



## The Witch's Boy

*Kelly Barnhill*

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**“A lightning bolt erupted from the cloud and aimed directly at Ned’s heart. He couldn’t cry out. He couldn’t even move. He could just feel the magic sink into his skin and spread itself over every inch of him, bubbling and slithering and cutting deep, until he didn’t know where the magic stopped and he began.”**

When Ned and his identical twin brother tumble from their raft into a raging, bewitched river, only Ned survives. Villagers are convinced the wrong boy lived. Sure enough, Ned grows up weak and slow, and stays as much as possible within the safe boundaries of his family’s cottage and yard. But when a Bandit King comes to steal the magic that Ned’s mother, a witch, is meant to protect, it’s Ned who safeguards the magic and summons the strength to protect his family and community.

In the meantime, in another kingdom across the forest that borders Ned’s village lives Áine, the resourceful and pragmatic daughter of the Bandit King. She is haunted by her mother’s last words to her: “The wrong boy will save your life and you will save his.” But when Áine and Ned’s paths cross, can they trust each other long enough to make their way through the treacherous woods and stop the war about to boil over?

With a deft hand, acclaimed author Kelly Barnhill takes classic fairy tale elements--speaking stones, a friendly wolf, and a spoiled young king--and weaves them into a richly detailed narrative that explores good and evil, love and hate, magic, and the power of friendship.

## The Witch's Boy Details

Date : Published September 16th 2014 by Algonquin Young Readers (first published August 25th 2014)

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Author : Kelly Barnhill

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Genre : Fantasy, Childrens, Middle Grade, Fiction, Young Adult, Adventure, Magic

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## From Reader Review The Witch's Boy for online ebook

### Tannaz says

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### Sepideh Dehghani says

4.5

amazing amazing amazing story telling! the best! beautiful words come together to make beautiful sentences and a great story. the best book to read by the fire in the winter, to read in the nature in spring time ... the best when you need an old beautiful fiction for your soul...

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### Liviania says

Ned and his twin brother build a raft, but it is not seaworthy, and Tam dies. Ned survives only through Tam's soul and his mother's magic. But the villagers are convinced the wrong boy lived, especially because the experience left Ned without words. Meanwhile, practical Áine lives in the forest with her bandit father, who is being overtaken by a strange force.

THE WITCH'S BOY is a lovely book. Ned and Áine are both hugely likeable in different ways. Ned has had to struggle with himself his whole life, and struggling with an external force for once (magic) helps him gain better control of himself. Áine is super practical (it bears mentioning again), but hurt by her father abandoning her for greed. She's cold and reluctant to trust, but a good person to have on one's side. I quite enjoyed that their parents were a crucial part of the story. Ned's father and Áine's mother aren't mentioned much, but do have actual personalities. The Bandit King and Sister Witch are much bigger figures. Especially Sister Witch, whose moment of weakness sets most of the plot in motion. (But how could she let her other child die too?)

The mythology of the world is very interesting. There are nine Stones, three sources of magic - most gone from the world - , and wolves. There's a little provincial kingdom with a tough and benevolent queen, and a bigger, more worldly kingdom with a young tyrant. It all comes together quite smoothly, each bit having its

place in a tale about the importance of words and of firmly doing good. And, well, I was a huge fan of the magic having a personality and voice of its own. The concept of it was not just interesting, but well executed.

There's a speech at the end that's a touch too didactic for me, but I think it is well suited to the middle grade age group. It's not so didactic as to be condescending. Much of the rest of the book isn't particularly subtle, but it is not like being hit over the head with the message either. It is just every present. *THE WITCH'S BOY* isn't quite a fairytale, but it has a bit of that atmosphere, with few extraneous details, a foreboding tone, and a logic that works more strongly for the story than the real world.

*THE WITCH'S BOY* is a terrific little fantasy. The violence is non graphic and most of the tyrant's cruelties are just hinted at, so I think this will appeal to the younger MG crowd as well as the older. The length and complexity do push it more towards the older side.

