

# **Plain Kate Study Guide**

## **Plain Kate by Erin Bow**

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# Plot Summary

Plain Kate is a novel by writer Erin Bow. Plain Kate is about a young orphan girl who is accused of being a witch because of her talent in wood carving. Plain Kate takes up with a man who claims to be a witch and wants to take her shadow from her. When Plain Kate finds herself forced to move on, she agrees to trade her shadow for some food and other items she needs in order to travel safely. Plain Kate then learns that the witch plans to use her shadow to seek revenge for his sister's death and bring the sister back to life. Plain Kate is a story of strength, of love, and of loneliness that will leave the reader in tears by the final page.

Plain Kate's mother dies when she is born, leaving her to be raised alone in her father's care. A carver, Plain Kate's father raises his daughter to be a master carver. However, many people are frightened of those who can use a knife to make beautiful carvings, and they call them witches. For this reason, Plain Kate is often accused of being a witch even though she has no powers to speak of. When her father dies, Plain Kate finds herself alone without anyone who cares about her. Plain Kate begins to live in her father's stall, sleeping in a small drawer and raising a small group of kittens for the company.

One day a strange man comes to town. Plain Kate thinks he is a witch, but the people of the town do not seem frightened of him. However, when the man bewitches a bunch of fish so Plain Kate can catch them and then the town's fish are burned, people again begin to look to Plain Kate as a danger. One night, someone takes an ax to Plain Kate's stall. For this reason, Plain Kate decides it is time to move on. Plain Kate makes a deal with the witch, Linay, to give him her shadow in exchange for some things she will need in order to make her escape.

When Linay takes Plain Kate's shadow, he gives her a wish. Plain Kate's remaining cat, Taggle, begins to speak. The local baker, Niki, then takes Plain Kate to the Roamers, a group of gypsies, who agree to allow her to travel with them. While traveling with the Roamers, Plain Kate befriends the young daughter of a witch who was burned and drowned in the city of Lov. Plain Kate admits to this girl, Drina, what she has done with the witch. Drina, who has learned some magic from her mother, decides to help Plain Kate. However, her first spell goes badly. Drina decides she should look for help in the next town they come to, Toila.

In Toila it is important for Plain Kate to sell many of the charms she carves called objarka so that the Roamers can see that she can help pay her way and they will allow her to stay. However, when Drina goes in search of information to help Plain Kate, she is identified as a witch by some locals and attacked. Plain Kate manages to get her away from the angry mob and notify her father. Plain Kate is taken back to the Roamer camp where her fate is debated all night. When the husband of her beloved sponsor, Daj, falls ill, Plain Kate's fate seems to grow dire.



Plain Kate is brought before the Baro and he sees she has no shadow. Frightened, the Roamers put Plain Kate in a cage. Then, when another of the Roamers falls ill, another throws a burning lamp on Plain Kate. Plain Kate escapes to the river. Linay finds Plain Kate and heals her wounds. Then Linay asks Plain Kate to give her blood to help him in exchange for the return of her shadow. When Plain Kate learns, however, that Linay is responsible for the hundreds of people falling dead in their wake and plans to destroy an entire city, she runs away in an attempt to find a way to stop him.

When Plain Kate reaches the city, she learns that Linay plans to sacrifice himself for his sister. Plain Kate fights to stop him, but nearly fails. Finally Plain Kate knows the only way to stop Linay is to kill her beloved cat, Taggle. Plain Kate does this. Linay dies and gives life briefly to his dead sister, Lenore. However, Lenore's return is brief, but in return for Plain Kate's sacrifice she gives Taggle back his life.



# Chapters 1-3

## Chapters 1-3 Summary

Chapter 1. The Skara Rok. Plain Kate's mother died when she was born. When her father introduced her to everyone, he said her name was Katerina Svelana, but he calls her just plain Kate. For this reason, everyone in town began to call her Plain Kate. Plain Kate's father is a master carver and put a knife in her hand when she was only three. Plain Kate has helped her father with most of his work and promises him she will be a master carver by the time she is twenty. However when the skara rok, the bad time, came, Plain Kate's father died of the witch's fever. A short time later, a new master carver comes to live in the home Plain Kate shared with her father. Plain Kate is forced to move out. Plain Kate moves into the stall her father kept in the market. Her first night there, Plain Kate finds three kittens abandoned by their mother. Plain Kate takes care of the kittens, raising them until two move on. One stays with Plain Kate, Taggle.

