

# The Daughters of Ys

## Dear Reader:

Several years ago I went to Brittany, on the northwestern tip of France, to do research on the legend of a mystical pool that, it turned out, still existed as a soggy brook in a Breton forest. While I was traveling around the peninsula, enjoying the gorgeous, rolling scenery and the butter-drenched local pastries, I came across the farthest western point in France, Finistère, “the end of the earth,” and, just beside it, a cove called the Bay of the Dead. Why, I wondered, was this sandy beach called the Bay of the Dead?

A waiter told me there once had been a fabled city there, the city of Ys, which, a thousand years ago, had sunk beneath the waves. He told me that on calm nights, the fishermen could still hear the city’s cathedral bells ringing under the black waters of the Atlantic.

I thought this was a weird and beautiful story. I’d heard versions of it before, but I never knew that it was attached to a particular place in France. After that day—when I climbed out across the wild, cyclopean rocks in the fog and rain—I tried to read all the versions I could find of this ancient tale. Most of them talked about the Celtic king Gradlon and his sinful daughter, Dahut. They blamed Dahut for sinking the city.

I started to think about how the story might have looked from Dahut’s point of view. I started to think about the way that families often blame their daughters for problems that go much deeper, the ways that families deal with their pasts and with their crimes. This version of the story, drawing on details from several Breton folktales and with some inventions of my own, imagines how Dahut might tell the sunken city’s tale. Jo Rioux’s illustrations—which are at once elegantly simple and deeply subtle—capture both the splendor of a fabled city and the heather and seashore of that lonely coast. I hope that *The Daughters of Ys* will bring this story, a millennium and a half old, to a whole new audience, and reveal secrets long hidden beneath the waves.

Yours,

M. T. Anderson