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### **Emma says**

This was my first exposure to Kelly Barnhill and when I started reading this book I did not realize that the next book on my to-read pile is her Newbery winner, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*. I am looking forward to reading more of her next, as I really enjoyed *The Witch's Boy*!

I appreciated that the magic in the book seemed different from other fantasy novels involving magic. I liked that it had its own personality and that I didn't always know whether or not to trust it. I also thought the plot and setting, including the history of the fantasy world, seemed unique and well-thought out. For the most part, the plot was paced well and I found myself itching to get back to it. I do, however, have two complaints:

First, the author was inconsistent with periods of strong showing and then periods of lengthy telling. When Aine was first introduced, I felt that I was being told about her character rather than shown her character. It was brief and minor, but stuck out to me after being introduced to Ned in a more gradual reveal. The history of the magic and the way that it worked was complicated, and at times I didn't understand it. I think the author knew this, and in an attempt to make it clear to her reader she would sometimes have characters lecture about how it works. That took me out of the story and made characters go out-of-character (view spoiler) in my opinion. There was also a lot of telling of the lessons that everyone learned at the end.

Second, pacing became an issue for me at the end, for the last 50ish pages. The climax was misplaced. I realized what Ned would do with the magic, but then it took forever to actually happen and did not seem to be a big deal. I thought it should be more climactic. Once it did happen, the rest of the story (view spoiler) was too drawn out. It seemed like the author was building up the rest of the story to be the climax, but since it was taking forever to get to it I found myself skimming to try to get to the action. Then the action that did happen was too little and over too quickly.

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### **Mieneke says**

First of all before I start talking about this book, I just want to say: That cover, you guys! I really love that cover and if anything, it was that cover that first drew me to give Kelly Barnhill's *The Witch's Boy* a closer look. I loved the play with the big shadows and those tiny little figures, and the sense that they were at the

edge of the world. It is very fitting to the setting of the book and the villagers' belief that there is nothing beyond the forest-clad mountains. But mostly it just made for an arresting visual. And all this was even before I read the blurb. When I opened the book and started reading I was sold, as Kelly Barnhill managed to break my heart twice in the span of two chapters, which meant I was in for a treat.

The story revolves around Ned and Áine, with several other points of view woven through their stories. Of these further points of views I especially loved that of Ned's mother and that of the Speaking Stones. I really loved Ned and Áine. The way Barnhill developed their characters and the growing bond between them was wonderful. I loved the way they were juxtaposed, with Ned trusting Áine and the young wolf relatively quickly and Áine's only grudgingly won trust. Ned was so sweet and earnest, and his silence was wonderfully portrayed. The question is whether his keeping mum is a physical consequence of his near-drowning or is a result of psychological trauma. In either case, his stuttering was treated so convincingly, such as the fact that it was often self-reinforcing; the harder it is for Ned to speak, the more stressed he becomes, the harder it becomes to speak. Áine is brilliant. Resourceful, tough, capable, and clever, I loved how hard she tried to save those she loves. And she's also clearly described as a person of colour, with black hair and eyes and dark skin. As such, I'd count this book as one to add to the diverse books column.

Of the adults, my favourite was Sister Witch. Oh Sister Witch, how much I loved her. Her actions, which set in motion much of the story and are somewhat an explanation for the wrong boy having survived, were so convincing and I could so completely empathise. Her dilemma in the second chapter of the book was just heart-breaking. I love the strength she displayed in the latter half of the book when she travels to the capital to petition the queen. Her magic is fascinating too. The idea of the magic as something that needed to be contained and tamed, as something that needed to be both treated with respect and coerced, was fascinating and I loved its history within Ned's family. Its origins and nature and its links to the Speaking Stones was awesome and I loved the manifestation of its power in Ned when he takes the magic into himself to keep it safe. The fact that it showed up as writing on his skin and that it talked to him – and with an attitude as well – was very well conceived.

