

The Girl Who Drank the Moon - Summary

The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill is a young adult fantasy about a town that each year sacrifices a baby to a notorious witch who lives in the forest on the outskirts of town. However, the witch, Xan, is actually kind and not cruel at all. Rather than sacrificing the babies, she brings them to loving homes on the other side of the forest, feeding them starlight for sustenance on the journey. One day, Xan receives a baby whom she accidentally feeds moonlight, rather than starlight. Unlike starlight, moonlight has magical properties. The story follows this character, Luna, who develops magic powers from drinking the moonlight. As her powers develop, they wreak havoc on the delicate system established between the local village and Xan the witch.

The book begins in the Protectorate, a small community blocked in by high walls where people live on the outskirts of the forest. The people in this community believe that outside the gate there lives an evil witch, who would attack and kill them if they do not sacrifice a baby each year to appease her bloodlust. The citizens of the Protectorate don't know the truth – that the myth of the evil witch was concocted by the Sisters of the Star, a group of leaders who control all the knowledge in a high tower inside the Protectorate. They claim the knowledge they have is too dangerous to share with commoners, and maintain the myth of the evil witch to subdue their citizens, frightening them into staying within the borders.

Gherland, the leader of the Council of Elders, collects a chosen baby each year to give to the evil witch. He drops the baby at the edge of the forest, and the villagers perform a short ritual before returning home. Xan, the witch in the forest, doesn't understand what leads the people of the Protectorate to abandon their own children. Worrying over the babies, she finds them comfortable homes in nearby villages each time a baby is abandoned.

One year, the mother of the chosen baby protests when Gherland and his clan come to collect their sacrifice. This baby has a birthmark shaped like a moon on her face; the mother climbs into the rafters of her house and threatens to fight the elders if they try to catch her. They take the baby anyway, abandoning her in the forest. They then lock up the mother in a tower until she goes mad.

Xan finds this baby, like all the others. However, unlike the other babies, whom she nourished on starlight as she found them new homes, Xan feeds this baby moonlight. Knowing that the moonlight will give the baby magic powers, Xan raises this baby by herself, naming her Luna, after the moonlight she drank and the shape of the birthmark on her face.

Things become complicated as Luna grows older. Xan knows that as Luna's powers become stronger, her own will become weaker, and she will die. She casts a spell on Luna so she will forget about magic. At the same time, Gherland's nephew Antain is slotted to take the new seat as Grand Elder, but he refuses. Instead, he becomes a carpenter and marries, and the couple has a baby. Unfortunately, Gherland comes to collect Antain's baby, which has been randomly selected as the yearly sacrifice. Antain, determined to save his child, threatens to find and kill the witch.

Xan, Antain, and Luna converge that year as the weakening Xan goes to collect the child, followed by a curious and concerned Luna. However, things are not quite what they seem, and they learn the truth together, slowly, before they discern that the true villains reside in the Protectorate itself.

About the Author -

Kelly Barnhill lives in Minneapolis with her husband and three children. She is the author of four novels. This book won the Newberry Medal and others were Minnesota Book Awards. She has been awarded Fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board and the McKnight Foundation.

She believes in the power of stories to connect us with the truth and with each other. She often writes books with the theme of the importance of doing the right thing. She says that this book is about the power of asking the right questions and acting on the answers.

Themes-

- Stories are important
- The power of fear
- The power of love
- The effects of sorrow
- The importance of telling the truth
- Perspective changes how we view the world
- The stories we tell are important
- Make careful choices in your life
- Do the right thing
- What you do has consequences
- Question authority and make up your own mind**
- You can make change
- Relationships are complex
- Your gifts need to be used responsibly - how you should use your magic

Questions -

1. Belief in the witch subdued the people so that they were compliant and lived in a sad haze. "Why do the elders spread the story of the Witch to the townspeople? Is the idea of the witch more powerful than an actual witch?"
2. Who is the speaker of the italicized chapters and who is the child listening to the stories? Did the switch of narrators change your experience of the story?
3. Antain desperately wants to visit the libraries in the Tower of the Sisters of the Star when he is young, but they refuse to let him. Why do they hoard their knowledge? Is it right?
4. Xan insists that sorrow is dangerous. Do you agree? How are hope and sorrow connected? What does Can learn about both by the end of the book?
5. When Luna's magic grows out of control, Can seals it away until Luna turns 13. What were the consequences of this action. Do you agree with her choice?
6. Many birds appear in the novel - the madwoman's paper birds, the sparrow Can becomes to travel, the crow Luna befriends. How are the birds alike and how are they different? Why do you think the author chose to include them?
7. The madwoman is distraught when she realizes she can't remember her past, even her own name. What other examples of memory loss are there and what effects do they have?
8. Xan and Luna start keeping secrets. How do the lies influence their relationship? Why did they decide to keep secrets?
9. Fyrian thinks he's a Simply Enormous Dragon, but everyone else thinks he's a Perfectly Tiny Dragon. Who is right? How does his perspective affect his view of the world? What other examples are there of how perspective changes a character's view of the world?
10. Why does the Sorrow Eater feed on people's sorrow? Why does she wall off her heart? What are the differences in the way she and Xan use their magic?
11. When Antain begins questioning the Witch's nature the Elders' deceptions, he calls his questions "revolutionary." Is questioning important? How can questions be revolutionary?
12. "A story can tell the truth, she knew, but a story can also lie. Stories can bend and twist and obfuscate. Controlling stories is power indeed." Why are stories powerful, especially when you control them? What happens when stories are shared? What examples of both are there in the book.

Possible Connections between the book and Works of Art -

- (Living Clay) "Cercle" (2010) Futamura Yoshimi. Connection: The moon.

- (Living Clay) "Planet" (2015) Tanaka Tomomi . Connection: Tortured lives, the darkness of fear.
- (Living Clay) "Blooming" (2016) Fujikasa Sakoko. Connection: Luna coming into her Magic.
- (Atrium 3rd) "Plague Bird" "Pestrogal" (2016) Walton Ford. Connection: The role of birds.
- (367) "Servant Girl" (1916) Amadeo Modigliani. Connection: The emotions of the witch.
- (369) "Monsters in Manhattan" (2016) Inka Essengigh. Connection: Glerk.
- (374) " Queen of the Night" (2018) Kevin Beasley. Connection: Complexity of the witch. *
- (376) "Through Birds, Through Fire, but not Through Glass" (1943) Yves Tanguy. Connection: Setting.
- (361)" Inacheve" (1957) Pavel Tchelitchew. Connection: The complexities of the plot, the web of lies.
- (377) " Golden Bird" ()Brancusi. Connection: Hope at the end of the story and the image of birds.
- (377) " The Appointed Room" (1940) Marvin Cone. Connection: The power of the lies of the Protectorate.