

“Ernie Banks does not have much to show for the last ten years spent in a boy's home other than a bad reputation. He is not a very likeable boy, but he has a soft spot in his heart for the vintage Ernie Banks baseball card and a crystal acorn that hangs around his neck, all that was with him when he was left on the doorstep at age three-speaking an unrecognizable language. As a last straw to keep him from being placed in a juvenile detention center, Ernie is sent to spend three weeks on a farm owned by Russ Frazier, a widower whose infant son disappeared from his crib thirteen years before. Ernie likes Russ and decides to redeem himself by solving the "Quilt Baby" kidnapping, with the help of Joey, the tomboy from next door. The most obvious clue is the intricately carved wooden mobile of tiny elfish creatures and acorns, which look remarkably like his own, that hangs above the empty crib. Ernie is about to discover that he had initially been kidnapped by Puddlejumpers, tiny water creatures who have come back to get him so he can help save them from extinction.

The realistic story of an unhappy rebellious young teen who must become a hero merges with a darker underground fantasy tale, where magical water creatures are enslaved, together holding the reader in their grasp until the battle between good and evil concludes. A reader cannot begin this journey of self-discovery with Ernie without vicariously walking beside him, all the way back home.

Reviewed by Ruth Cox Clark

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