The driving force at the core of the narrative is love. Love is what causes Sister Witch to save Ned by any means necessary, love is what motivates Áine to try and save her father even when he is beyond redemption, and in a way even The Bandit King was driven by love. Or perhaps more accurately the loss of the person he loved so fiercely that her death broke him. Ned's dad just broke my heart. So much of his actions and behaviour are caused by grief, love and guilt. He can't forgive himself for not being able to save both his boys and loving Ned is double-edged for him, because every day looking at Ned means remembering he failed the boy that looked so much like him.

I loved Kelly Barnhill's latest. *The Witch's Boy* is a middle grade novel, but it's certainly one that can be enjoyed by older readers as well. It's also a book that I can't wait to share with my girls when they are a bit older and understand English more fully than just the occasional word (or if the book is translated to Dutch). A beautifully written, lyrical, and subversive fairytale, *The Witch's Boy* is a story about love, grief, letting go and forgiveness. And it's one that will almost certainly feature on one of my 'favourites for 2014'-lists.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

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### **Susana says**

What a lovely, enchanting story..

Full review to come...

### **Arc provided by Algonquin Books through Netgalley**

How much I loved *thee*... let me count the ways...

I loved it all, so much, that I don't even know how to properly write this review...  
Fair warning...

#### **Ode To a Book:**

(Just not lyrical... or written in metrical form... although if you want to, be free to sing it! Basically this is just my way to give voice to the fangirl in me!)

I loved **your** storytelling abilities. I loved your multidimensional approach to this engrossing story.  
I loved how I keep feeling as if I was reading a fairy tale, an adventure, a magical fantasy with dashes of epic fantasy all seamlessly stitched into a perfect combination.

I loved your characters. Characters who weren't perfect, characters far away from Maries or Garys Stue.

I loved how the main characters were portrayed. I loved their character development so much that, had I the time, I would definitely start re-reading this one... starting now.

Ned:

I loved him, for the difficulties he went through life, his disability; but mainly for his courage. I loved him because he wasn't strong, or especially bright. I loved him for what he lost, and what made him so.

Aìne:

She, I loved for her mind. For her straightforward way of thinking. Mostly, for the way she never gave up. For her strength, courage and for the very important fact that she isn't portrayed as the usual white bread roll.

"A girl—black hair, black eyes, skin the color of oiled wood"  
— (arc, subject to changes, and which I shouldn't be quoting o\_O)

I loved the interesting story, that went to so much more besides the main characters' problems. We have treasons in the court (the guy is an idiot, but he wants power, so, that makes him a dangerous idiot), provinces at the edge of war, (the ones that are content with their lot in life, fighting off the spoiled brat King's army), a witch who is seen as a threat by one of the sides, and dismissed by the other. Grieving families and the love between them which just isn't showed.

All the characters are so alive in this tale! And although there's so many of them, never once do their voices get mixed.

Not the King of thief's or the ageing Queen. Even the rocks get their own very distinguishable personality.

Such a masterpiece use of writing, and story telling abilities makes of this story one of the strongest ones I've read this year.

Definitely recommended. Not only to middle graders, but to the YA audience who wants something completely different from what they're used to. But especially to the adult audience, to remind us why we love to read so much.

A story to devour in one sitting \_unless you find yourself sick as a dog for the longest couple of days of your (cough \*my\*) life.

Author's Official Site

Buy... (Pre-order it until September arises!) The Witch's Boy:  
@Bookdepository.com

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### **Ethan says**

I had high hopes for this book which it didn't quite meet. It's not that this book was bad. On the contrary, if I saw a child reading it I certainly wouldn't slap it out of their hands. I just can't really say it moved me the way I like books to do (even children's novels).

The concept is great. There are witches and bandit kings and wolves. Both the beginning and end of the story are strong, but the middle began to drag for me. The author made a couple of plot choices that I didn't quite see the merit of, and that I personally felt took away from the overall story. Still, she definitely gets bonus points for having a whole slew of very strong female characters.

