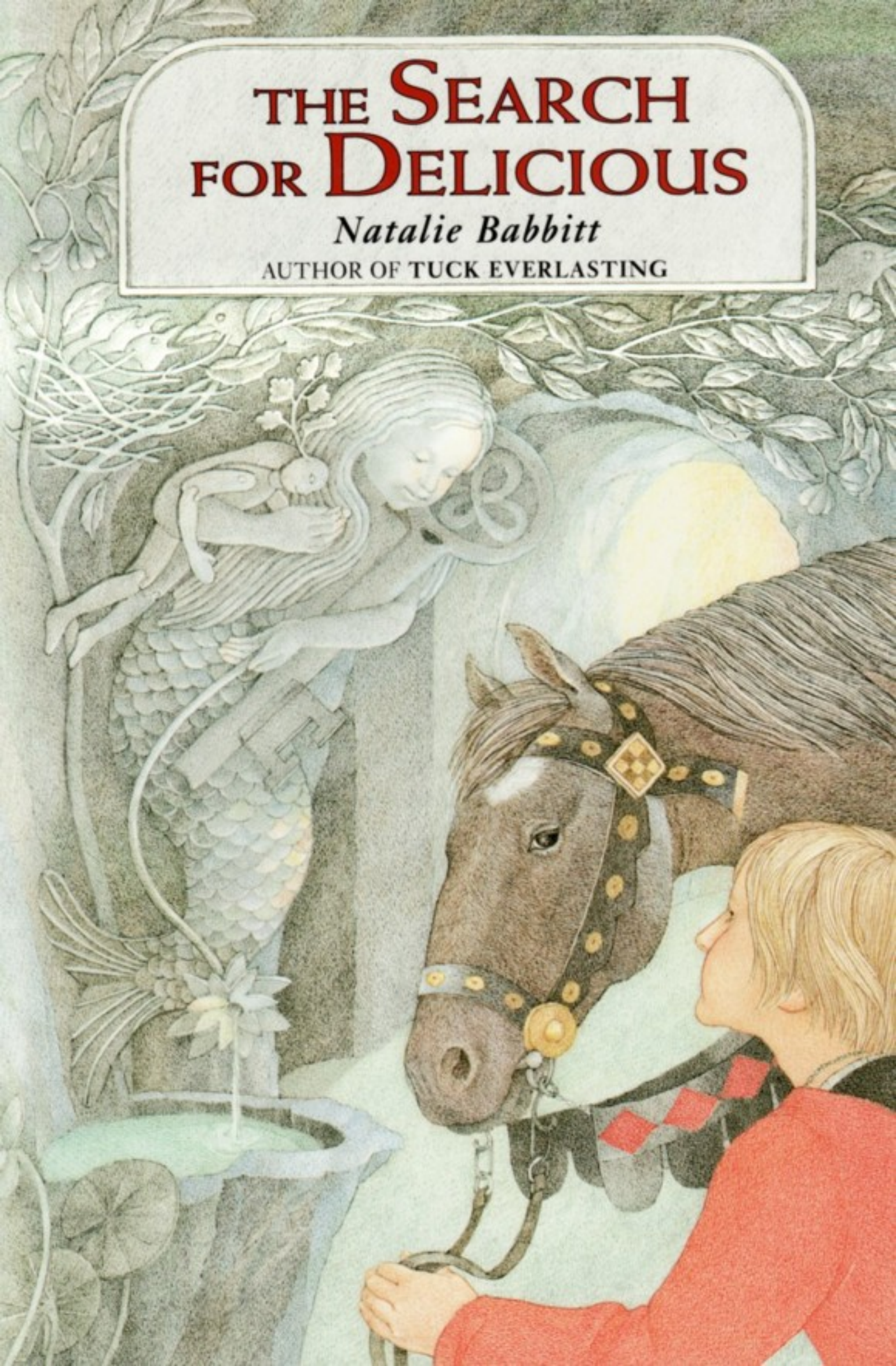


THE SEARCH FOR DELICIOUS

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AUTHOR OF TUCK EVERLASTING





HERE WAS A TIME ONCE
when the earth was still very

young, a time some call the oldest days. This was long before there were any people about to dig parts of it up and cut parts of it off. People came along much later, building their towns and castles (which nearly always fell down after a while) and plaguing each other with quarrels and supper parties. The creatures who lived on the earth in that early time stayed each in his own place and kept it beautiful. There were dwarfs in the mountains, woldwellers in the forests, mermaids in the lakes, and, of course, winds in the air.

There was one particular spot on the earth where a ring of mountains enclosed a very dry and dusty place. There were winds and dwarfs there, but no mermaids

because there weren't any lakes, and there were no woldwellers either because forests couldn't grow in so dry a place.

Then a remarkable thing happened. Up in the mountains one day a dwarf was poking about with a sharp tool, looking for a good spot to begin mining. He poked and poked until he had made a very deep hole in the earth. Then he poked again and clear spring water came spurting up in the hole. He hurried in great excitement to tell the other dwarfs and they all came running to see the water. They were so pleased with it that they built over it a fine house of heavy stones and they made a special door out of a flat rock and balanced it in its place very carefully on carved hinges. Then one of them made a whistle out of a small stone which blew a certain very high note tuned to just the right warble so that when you blew it, the door of the rock house would open, and when you blew it again, the door would shut. They took turns being in charge of the whistle and they worked hard to keep the spring clean and beautiful.

But the spring they had discovered was in a cup of land surrounded by cliffs and eventually the spring be-

gan to fill up the cup, until after a while there was a little lake there with the top of the spring house standing out in the center like an island. And the lake kept getting higher and higher. After a few years the spring house was completely submerged and the dwarfs could no longer get down to it, although they could see it easily through the clear water and could still make the door open and close with the whistle, just the same as before.

The water in the lake began in time to fill up with creatures of its own, as water has a way of doing, and one of these creatures was a lovely little mermaid. The dwarfs named her Ardis and one of them made her a pretty doll out of linked stones with a trailing fern fastened to its head for hair. Ardis loved the doll very much and played with it all the time, and in exchange she promised to keep watch over the spring in the house of rocks, now far down under the water. So the dwarfs gave her the special whistle and she kept it hanging by a chain on a sharp bit of rock at the water's edge. Every morning she would blow the whistle to open the door and then she would dive down and play with her doll



WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF DELICIOUS?

The King's all for apples, the Queen favors Christmas pudding, and soon the entry in Prime Minister DeCree's dictionary is a bone of contention throughout the court. Alarmed, the King dispatches young Gaylen, DeCree's foster son and Special Assistant, to take a poll of the whole kingdom. In short order, the country is on the brink of civil war.

—*Kirkus Reviews*

A subtly teasing fantasy-adventure that's as fresh and sparkling as spring water. It's truly delicious.

—*The New York Times Book Review*

★ An imaginative, winning story, lightly told.

—*STARRED / Booklist*

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