



2010

Plain Kate

Meriam Bates

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Bow, Erin. *Plain Kate*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2010. ISBN 9780545166645. \$17.99. 336 p.

Reviewer: Meriam Bates

Reading level: Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fiction; Adventure Stories;

Subject: Witchcraft --Juvenile fiction; Human-animal relationships --Juvenile fiction; Orphans --Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Plain Kate, the woodcarver's daughter, has lived alone in her small village since her father died of witch's fever. With only her cat, Taggle, for company, she is generally left alone and is able to earn just enough through her skill as a woodcarver to survive. All is well until a traveler named Linay uses his own witchcraft to turn the townsfolk against her. Unaware of Linay's trickery, Kate trades her shadow in exchange for his help to escape and to give Taggle the gift of speech. Kate joins a band of gypsies and they become her family until a terrible new fever strikes the countryside and Kate is blamed. She and Taggle set out for the great city of Lov to find out what is happening. They are captured by Linay and discover that he is using Kate's shadow to call the plague in revenge for his sister's death. They eventually discover a way to stop Linay's plot and Kate is truly accepted into the gypsy band.

A story with a clever and entertaining plot, *Plain Kate* is about family, loyalty, and perseverance. The characterizations of two unique characters- a talking cat and the villain- are two of the best in the book. Taggle adds humor and wisdom while being an overall loveable character yet keeps his catlike qualities. Linay on the other hand is a more complex figure. Though he is clearly the villain, he is also a family member, and his winsome personality makes it even more difficult to defeat him. This is a book that will be loved by fans of both fantasy and historical fiction for both its plot and its thought provoking questions about the definition of family and acceptance.

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