I would recommend this novel to anyone who likes fantasy. For me, it had the same feel as *The Dark Crystal*, and is a nice break from some of the more pop-culture infused fantasies that seem to have flooded the market. It should also be noted that this is not a book that shies away from some of the darker and more difficult aspects of life. (Within reason. It is still a children's book.) Overall, a good read for a bored kid, though I wouldn't call it great children's literature.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

*The Witch's Boy* is an excellent fantasy novel, a very dark yet incredible story full of magic, friendship, mystery and surprises.

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### **Evie says**

Delightful, beautiful, heartfelt. A fairy-tale like story full of meaning and messages worth remembering. A story of love and sacrifice, redemption and forgiveness, unlikely friendships and new beginnings. Absolutely loved this book!

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**Producervan in Sedona, AZ from New Orleans & L.A. says**

The Witch's Boy by Kelly Barnhill. Published September 16, 2014 by Algonquin Young Readers. 5 Stars. I got this ebook from the library. Engaging from the very start. Brilliantly written about a couple of teens (one a twin) and their soulful and magical relationships with the earth, the forest, the stones, their dreams of the sea, and even death. An involved plot that is deeply simple at its core—how do the intentions and choices people make about love affect the future—theirs and everyone else's? An intriguing and fun YA read. Highly recommend!

## **Yasamin Seifaei says**

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**Nafiza says**

4.5

## **Isa Lavinia says**

So wonderful!!!

This books is a perfect example of how amazing children's books can be!

It was simply magical, imaginative, vivid in its worldbuilding, with well developed character, a lovely plot, and clever social commentary!

I hate that I'm not very good at expressing myself when it comes to books I really like, but take it from me, this is a book everyone should read!

## **Jack Stark says**

2,018,965 stars

I wanted to like this. **I really did.** It started off so well with so many elements that I love in a story but then it just sort of fizzled out and I felt very ‘meh’ for the last two thirds.

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.

The Witch's Boy had potential to be a really good fairy tale-esque story. In the beginning, twin boys, Ned and Tam, create a raft to float out to sea. The raft doesn't hold up and Tam dies. The boys' mother, Sister Witch, tries to save Tam by stitching his soul to Ned. The village, *like a bunch of bastards*, claim 'the wrong boy lived'. Poor Ned. Sister Witch performs a little more healing magic on someone, which is nice, and then she has to go away and Ned and his father are attacked by bandits trying to steal the magic kept in a jar at their home and magic things happen and Ned meets up with the bandit king's daughter and then stuff happens. **This was the good bit.**

The strongest trees on the mountain are the short, gnarled jacks. They let themselves bow and twist, and they live. They survive snowstorms and avalanches and wind.

Then, well... then all the work that went into setting up great plot points were just misused and things happen for no real reason. Like, the one thing I was really looking forward to happening at the end of the book, happens out of nowhere about 75% of the way through and the last 25% was soooooo boring and really just, unnecessary. There just wasn't the payoff that I was waiting for.

"It's a dangerous thing," Sister Witch explained to him once, back when she still had hope that he might wield it when the time came. "But with tremendous power to do good. And that is our role, son. To do good. To keep it good. No matter what."

*With great power comes great responsibility Peter Ned.*

There are moments of really well written, poetic, pensive moments through the story, and I did appreciate this a lot. I've seen lots of high ratings and reviews of people who love this story, so if it interests you enough to be considering reading it, I would say give it a go - it just wasn't for me. But don't let that put you off. **Also - The cover. Look at the cover! It's so beautiful!**

"There is no death," the Stone said. "There is only the next thing. A mountain gives way to a river and becomes a canyon. A tree gives way to its rot and becomes the ground. We will let go of our unnaturally elongated lives and embrace something else. We do not know what it is. But we will know it when we see it."

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### **Jessica says**

Gorgeous, spare writing that brings to life an unusual and wonderful story. I couldn't put this one down, and it made me sad and joyful at the same time.

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