



2002

### Tree Girl

Sandra L. Tidwell

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Barron, T.A. *Tree Girl*. Philomel Books, 2001. ISBN 0399234578. \$14.99. 138 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Fiction; Fantasy fiction

Subject: Trees--Fiction; spirits--Fiction; Books--Reviews

Rowanna, called Anna for short, lives in a fantasy world near the sea coast with Master Mellwyn, an old fisherman. She yearns to know who her mother was, and she wants a friend she can talk to and share her feelings with. Anna is drawn toward the nearby forest, which Master clearly warns she should never enter. However, Anna has a special gift: she can communicate with Old Master Burl, a giant fir tree, and can't escape the desire to go to and talk with the High Willow, which lies very deep in the forbidden forest. In a short wandering in the forest, Anna and Eagle, an injured sparrow that she saved early in the story, meet a playful bear, Sasharash. They become friends, and after a time, Sash transforms himself into a sandy-haired boy who appears to be Anna's age. He says that he is none other than a tree ghoul, the very creatures Master Mellwyn has been warning against. However, this tree spirit is not harmful. Sash explains that tree ghouls take on the appearance and nature of what each individual expects. The master fears Rowanna will be taken from him if she goes near the forest, so they appear as dangerous creatures to him. A long excursion into the forest with Sash, the transformed bear, helps Rowanna discover her real origin and identity.

In Rowanna's fantasy world, individuals have the innate human desire to know their identity and to have a friend. Readers are drawn into Rowanna's desire to know why Master Mellwyn won't tell her the truth about her birth and the whereabouts of her mother. They will be able to relate to Rowanna's lonely life and her desire to have a true friend her own age. This book would probably appeal to girls in grades three through six, although some boys may relate to Sash. Short chapters with compelling endings and surprising beginnings move the story along well. Throughout the book there is a feeling of reverence toward plant and animal life and their interconnectedness. It was interesting to read of trees in the forest revealing their unique personalities as they come to life and talk and dance together on High Hallow Eve.