1-21-2015

The School for Good and Evil

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Chainani, Soman. *The School for Good and Evil*. Illus. Iacopo Bruno. New York: Harper, 2014. PZ7.C34874Sc 2014.

"But in the end, they had known what she didn't – that the line between stories and real life is very thin indeed." – page 72

Every four years, on the eleventh night of the eleventh month, two children from the town of Gavaldon are kidnapped. The villagers of Gavaldon have noticed a pattern: one kidnapped child is beautiful and virtuous while the other is homely and unpleasant; both are at least twelve years of age. The children of Gavaldon have noticed something else, as well – their kidnapped peers are beginning to show up in the pages of the storybooks handed out at the town bookstore. According to the owner of the bookstore, the storybooks simply appear each year, in a crate bearing an elaborate crest with a banner beneath, reading The School for Good and Evil.

Sophie is sure that she will be kidnapped and taken to the School for Good this year. Sophie always wears pink, has a strict beauty routine, and is helpful to others: she even put up a mirror in the church restroom so parishioners can return to the pews looking their best. Sophie is excited to learn how to be a princess, how to rule a kingdom justly, and how to find her Happily Ever After. Sophie is also sure that her Good Deed, Agatha, will be kidnapped for the School for Evil. Agatha lives in a graveyard with her ragged cat, only wears black, and avoids pretty much everyone. At school, Agatha will learn to be a wicked witch and learn how to lay curses and cast evil spells. Agatha doesn't believe Sophie's stories…until the night boney birds snatch both girls, fly them over two castles – one pink and blue, the other blackened – and then mix the girls up, dropping Agatha into a flowery field and Sophie down into a sludge-filled moat.

A fairytale about fairytales, Soman Chainani's *The School for Good and Evil* is an original and witty debut work with a focus on friendship rather than romance. Dynamic characters Sophie and Agatha grow throughout their story, breaking the rules of The School for Good and Evil and often, social stereotypes. The two girls are supported by a range of strong secondary characters living in a vivid (and if you know your fairytales) believable world. Readers will eagerly follow along as Sophie and Agatha each fight for a happy ending – sometimes fighting with and sometimes fighting against each other in the process.