



The Folk Keeper

Franny Billingsley

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She is never cold, she always knows exactly what time it is, and her hair grows two inches while she sleeps. Fifteen-year-old Corinna Stonewall--the only Folk Keeper in the city of Rhysbridge--sits hour after hour with the Folk in the dark, chilly cellar, "drawing off their anger as a lightning rod draws off lightning." The Folk are the fierce, wet-mouthed, cave-dwelling gremlins who sour milk, rot cabbage, and make farm animals sick. Still, they are no match for the steely, hard-hearted, vengeful orphan Corinna who prides herself in her job of feeding, distracting, and otherwise pacifying these furious, ravenous creatures. The Folk Keeper has power and independence, and that's the way she likes it.

One day, Corinna is summoned by Lord Merton to come to the vast seaside estate Cliffsend as Folk Keeper and family member--for she is the once-abandoned child he has been looking for. It is at Cliffsend that Corinna learns where her unusual powers come from, why she is drawn to the sea, and finally, what it means to be comfortable in her own skin. Written in the form of a journal, *The Folk Keeper* is a powerful story of a proud, ferociously self-reliant girl who breaks out of her dark, cold, narrow world into one of joy, understanding, and even the magic of romance.

The Folk Keeper Details

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From Reader Review The Folk Keeper for online ebook

Beth says

Hmmmm. I'm still compiling my thoughts on this one, mainly wondering if I would be more impressed if I'd read *The Folk Keeper* before the superior *Chime*. This book feels like the precursor to *Chime*, the I'm-still-working-things-out on the author's part - things like mood and the delicate balance of eerie and fey, like better-integrated descriptions and language. I realize that some might think *Chime* to be overly long or endlessly narrated, but its language was so nuanced and lovely that the *The Folk Keeper* feels choppy and abrupt in comparison, almost as though part of the story was edited out.

This is not a bad read; it's certainly creative and it kept me turning the pages. But for Billingsley's real masterpiece, read *Chime*.

Chelsea says

Short and sweet. The writing style in this book was very to-the-point, being descriptive when necessary and succinct otherwise. And because it was written in journal-style, only the key elements were included and not any long, perhaps unnecessary passages. Thus we are left with a short book, but a touching story. It is largely the story of Corinna's coming-of-age, but in surprising ways. I would definitely recommend it to any fantasy lovers.

Jackie says

Corin/Corinna is the 'folk keeper' at Rhysbridge. She controls and tends to them, so that they will not create havoc on the people of the village. They have been known to sour the milk, kill the crops and harm the animals. So they must be appeased. Corinna knows that only boys can be folk keepers. She disguises herself. She is called to a new village to become the folk keeper of Lord Merton's people. Lord Merton mysteriously knows her secret and eventually Corinna learns of other secrets, too. Her destiny is realized at Cliffsend, Lord Merton's realm. But, does she want to accept this new development in her life and return to the sea from which she came? Corinna deals with issues unique to her and her life.

Loederkoningin says

A lovely magical atmosphere and some beautiful ideas here, but as a whole the story lacked body. The pacing felt hurried and the characters were not at all fleshed out. Several more spoonfuls of TLC and what a lush tale *The Folk Keeper* would've been! For fans of selkies: One Saved to the Sea.

Emmy says

Once I started reading I couldn't put this book down. It was storming outside my window and I was huddled by my lamp devouring Billingsley's words. I stayed up the entire night reading and when I finished I was left wishing for more. I can probably credit this book for making me realize that writing doesn't have to be a boring and daunting activity. If I could find the right words I could make the exciting stories in my head come to life on paper for other people to enjoy.

I still get a little thrill of excitement when I think of this book. It's not just a children's book, I recommend it to anyone who likes dark fairy tales. If you can, read it on a stormy night with the rain drumming on your roof... and the Folk hungry in your basement.

The Shayne-Train says

Both the little one and I really enjoyed this book. The narrator has such a strong voice, and in the beginning (and mostly throughout) her utter disdain for people was endearing and entertaining.

Plus (~~minor spoilers~~), the fact that the narrator was a girl masquerading as a boy led us to a conversation about how some people feel the desire or downright need to dress as the opposite sex, whether out of fun, or self-identity. So I got to throw some open-mindedness and acceptance into her innocent little brainpan as well. Bonus. (I didn't do the 'hide spoilers' thing because, seriously, you find out within the first 20 pages.)

The supernatural elements (i.e., the Folk that, as you may have guessed, are Kept) are portrayed with just the right level of creepiness to build tension, but not necessarily make the faint-hearted shiver and ask to sleep in YOUR bed tonight. There are a few bits of stuff that are pretty intense (discussions of deaths of previous household members, including that of a mother and child during birthing), but it's done in a matter-of-fact way that I think actually helps a child realize that sometimes bad crap happens and lives must go on.