Chapter 2. The Stranger. On day an albino man comes to town to sell metal charms. Plain Kate finds him interesting, but it is clear he is a witch and this frightens her. Niki, the baker, warns Plain Kate to stay away from the stranger. However, the stranger hires her one day to fix a bow for him. Plain Kate takes the job because she needs the money.

Chapter 3. The Fish, the Axe, and the Bargain. A group of Roamers come to town and the stranger seems to disappear. One night, Plain Kate goes to the docks to try to catch some fish. Plain Kate knows that the fishing has been tough lately, therefore she is surprised when the river suddenly swarmed with fish. Several fishermen comment on it and Plain Kate knows they will think she did it somehow, but she is hungry. Plain Kate then bargains with a fisherman to get a space in the town smokehouse. A few days later, all the fish in the smokehouse burn except for Plain Kate's. This again causes rumors that she is a witch.

One night while she is sleeping, Plain Kate's stall is attacked by someone with an ax. Frightened, Plain Kate escapes her drawer and begins to gather her belongings, aware that she will be killed if she continues to stay. A short time later, Plain Kate goes to see Linay. Plain Kate gives him his completed bow and then agrees to give him her shadow if he will give her some things she will need to leave town. Plain Kate gathers her belongings and then meets Linay on the docks after dark. Linay sings softly and burns some of his blood. When it is over, Linay tells her it will take time for her shadow to leave her and she should find a place to belong before it is gone.

## Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Plain Kate is an orphan who only had one person in her life who loved her and whom she loved. When her father died, Plain Kate finds herself completely on her own in a



town where people will not accept her because of her amazing talent as a wood carver. This causes Plain Kate to find a unique way to survive, living in a drawer in her father's stall, and to draw comfort from three kittens who were abandoned like her. This is a very lonely life, but Plain Kate is content depending on her own wits.

The people in Plain Kate's town are deathly afraid of witches, but they do not recognize a real witch when he comes to town. Plain Kate recognizes this witch, but she does not judge against him because of her own experiences with being accused a witch. However, when this man causes odd things to happen around Plain Kate, she finds herself in a difficult situation. Plain Kate decides she must leave town and the only way she can do this is by making a deal with the witch. Plain Kate gives this witch her shadow, plunging her into an unknown situation that will have unknown consequences.



# Chapters 4-6

## Chapters 4-6 Summary

Chapter 4. The Roamers. Plain Kate discovers that her cat, Taggle, can now speak. It is a gift the witch gave to her for her shadow. Plain Kate returns to the town to give a completed objarka to Niki. When Niki realizes she is leaving town, he decides to send her to the Roamers so that she will not have to travel alone. Niki introduces Plain Kate to Behjet, one of the horse wranglers who travels with the Roamers. Behjet introduces Plain Kate to Daj, the elder female of the group, who agrees to allow Plain Kate to travel with them. When Niki leaves, Plain Kate volunteers to help with the striking of the camp. Daj sends Plain Kate off with Drina to collect sand to clean the pots. Drina is a little younger than Plain Kate and typically adept at avoiding work. Drina tells Plain Kate some about the ways of the Roamers and introduces Plain Kate to her horse, Cream.

Chapter 5. The Road and the Rain. Plain Kate walks behind the wagons on the first day with the Roamers. It rains the whole time and Plain Kate's feet are soon wet and covered with blisters, but she is grateful not to be alone. When they camp for the night, Daj takes Plain Kate to introduce her to the Baro, Rye Baro. After a brief discussion, Rye Baro tells Plain Kate to carve some objarka to sell in Toila. If she can make some money, they will decide whether or not to allow her to remain with the Roamer clan. Over the next few weeks, Plain Kate learns a lot about the Roamer ways. The rain continues and a fog settles over them one night. Drina talks about her mother, who was burned for a witch in Lov and ended up drowning. Plain Kate recalls seeing Drina's mother once in her small town when she healed Plain Kate's father.

Chapter 6. Secrets and Roses. Drina discovers Taggle can speak, but she agrees to keep it secret when Plain Kate tells her everything. Drina tells Plain Kate that her mother was a healer and that she learned a little from her. Drina offers to help Plain Kate. Drina tells Plain Kate how her uncle was so upset over her mother's death that he used some of his own hair soaked in blood to remove a part of his shadow to help the dead speak. Later, Drina asks to braid Plain Kate's hair in preparation for doing a similar spell to help return her shadow to her. The following day, Plain Kate goes with Drina's father, Stivo, to search for cured wood to use in her carvings. Stivo warns Plain Kate not to drag his daughter into the trouble that follows her. Plain Kate tries to ask Drina to stop helping her, but Drina becomes angry so Plain Kate relents.

