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The Whispers

Karen Abbott

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Book Review

The Whispers

Author

Greg Howard

Reviewer

Karen Abbott

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Intermediate

Pages

272

Year

2020

ISBN

9780525517511

Publisher

Puffin Books

Riley's mother is gone, and the pain and devastation of her absence has immobilized his family. Riley feels that people blame him, and his friends are starting to think he's crazy for believing that his mother is alive. Acting on a story his mother told him about the whispers, magical beings who grant a heart's desire, Riley leaves them tribute, voicing aloud his longing to find his mother. The whispers don't answer, even as he follows the signs he thinks they send. Soon he has nothing left to give, and he offers up his soul. When he passes out from fatigue and awakens on his mother's grave, he accepts what happened. His mother died of cancer, and he feels responsible because he thinks that the shock of his budding sexual orientation killed her. With the truth, Riley can begin to make a new life by letting go of the whispers of the people around him, and maybe even the things that he whispers to himself.

This is a fantastically well-written story with words that describe emotions and situations in ways that pull beauty from the pain of loss. The text creates an image so vivid that sensations not described, such as smell and touch, are felt by the reader. Told from Riley's point of view, the story takes on a very direct, no-nonsense tone that shares a similar emotional intensity to Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There is a raw integrity that strings the story together and leaves readers deeply enriched by the end. Riley's homosexual beginnings are handled with delicacy, offering an appropriate way to open discussions on acceptance and appreciation for others.

*Contains mild sexual content.