All in all, both adult and child were delighted with this story. If you read to children, read *this* to them. If you read YA/middle grade literature for yourself, read this to *you*.

Nandakishore Varma says

I usually don't read YA: just picked up this book at a garage sale without knowing what it was, read two pages and abandoned it. I went back to it only because I wanted a slim volume to keep up my book count for the reading challenge... but now I am glad that I did. Good for goodreads!

I am in two minds about this book. The premise and story are superb, and the characters are drawn with a few deft brush-strokes. But this book is too thin, almost an outline for a novel than a novel itself. The beginning is so abrupt that I was tossed head-first into the middle of the story, and it took me quite some time to regain my breath: then some more time was spent on getting my bearings in this strange universe into which I had descended. Then, I was captivated.

Corinna Stonewall is an orphan and a Folk-Keeper. She dresses up as a boy (Corin) and lives in the cellar of the Rhysbridge orphanage. Her task is to keep the Folk (beings which are "mostly wet mouth and teeth" - brr! Right out of M.R.James, that) from working their black magic and spoiling food and harvest, by

continuously feeding them. She is jerked out of this less than idyllic but stable existence and hauled off to Cliffsend in the Northern Isles, by Lord Merton and his wife Lady Alicia, along with Lord Merton's cousin Edward. Lord Merton dies immediately after meeting Corinna, after startling her with knowledge of her secrets: but he intrigues her enough to persuade her to travel.

Once at Cliffsend, Corinna begins to make startling discoveries about her true nature. The Folk are stronger here, but they are not the only denizens that inhabit the twilight world between reality and fantasy. As Corinna slowly discovers her kinship to them, the secrets of her past are also slowly revealed.

The Folk Keeper is a fairy tale and Gothic romance rolled into one. The author makes use of common devices of both the genres and merges them seamlessly. I could feel the bite of the cold wind at Cliffsend, and the woodland sprites flitting about at the corner of my vision. And the resolution is satisfying to both genres.

This is also a coming-of-age story, and a Hero's journey, where the heroine finds her true nature at the end (though not in the way we expect).

Why only the three stars then? Well, as mentioned in the beginning, the story is spread too thin. It seems as though Ms. Billingsley was in a hurry to get the novel out. I can't help feeling that this is one book which would have been better if it had been a little fatter.

Nikki says

The Folk Keeper is like a prototype for Chime. Something about the narration, the tone, the characters. I still liked it, though, even if not as much as Chime -- it's shorter, lighter, and it does have details all its own: Corinna has her own lovely-strange powers, her own story.

If you liked Chime, The Folk Keeper may seem like an easier, shorter version, but it's still very good. I read it all in one go, and apparently my train stopped in Cheltenham without me even noticing...

Sharman Russell says

I finished The Folk Keeper in just a few hours and almost in one sitting. I was reminded: this is one reason I like middle-grade literature. Short powerful stories you can enter and leave in a short time, something like a movie, rather than that other experience of reading a book over days or weeks. The latter is so stretched out, dipping your feet back in the water, getting into the flow again. The Folk Keeper was a plunge, into the waves! I was impressed. I felt like a ten-year-old again. (This is another reason I like middle grade literature.) The language was beautiful. Lyrical. Surprising. The plot was fun and didn't wind down, either. New developments. A strong and powerful book! It made me feel strong and powerful, too, as a writer and as a young person going out in the world. (Yet another reason I like middle grade literature.)

Nafiza says

Franny Billingsley has magic in her fingers. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she has magic

in her mind. There are conventional ways to create characters and then there's the Franny B. way. Her protagonists (I've read three of her books so I know what I'm talking about) have this certain quality of otherness. This, how do I say it, unearthliness to them that make all of them just so fascinating to read.

Corinna is no different. The story is told in the first person and from the very beginning, the reader has to take a breath to adapt to the curious manner in which Corinna thinks. You have to sift through her words, through her actions to find the daily-normal life explanations. Some people will find Corinna difficult to relate to. I know I did. Some will find her a bit too honest. But there's something that everyone (albeit unwillingly) will agree to: Corinna is compelling. She is an intriguing character and because she is intriguing, you will read through the book, experiencing (in a slightly diluted manner) the events that lead to the book's conclusion.

I also adore (and I don't use the word often so you know I mean it) the romance in the book. It is mush-free and just sneaks up on you with a subtlety and a delicacy that is a testament to Billingsley's skill. The book, though slim, offers a lot within its pages. The story it tells is, in no way, simple. The complexity is disguised by the enigma of Corinna and the reveal at the end will elicit understanding.