A few days later they arrive at the home of Pan Oskar where they will stay for a few days to breed the horses. While there, Drina and Plain Kate will have some privacy in a tent and Drina thinks this will be the perfect time to try a spell to return Plain Kate's shadow to her. However, the spell goes badly and calls something evil to them instead of Plain Kate's shadow. Plain Kate ends the spell by pouring water on the fire where her hair and blood burns. Drina then suggests that when they get to Toila she might ask someone with more knowledge how to draw the shadow to Plain Kate without bringing the evil with it.



## Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Niki, the baker, is the only person in Plain Kate's hometown who has ever been kind to her. When he learns that Plain Kate has decided to leave town, he arranges for her to travel with the Roamers, a band of gypsy who have recently stopped in the town to sell their goods. Plain Kate is conditionally accepted into the clan and put to work carving objarka that she can sell in the next city, Toila.

Plain Kate meets and befriends Drina, a young girl who has also suffered the loss of a parent. Drina's mother, a witch, was burned in Lov during the skara rok and then was drowned. The memory is difficult for Drina and it binds the two grieving girls together. Plain Kate feels close enough to Drina to confess the truth of what has happened to her shadow. This leads Drina to offer to help. However, Drina does not know much magic and her help only draws something terrible to them. This leaves Plain Kate worried that there is not hope for her. Plain Kate has grown frightened of what will happen to her when her shadow disappears completely. Drina, always hopeful, continues to fight for Plain Kate, however, promising to find answers in Toila. However, this could place Drina in trouble, as the reader already knows that people are frightened of known witches and Drina will need a witch to give her answers.





# Chapters 7-9

## Chapters 7-9 Summary

Chapter 7. Toila. When they arrive in Toila, Drina and Plain Kate immediately set off together to sell Plain Kate's objarka in the appropriate market. Drina and Taggle dance, drawing a crowd to Plain Kate's objarka. Then Drina goes off in search of answers for Plain Kate's problems. At first Plain Kate struggles to sell the rest of her goods, but soon they begin to sell well. Then a guard comes up to Plain Kate and tells her they do not like witches and she should go. Plain Kate rushes away in search of Drina. When Plain Kate finds Drina, she finds her being attacked by a mob, her hair shorn off and her ear nearly amputated. Plain Kate and Taggle manage to create enough of a distraction to get Drina away from the man with the knife. Plain Kate then sacrifices the silver she has already made to distract the mob. Plain Kate, Drina, and Taggle run from the mob and are helped by a woman who sold baskets near Plain Kate.

Chapter 8. The Bog Camp. Plain Kate goes in search of Stivo and Behjet. Stivo rushes to where Drina is while Behjet quickly gets Plain Kate out of town. When they arrive at the camp, they learn that Drina is alive, but badly injured. Plain Kate goes with Behjet to find another camp off the beaten path so that the mob, if they come after them, will not be able to find them. On the ride, Behjet asks Plain Kate to tell her anything he knows, but she decides not to tell him the truth. They end up making camp in a bog. Plain Kate does most of the chores she and Drina normally do alone. The men set up a tent and have a meeting, trying to decide what to do with Plain Kate. Plain Kate sits outside her vardo and planes wood to fix a broken bucket. Daj comes out and says something that causes Plain Kate to lose control of the plane and she cuts herself. Daj takes Plain Kate into the men's tent to give Plain Kate first aid. Wen, Daj's husband, accidentally drinks some tea with Plain Kate's blood in it. The next morning, Wen is sick. The Baro, who has come to check on Wen's condition, notices that Plain Kate has no shadow.

Chapter 9. The Bear Cage. Rye Baro has Plain Kate locked in bear cage while they decide what to do with her. Taggle offers to help Plain Kate and she instructs him to get the key from Stivo. When Taggle tries, however, he is seen. The men chase him from the tent. Stivo throws an ax and hits Taggle on the back of the head. When Stivo comes over to question Plain Kate about Taggle's actions, he hears Taggle speak. Later, Behjet comes to Plain Kate and asks her what happened. Time passes. Plain Kate gets ahold of the ax handle and uses it to carve a key from an impression in the mud. When darkness falls, a fog comes over the water that turns into a white woman. Plain Kate watches as the woman approaches Stivo. Plain Kate tries to call for help when she sees the woman embrace Stivo, causing him to fall to the ground. Behjet comes in response to her cries and sees his brother. Behjet then learns his father is dead. Overwhelmed with grief, Behjet throws a burning lamp on Plain Kate. Plain Kate manages to get out of the cage with her carved key before she is killed.



## Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Plain Kate and the Roamers arrive in Toila. At first everything is lighthearted and fun. However, the tone quickly changes when Drina, who has been trying to get information from an experienced witch, is attacked by a mob. Plain Kate and Taggle are able to save Drina, but this action does not absolve Plain Kate for her responsibility in Drina's attack.

Plain Kate is desperately sad about what happened to her friend. Now Plain Kate not only has to worry about what happens to her when her shadow is gone, which it now is, but she has to worry about the Roamers throwing her out. When Wen becomes ill, Plain Kate is the first one the Roamers blame, especially Stivo who blames Plain Kate for his daughter's injuries. Therefore, it is not a big surprise when, upon seeing she has no shadow, the Roamers place Plain Kate in a cage. Plain Kate knows that she will more than likely die soon, so she fights to find a way out. In the end, the one man who appeared to be on Plain Kate's side, Behjet, turns on her and tries to burn her alive when his father and his brother are stricken by the mysterious sleeping illness.

Plain Kate escapes the fire, her worst nightmare, and gets away. However, the reader must wonder now what will happen to Plain Kate. Plain Kate has no where to go and no one to turn to.



# Chapters 10-12

## Chapters 10-12 Summary

Chapter 10. The Punt, the Pool, and the Empty Road. Plain Kate wakes and finds herself on Linay's punt. Plain Kate is shocked and afraid to see Linay again, but too ill to do anything about it. It takes Plain Kate several days to recuperate from her experiences. Finally, Plain Kate goes to speak with Linay. Linay sends Plain Kate to have a bath in a shallow pool where they are tied up. Plain Kate bathes and falls asleep for a time. When she wakes, Plain Kate recalls that she should be frightened of Linay. For this reason, Plain Kate decides to run away. However, as she goes back the way they have come, Plain Kate finds herself in a thick fog. There are no people around, the crops are rotting in the fields, and there are people lying in an unnatural sleep. Plain Kate knows that she and Taggle cannot survive out here alone and they decide to return to Linay.

Chapter 11. A Ghost in the River. Linay complains about Taggle because Taggle does not like him and continuously attempts to bite him. Linay then tells Plain Kate that he needs her help in feeding the dead spirit of his sister. Linay promises that he will set Plain Kate's shadow free when they reach Lov if she will help him. Plain Kate reluctantly agrees. Linay calls to the ghost with his own blood. Plain Kate then offers her slashed wrist. The ghost, or rusalka, takes so much blood that Plain Kate cannot pull away until Taggle comes and pushes her away. While recovering afterward, Plain Kate realizes that there are too many coincidences in their stories. Linay and Drina's uncle are one and the same.

Chapter 12. Fog. The next day, Plain Kate finds proof of who Linay really is. She asks him about Drina and his sister. Linay tells her his sister's name and then apologizes for what he has done and what he will do to Plain Kate. The next day, Plain Kate give her blood freely to the rusalka. Taggle is not happy and berates Linay for this. Linay tells them there is a trick to it and later shows them how he can make a bowl of ice for the blood so that the rusalka cannot drink freely. As time passes, Plain Kate begins to carve a piece of burl she found on the road. Linay asks her about the Roamers, about Drina, showing some affection for his niece.

## Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Plain Kate finds herself with Linay, the witch who took her shadow and caused her these problems in the first place. Linay is a complicated character. On the one hand, he seems to genuinely care for Plain Kate and to be offering her some comfort and care. On the other hand, however, he seems so intent on his plan, whatever it is, with his sister that he does not care who he hurts. This leaves Plain Kate confused and unsure if she can truly trust Linay.



Plain Kate tries to run away, but she discovers that the world behind them has been turned on its heels by some kind of fog and a sleeping illness like the one that took the life of Wen and Stivo. Plain Kate does not understand what is causing this, but suspects it might have something to do with Linay. When Linay calls out to his sister and the white woman appears, it seems certain. However, Plain Kate is weakened by the blood she agrees to give to the white woman, the rusalka, in exchange for getting her shadow back that she stops fighting and gives in to what Linay wants.



