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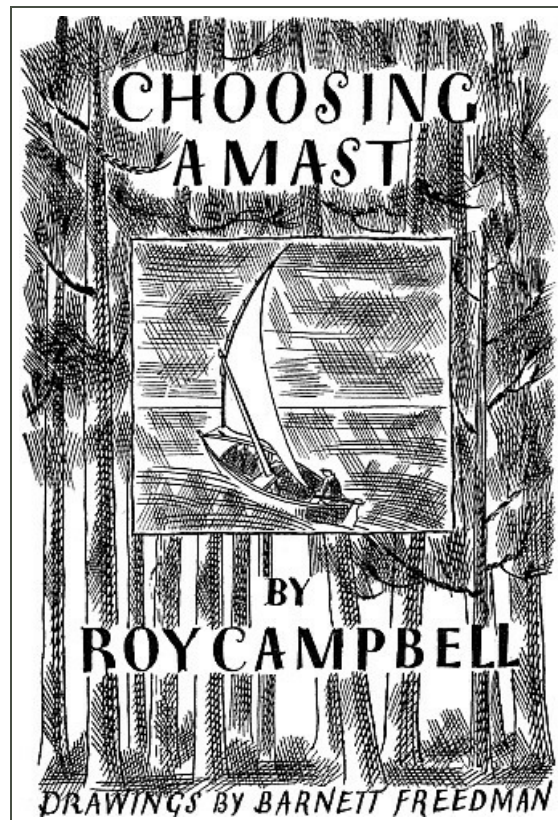
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# **CHOOSING A MAST**

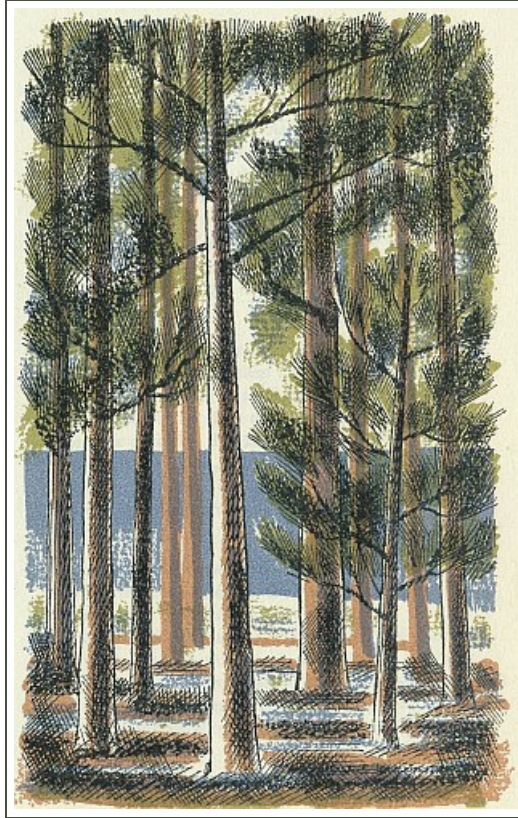
**BY**

# ROY CAMPBELL

*Drawings by*  
BARNETT FREEDMAN

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# Choosing a Mast

This mast, new-shaved, through whom I rive the ropes,  
Says she was once an oread of the slopes,  
Graceful and tall upon the rocky highlands,  
A slender tree, as vertical as noon,  
And her low voice was lovely as the silence  
Through which a fountain whistles to the moon,  
Who now of the white spray must take the veil  
And, for her songs, the thunder of the sail.

I chose her for her fragrance, when the spring  
With sweetest resins swelled her fourteenth ring  
And with live amber welded her young thews:  
I chose her for the glory of the Muse,  
Smoother of forms, that her hard-knotted grain,  
Grazed by the chisel, shaven by the plane,  
Might from the steel as cool a burnish take  
As from the bladed moon a windless lake.

I chose her for her eagerness of flight  
Where she stood tiptoe on the rocky height  
Lifted by her own perfume to the sun,  
While through her rustling plumes with eager sound  
Her eagle spirit, with the gale at one,  
Spreading wide pinions, would have spurned the ground  
And her own sleeping shadow, had they not  
With thymy fragrance charmed her to the spot.

Lover of song, I chose this mountain pine  
Not only for the straightness of her spine  
But for her songs: for there she loved to sing  
Through a long noon's repose of wave and wing—  
The fluvial swirling of her scented hair  
Sole rill of song in all that windless air  
And her slim form the naiad of the stream  
Afloat upon the languor of its theme;

And for the soldier's fare on which she fed—  
Her wine the azure, and the snow her bread;  
And for her stormy watches on the height—  
For only out of solitude or strife  
Are born the sons of valour and delight;  
And lastly for her rich exulting life  
That with the wind stopped not its singing breath  
But carolled on, the louder for its death.

Under a pine, when summer days were deep,  
We loved the most to lie in love or sleep:  
And when in long hexameters the west  
Rolled his grey surge, the forest for his lyre,  
It was the pines that sang us to our rest  
Loud in the wind and fragrant in the fire,  
With legioned voices swelling all night long,

From Pelion to Provence, their storm of song.

It was the pines that fanned us in the heat,  
The pines, that cheered us in the time of sleet,  
For which sweet gifts I set one dryad free—  
No longer to the wind a rooted foe,  
This nymph shall wander where she longs to be  
And with the blue north wind arise and go,  
A silver huntress with the moon to run  
And fly through rainbows with the rising sun;

And when to pasture in the glittering shoals  
The guardian mistral drives his thundering foals,  
And when like Tartar horsemen racing free  
We ride the snorting fillies of the sea,  
My pine shall be the archer of the gale  
While on the bending willow curves the sail  
From whose great bow the long keel shooting home  
Shall fly, the feathered arrow of the foam.

ROY CAMPBELL

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[End of *Choosing a Mast* by Roy Campbell, illustrated by Barnett Freedman]