

6-17-2015

The Witch's Boy

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Recommended Citation

Mason Smith, Maggie, "The Witch's Boy" (2015). *Publications*. 95.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/lib_pubs/95

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Barnhill, Kelly Regan. *The Witch's Boy*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 2014. JUV PZ7.B26663Wit 2014.

“Not every story is true,” her father said. “And sometimes the things that were wicked become the things that save us, and the things that were good doom us to misery and pain. We lift our eyes to the heavens, but we live on the ground. Come. Let me show you.” – page 22

When Ned and his identical twin brother set sail for the sea on a raft of their own making, only Ned survives; if it weren't for the boys' mother – a keeper of magic known only as Sister Witch – both twins would have drowned. But the loss of his brother coupled with village rumors that the “wrong boy” lived has changed Ned into a different child. Ned stutters; Ned has no confidence; Ned will never take his mother's place as keeper of the magic. When his mother is called away and a horde of bandits surround Ned's house to steal her magic, Ned must make a decision: he can give up the magic to save himself or he can fight to save the magic from sure corruption, likely dying in the process.

Áine has always lived at the edge of the sea, but when her mother dies, Áine and her father move to the heart of the wood. The wood is a tricky place: roots rise to trip travelers, trees move to block paths, and paths seem to change their minds midway along. Áine's father is also changing – He has returned to the life of lies and theft he knew before marrying Áine's mother. When he arrives home with the largest group of bandits yet, Áine learns her father, the Bandit King, is planning to steal a cache of magic. Áine is determined to stop her father, but before she can decide on her first course of action a strange boy wanders into her yard. Áine's mother said the wrong boy would save Áine's life. Is this the boy her mother told her about?

Winner of numerous best book awards, *The Witch's Boy* is an original and imaginative work of high fantasy. In it, Barnhill beautifully entwines the story of Ned, who is slowly finding his courage as well as his voice, with that of intelligent and independent Áine, and the nine enigmatic Speaking Stones that wake to assistance the two children in navigating the wood as well as a difficult situation, in hopes that Ned and Áine will help them in turn. Vivid details and a fairy-tale mood allow the reader to suspend disbelief; bandits, magic with a mind of its own, friendly wolves, and warring nations come together in rich, believable prose to create a powerful narrative that will teach readers about friendship, love, and more generally, the world.