# Chapters 13-15

## Chapters 13-15 Summary

Chapter 13. Shadow. Plain Kate witnesses Linay feeding blood to her shadow. After thinking on it for a time, Plain Kate decides to steal her shadow back. However, when she opens the box and her shadow surrounds her, it causes her to go numb and have trouble breathing. Then the light begins to break the shadow apart, causing a similar effect on her. Taggle finally manages to cry tears into the box where the shadow is kept, calling it back inside. This saves Plain Kate's life. Plain Kate wakes later outside where Linay has carried. Linay scolds her for her attempt and warns her it will kill her next time. Later, when Plain Kate asks Linay about the fog, he admits that he has created it.

Chapter 14. Blood and Questions. Saddened by the realization that she has helped Linay kill hundreds, Plain Kate refuses to give her blood that night. Plain Kate tells Linay she will only give blood if he will answer her questions. Linay agrees to one question a night. The first night, Plain Kate asks why he is taking his sister to Lov. Linay tells her it is to seek revenge on those who tried to kill her. The second day, Plain Kate asks how he will avenge his sister's death. Linay tells her he will destroy the city. On the third day, when Plain Kate asks how he will destroy the city, Linay calls the rusalka to him and binds her shadow to it. When he does, the rusalka develops a wing that is dark and everything below it turns to dust. Plain Kate is so shocked by this display that she decides she must run away and find a way to stop Linay.

Chapter 15. The Abandoned Country. Plain Kate walks quickly toward Lov and is saddened that she sees no one on the road. The countryside is abandoned. One day, however, Plain Kate spots a red vardo and a horse on the other side of the river. Plain Kate goes to check it out and finds Drina inside with Behjet, who is suffering the sleep sickness. Plain Kate is angry to see Behjet and considers going on. However, Drina comes outside and tells how she was trying to return to her mother's clan after her father's death and Behjet fell ill. Drina begs Plain Kate to help Behjet. Plain Kate takes a look at him, but is unable to wake him. Later, Plain Kate makes dinner and tells Drina all that has happened. When Drina agrees that Linay must be stopped despite the hope that he can bring back her mother, Plain Kate decides she can trust her. Drina accompanies Plain Kate the rest of the way to Lov. When they arrive, Plain Kate struggles to find a way to stop Linay. Taggle suggests that she kill him in order to reverse the gift that allowed him to take her shadow.

## Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Plain Kate attempts to get her shadow back, but her attempt nearly kills her. Plain Kate has become aware that Linay has caused the fog behind them, and that it is his rusalka that is killing everyone with the sleeping illness. Plain Kate feels guilty because she knows that by giving him her shadow and by feeding the rusalka her blood she has



helped him in these murders. Plain Kate falls into something of a depression, resolved to die. However, when she learns that Linay plans to destroy a whole city and all who live in it, she knows she must stop him.

Plain Kate runs away and finds Drina quite by accident. Plain Kate tells Drina everything that has happened and is pleased to discover that Drina is willing to help. Plain Kate is not sure she can trust Drina at first because of what Behjet did, but she finally decides that Drina has always been her friend and nothing has changed that. For this reason, Plain Kate takes Drina with her to Lov where they try to decide how best to stop Linay. However, neither Drina nor Plain Kate fully understand the magic that Linay is using, so they are not sure what they should do short of killing the cat.



# Chapters 16-19

## Chapters 16-19 Summary

Chapter 16. The Peace of Lov. Plain Kate refuses to kill Taggle. Then Taggle suggests they kill Linay. Plain Kate and Drina agree that they should turn in Linay to the guards and let them burn him at the stake. The next day, Plain Kate, Taggle, and Drina make their way to the city gates. The gates are crowded by people who have been locked outside. Plain Kate and Drina push their way through the crowd in an attempt to get to the gates. Then Taggle attacks a merchant dressed in white and Plain Kate is shocked to see it is Linay. A short time later, a storm blows up behind them. Linay announces that this is the destruction of Lov and that he is a witch. It turns out that burning at the stake is part of Linay's plan. When Linay is arrested, Plain Kate insists on going into the city and finding a way to prevent his burning.

Chapter 17. The Stone City. Plain Kate, Taggle, and Drina manage to get inside the city gates in the confusion of Linay's arrest. Plain Kate orders Taggle to help them find a way to the center of town where Linay will be kept. Linay is tortured all night and Plain Kate can hear his cries where she is hiding on a building's roof. In the morning, Plain Kate, Drina, and Taggle make their way to the town square to await Linay's arrival at the stone pillar where he will be burned. Still unsure what she will do, Plain Kate watches as Linay is brought out and secured to the pillar. Linay fights the guard, suffocating him with ice and then frightens the rest of the people away with a hail of ice. Linay then takes a sword from a guard and cuts himself.