If it wasn't clear before now, I enjoyed this novel. And if you like something different, something other than mush and the run of the mill tortured romance, you should read this.

Millenia says

There is so much to love about **THE FOLK KEEPER**, but if I had to say one thing about it, I would say that it is a perfect example of the Iceberg Theory.

In case you don't know, the Iceberg Theory describes the writing style of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway thought that if the writer was skillful enough, she could give the reader minimal information in the narrative, a surface story if you will, but write in such a way that the underlying story "shines through" (as Wikipedia puts it), even if none of it was explicitly stated.

THE FOLK KEEPER uses this style perfectly. You see that picture above? Well, the part above the water is the actual 162-page story. It's a great story, mind you, and is exciting, with suspense, twists and turns, and an unpredictable, nicely-paced plot. It's the reason why I (and lots of other kids) fell in love with **THE FOLK KEEPER** a number of years earlier.

Now, do you see the part below the water? That's the REAL story. It's the story of a girl who has been rejecting her true self, but when she does embrace it, she is finally able to see her world with open eyes. It's a book about power, and how gaining it and using it can either bring happiness or suppresses the self. It's a book about a vivid, richly realized world of superstitions, traditions, and otherworldly creatures. It's also a very feminist book, so even though it's set in a patriarchal world, it shows the strength of women and how they can rise into power while still being true to themselves and their femininity. It's a book about all these things and so much more, a book that you can read again and again and still come away with something new.

(Oh, and the language is astonishingly beautiful. Here is a very typical but beautiful passage I found when I opened the book to a random page.)

We retired to the Music Room after supper. [...] The Music Room was small by Manor standards (not big enough to hold more than fifty elephants), and all white and gold with huge marble fireplaces that yawned into the room with tongues of flame.

The Music was not too bad, really.

Lady Alicia sat at a spinet in an alcove; Finian raised his little whistle. The room gradually reduced itself into a golden bubble, just big enough to hold a candle, Lady Alicia's shining hair, and Finian's fingers dancing over a scrap of tin. The silver thread of Finian's whistle wove itself into a rainbow of arpeggios as Lady Alicia spiraled to the final chord. She kissed Finian's cheek before she left the alcove. She did love him best of all, anyone could see that.

And, as anyone can see, I'm madly in love with THE FOLK KEEPER. It's an amazing children's book, an unforgettable experience - it transcends genre bounds, so even if you don't like fantasy, READ IT.

Karen says

The Folk Keeper is set sometime in the past when we travelled by horse and coach and villages grew and raised their own food ... and people had to worry about controlling 'The Folk'. Corinna, the main character, cuts off her beautiful long hair, wears trousers and masquerades as male adolescent, Corin. Only males can be Folk Keepers and this is what Corinna, now known as Corin, wants to do with her life. She's secretly listened into the conversations of other Folk Keepers, bribed secret lessons from some of the boys at the orphanage where she lives and taught herself everything she knows. I found Corin to be a smart and amusing character who wasn't about to let anyone get the better of her and I was totally under her spell after just a couple of chapters.

The Folk Keeper is written as journal entries Corin makes in her Folk Record. The writing is very whimsical and the sentence structure is a little different from usual and can be quite difficult to take in at some points, with a lot of the writing as short, stunted sentences. I did occasionally get a little confused, especially if I'd been interrupted for any reason and I had to go back a page or two and read it again, but all in all, this was a fascinating little book.

I was desperate to find out what exactly The Folk were and I loved reading the Folklore and picking up bits of information Corin noted in her journal. What kind of creatures were these 'Folk' and how come they ate so much and caused mayhem to the animals and crops, especially on feast days? Why did the posh family want to adopt her? Why did she feel so 'at home' near the sea? I had so many questions almost immediately I started reading and it was a fun and enchanting journey finding out the answers as little snippets of information were given up here and there allowing the tale to come together.

When I picked up The Folk Keeper I thought that at 162 pages I'd have it read in no time. I was wrong! This book takes a fair bit of concentration and will probably take you twice as long as you think to read. Don't let this put you off though - the story is totally enchanting and definitely worth every minute of your reading time!

Would I recommend this book? Yes, it's a beautiful and enchanting story very reminiscent of an old fashioned fairytale.

jesse says

Very, very unusual book. It would have been a great advantage being more fluent in English, because I'm not sure I understood all of it. Don't get me wrong, the story as a whole was easy enough to understand, but being doomed to failure, because of the little things? I have this feeling, I could have enjoyed it a little more, without this hindrance.

