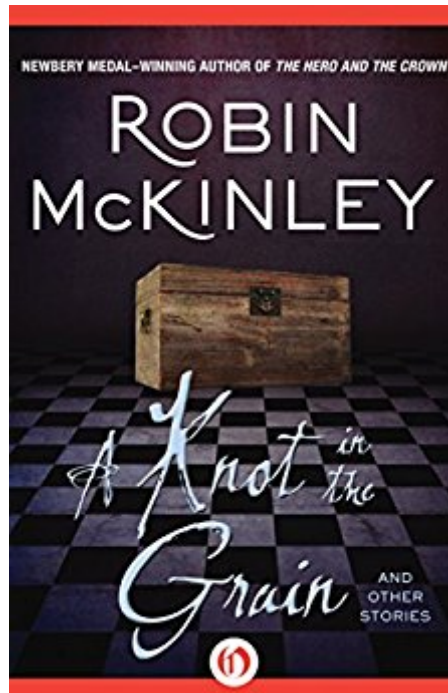


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A Knot In The Grain: And Other Stories



Synopsis

Stories from the world of *The Hero and the Crown* and other magical places by a New York Times “bestselling Newbery Medal winner. Robin McKinley returns to the mythical setting of *The Hero and the Crown* and *The Blue Sword* in this “thrilling, satisfying, and thought-provoking collection” featuring two stories set in the world of Damar, plus three other fantasy tales featuring adventurous, pragmatic, and heroic young women (Publishers Weekly). “There’s mute Lily, in “*The Healer*,” who has the power to help others, and receives a startling opportunity to find her voice when a mysterious mage stumbles into town. And Queen Ruen, who is at the mercy of a power-hungry uncle until she encounters a shape-changer in “*The Stagman*.” In “*Touk’s House*,” a maiden who has grown up with a witch and a troll has a chance to become a princess, but she must decide whether she would really live happily ever after. When a curse follows Coral to her new husband’s farm in “*Buttercups*,” the pair has a choice: Succumb to defeat or find a way to turn a disastrous enchantment into a fruitful new venture. “Finally, travel to upstate New York with Annabelle. In the title story, her family moves shortly after her sixteenth birthday, and just as she starts to adjust to her new life in a small town, a plan to build a superhighway threatens her new home. But a strange box hidden in a secret attic in the new house may be the answer. This is a delightful assortment of tales from an author with “a remarkable talent for melding the real and the magical into a single, believable whole” (Booklist). “

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Customer Reviews

This is a short story collection containing five stories: The Healer, The Stagman, Touk's House, Buttercups, and A Knot in the Grain. The first four stories are set in McKinley's Damar universe, the first three even feature Luthe. The last is a departure for her because it is set in modern times and doesn't have a very large fantasy element. The Healer, is the story of a girl named Lilly who has the power to heal but is also mute. She meets a mage who can hear her telepathically and they set off on a journey to restore Lilly's speech. This is a fairly strong story and a great pick to start the book with. The characters are fleshed out well and the love story was enjoyable. The Stagman, is about a princess named Ruen who is left, by her greedy uncle, as a sacrifice to a human/stag hybrid. Is the Stagman really as bad as people think he is? This is probably my favorite story in the collection. I liked all the characters and the plot was very interesting. It would have worked much better as a novel though. By the time the story was over there were still far too many unanswered questions. Touk's House, is the story of a girl named Erana who was raised by a witch. As she grows up, she befriends and eventually falls in love with the witch's troll son. This is a fairly decent story. The plot is really interesting but it would have been much better if the characters had been developed a bit more. Buttercups, is the story of a old farmer named Pos who marries a young girl named Coral. Pos loves his wife very much but has doubts about her affection for him because she spends too much time on buttercup hill. This is a cute story but it's, unfortunately, very boring. A Knot in the Grain, is about a teenage girl named Annabelle who is forced to move away and leave behind her entire life.

As an ardent fan of McKinley's books, most especially her "A Door in the Hedge," I was eager to buy and read another collection of her original fairy tales. However, "A Knot in the Grain," although good to read, like eating thick honey for a week, lacked in subtle subtext. "The Healer," the story of a mute girl who finds love in a telepathic ex-mage, began in a promising manner - using phrases like, "the creaky place that might once have been his heart," and so on - but ends strangely, with them returning to the village and some sense that a deeper meaning was intended but not, at least by me, realised. "The Stagman," as others have noticed before me, was particularly head-scratch-worthy, dealing with a cruel Regent-uncle, the girl who should be Queen and does not

know how, a prince who likes to hunt, and the elusive stagman who, apparently, the Queen leaves her kingdom, husband and four children for...what? Why? HOW?"Touk's House" can be seen as an interesting 'take' on the Rapunzel legend, but ends with the message that kings are rotten and trolls (TROLLS!) are lovable. Again, the ending is confusing, since the images cast upon us feel as though they ought to be wrought with great significance."Buttercups" is perhaps the best story, structurally, following the wedding of a farmer to a girl twenty years his junior, and their marital struggles. The last story, from which the title of the book takes its name, is not quite as bad as the previous reviews had led me to believe. The story is a snippet of a modern girl's life, dealing not so much with the knot as with a magical wishing box she finds.

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