

# *The Country Boy* - an extract by Pablo Neruda from *Memoirs*

THE CHILEAN FOREST

**U**nder the volcanoes, beside the snow-capped mountains, among the huge lakes, the fragrant, the silent, the tangled Chilean forest . . . My feet sink down into the dead leaves, a fragile twig crackles, the giant rauli trees rise in all their bristling height, a bird from the cold jungle passes over, flaps its wings, and stops in the sunless branches. And then, from its hideaway, it sings like an oboe... The wild scent of the laurel, the dark scent of the boldo herb, enter my nostrils and flood my whole being . . . The cypress of the Guaitecas blocks my way . . . This is a vertical world: a nation of birds, a plenitude of leaves . . . I stumble over a rock, dig up the uncovered hollow, an enormous spider covered with red hair stares up at me, motionless, as huge as a crab...A golden carabus beetle blows its mephitic breath at me, as its brilliant rainbow disappears like lightning . . . Going on, I pass through a forest of ferns much taller than I am: from their cold green eyes sixty tears splash down on any face and, behind me, their fans go on quivering for a long time . . . A decaying tree trunk: what a treasure! . . . Black and blue mushrooms have given it ears, red parasite plants have covered it with rubies, other lazy plants have let it borrow their beards, and a snake springs out of the rotted body like a sudden breath, as if the spirit of the dead trunk were slipping away from it . . . Farther along, each tree stands away from its fellows . . . They soar up over the carpet of the secretive forest, and the foliage of each has its own style, linear, bristling, ramulose, lanceolate; as if cut by shears moving in ways . . . A gorge; below, the crystal water slides over granite and jasper . . . A butterfly goes past, bright as a lemon, dancing between the water and the sunlight . . . Close by, innumerable calceolarias nod their little yellow heads in greeting . . . High up, red copihues (*Lapageria rosea*) dangle like drops from the magic forest's arteries . . . The red copihue is the blood flower, the white copihue is the snow flower . . . A fox cuts through the silence like a flash, sending a shiver through the leaves, but silence is the law of the plant kingdom . . . The barely audible cry of some bewildered animal far off . . . The piercing interruption of a hidden bird . . . The vegetable world keeps up its low rustle until a storm churns up all the music of the earth.

Anyone who hasn't been in the Chilean forest doesn't know this planet.

I have come out of that landscape, that mud, that silence, to roam, to go singing through the world.

Pablo Neruda, *Memoirs*

## Vocabulary

Oboe- a high pitched woodwind instrument

Laurel- an evergreen shrub with shiny leaves

Plenitude- fullness or abundance of

Mephitic- offensive to the smell

Foliage- the leaves of a tree or plant

Linear- arranged in a line

Ramulose- having many small branches

lanceolate- shaped like the head of a lance

infinite- endless; without a limit

gorge- a narrow valley with steep sides

arteries- tube in the body which carries blood

bewildered-confuse