Corin/na is brave, vengeful, patient, stubborn and very, very smart. She's afraid that people will constrain her freedom, take away her rights once they know she's merely girl dressed as a boy. She's also bloodthirsty, people who've wronged her, she takes revenge upon, with no second thought. So, it's also no wonder she enjoys having power over other people and being able to keep her secrets to herself, since she knows she's indispensable.

"Everyone else is afraid. Only I am powerful."

"Vengeance. It is not always as delicious as you anticipate, but you must not flinch from it. Otherwise the Matrons of the world would rule us all."

"But I never spoke my anger; no, you must never give your anger away."

She likes to keep people guessing, keep them on their toes, but actually only minds her own business.

"There is power in silence, I have always known that."

And then of course, the little things, which made me like her.

"I don't care for beauty, not in the ordinary way."

Although it's said that **The Folk Keeper** is a children's book. I must say I'm not *sooo* sure about that one. Well, enough said. *I enjoyed it enough. And so might you.*

Katie says

I really do just want to copy and paste Beth's review! I, too, felt like this was a not-as-good precursor to Chime. And to some extent, I was ALWAYS going to compare the next Billingsley I read to my beloved Chime, but this had a lot of parallels with the mysteries to both reader and narrator. The romance, too, had a similar flavor.

Anyway, this was nice enough.

Sarah Mayor Cox says

I read many books over the course of a year, some for pleasure, some for work, some to review and share with others. Some of the books I start out reading for work or to review I end up enjoying more than I had initially predicted. Very, very few however, of these books make it onto my all time favourite list. So in a

year when I have read some of the finest books yet, it is with great excitement that I add The Folk Keeper to my list of all time favourites.

The Folk Keeper sits within a genre of books that has become very popular with children's and adult writers alike. I like to call them 'full-pitcher' fantasies. The term refers to Maurice Saxby's description of literature being like the magical pitcher that never runs dry, you can always dip into it and come up with a recurrent theme, archetypal character or story with which to do something new.

I have to admit from the outset that full-pitcher fantasies are probably my favourite sort of books to read. One of the children's literature subjects I teach focuses on the history of myths, legends and folk-tales and how these traditional literatures impact on modern writing for children. It is a fascinating subject and I am on as steep a learning curve as the enthusiastic students with whom I work. What I most enjoy is discovering some element, character or symbol from one of these traditional literatures woven into a new book. Perhaps it is this context, which made The Folk Keeper stand out for me as such as strong story.

Corinna Stonewall, the female protagonist, masquerades as a male so as to be allowed the position of Folk Keeper. She is endowed with all the feistiness and ingenuity needed to keep the Folk of the Otherworld at bay. Her story is told through the entries she makes into the Record, a diary of what the Folk are eating and how they are responding to her keeping of them on certain feast days throughout the year. I normally find books told through the device of diary entries quite boring ? it is a device that has been done to death. So I was surprised by the originality of the opening entry.

February 2nd Candlemas

It is a day of yellow fog, and the Folk are hungry. They ate the lamb I brought them, picking the bones clean and leaving them outside the Folk Door.

The lamb was meant for Matron's Sunday supper. She'll know I took it, but she will not dare say anything. She can keep her tapestries and silks and Sunday dinners. Here in the Cellar, I control the Folk. Here, I'm queen of the world.

It is one of the strangest opening passages I've ever read but two or three entries later I was completely hooked.

Billingsley has this knack of casually throwing out clues about Corinna which are at first slightly unnerving. We are told she hardly eats or sleeps, that her skin has a strangely translucent quality and that her downy hair magically grows two inches each night. Coupled with her fierce determination to control the Folk and her revengeful nature it took me a while to warm to her. Early in the story and, against her wishes, she is summoned to the bedside of Lord Merton who is dying. He sees past her boyish disguise and recognises her face and her skin. When she agrees to become The Folk Keeper at Cliffsend, Lord Merton's estate, she finds herself caught up in a tangled family history. A history full of secrets and mystery and of characters who are not what they appear to be. As Corinna searches desperately for her own identity and her place in the world her vulnerability is revealed.

I did not pick the solution to the mystery. I didn't see the love-story coming and the murder took me completely by surprise, but even if I had guessed at these things I am sure I would still have been satisfied by the story. Billingsley laces The Folk Keeper with many motifs and archetypal characters from Celtic and Norse mythology, and tells it in an unusual combination of literary quality and pace. The Folk Keeper shows how complex a 1st person narrative can be if written as brilliantly as Billingsley does.

Please judge this book by its cover. Sarah Gibb's eerie illustration is striking, and Yeti McCaldin's design is one of the most sophisticated I have seen - you will find it holds a truly remarkable tale inside.

Sadly new edition's cover is very bland in comparison to the last one
