

10-15-2014

Doll Bones

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Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "Doll Bones" (2014). *Publications*. 84.

https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/lib_pubs/84

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Black, Holly. *Doll Bones*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2013. PZ7.B52878Dol
2013.

“He sat there for a long moment, breathing hard. Something had shifted, something seismic, and he needed to be still long enough to have it settle inside of him. Then he stood up and went out the door.” – page 208

Alice, Poppy, and Zach have been playing the same game for years. It is a game spread across many kingdoms; a game of pirates, warriors, mermaids, and thieves. Zach habitually plays the part of determined and impetuous pirate William the Blade, Alice has recently taken on the role of loud and wild thief Lady Jaye, and Poppy, with her distinct flair for the dramatic, is always best when playing the villain. But no matter which character the three friends choose, each is a subject of the Great Queen – the creepy bone china doll that Poppy’s mother keeps locked in a glass cabinet.

Zach cannot imagine his life without Poppy, Alice, and the game, but as the three are now in middle school it’s becoming harder to play. Zach’s basketball teammates have begun to tease him about talking to Alice and Poppy, and Zach is embarrassed by even the thought of his teammates finding out about the game. But when his father throws out Zach’s army bag full of action figures, Zach cannot play the game anymore, regardless of his own wishes. Zach abruptly and rather harshly ends the game, but when the girls show up at Zach’s house in the middle of the night claiming Poppy is being haunted by the ghost of the Great Queen, the three may have one last adventure, after all.

In her Newberry Honor Medal winning work *Doll Bones*, Holly Black expertly captures the confusion of a transitional age. Zach yearns for adolescence but he does not wish to leave childhood behind. His palpable uncertainty is beginning to influence the relationship he shares with his two best friends, and all three fear the permanence of the change. At its core, *Doll Bones* is a creative blend of mystery, adventure, the suggestion of a budding romance, and a good bit of paranormal activity, combined to build and possibly to destroy a friendship. For older readers, *Doll Bones* is the feeling of nostalgia wrapped in print and bound with endpapers. But for every reader, it is the hope that things never really have to end.