Chapter 18. An Exchange of Gifts. Plain Kate confronts Linay. She shows him the carving she has made of his sister, Lenore. Plain Kate insists on knowing if this is what Lenore would want. Linay lies and it causes him to injure himself. Linay, burned and injured, falls when Plain Kate cuts him free. Plain Kate continues to ask him to stop the rusalka. However, it is clear he will not. Taggle comes up and tells Plain Kate there is only one way to stop it. Taggle impales himself on Plain Kate's knife. As Taggle dies, the rusalka becomes a living woman. Lenore kneels beside Linay and speaks to him as he dies. Drina then makes Lenore and Plain Kate follow her out of the city.

Chapter 19. The Names of the Dead. Behjet is alive and well when they return to the vardo. Plain Kate becomes angry, asking why he is still alive when all she loves is dead. Plain Kate then locks herself in the vardo with Taggle where she combs his hair and grieves his death. They agree to bury him in a meadow not far away. When the grave is ready, Lenore comes to Plain Kate and apologizes for all that has happened. Then Taggle suddenly comes back to life. Lenore tells Plain Kate that Linay's sacrifice could not last for long and that she does not deserve to be there. Lenore warns Plain Kate that Taggle's voice will soon disappear now that Plain Kate has her voice back. When Lenore is gone, Drina heals the scars from the fire on Plain Kate's face with the spells her mother taught her. Plain Kate then returns to Linay's punt to retrieve the knife he



gave her. When she arrives, Plain Kate discovers that Linay has left her a bag of money in hopes that she would live.

## Chapters 16-19 Analysis

Plain Kate struggles to find a way to stop Linay. The only way they can think of is to kill him. To fulfill this, Plain Kate and Drina go to the city to tell the guard about him, but when they arrive, Linay does it for them. It turns out that in order to make the shadow stick to the rusalka, Linay must sacrifice himself. Plain Kate cannot stand the idea of this and she tries to stop him. As Plain Kate fights for Linay, the reader can see that Linay is only acting out of grief, a grief that Plain Kate understands only too well. For this reason, the reader can finally see the great affection Linay and Plain Kate have for one another. Maybe under other circumstances their lives would have been different.

Plain Kate still does not know what to do to stop Linay, and she even questions her desire to stop him. However, Taggle knows what to do and he does it for Plain Kate. However, Plain Kate is overwhelmed by the loss of Taggle. Plain Kate is devastated even as Drina has her mother back. However, Linay's spell cannot last for long because he was a witch and his sacrifice is not enough to sustain Lenore's life. For this reason, Lenore gives Plain Kate her cat back and teaches her daughter to be a healer. Drina and Plain Kate are left to live full, long lives with the knowledge and love Lenore and Linay leave behind.





# Characters

## Plain Kate

Plain Kate is an orphan girl who is accused of being a witch because of her great ability with a carving knife. After the death of her father, Plain Kate finds herself alone and forced to care for herself, often starving because of her inability to make money from her craft because she is not part of the guild. When a stranger comes to town, Plain Kate presents a perfect target for his desire to steal a shadow.

The stranger, Linay, tells Plain Kate that he wants her shadow and he will give her her heart's desire in exchange. Plain Kate turns him down, but when Linay's magic causes the town to be afraid of her as a witch, she needs to leave town. For this reason, Plain Kate agrees to give Linay her shadow in exchange for some things she needs to travel with. Not only is Linay generous in the items he gives to her, but he also gives her her heart's desire: a talking cat.

Plain Kate joins a group of Roamers, only to have them turn on her when one of their own is attacked for being a witch while trying to get information on Plain Kate's behalf. Plain Kate finds herself with Linay again. However, Plain Kate discovers that Linay is responsible for the deaths of hundreds in an attempt to bring his sister back from the dead. Plain Kate wants to stop him, but ends up forced to sacrifice the only thing she has left, her cat.

## Piotr Carver

Piotr Carver is Plain Kate's father. Piotr is a good man who teaches his daughter to be a great carver. However, when the witch's fever comes, Piotr dies, leaving his daughter unapprenticed in the carving art and unable to afford to have herself apprenticed. Plain Kate becomes homeless and desperate after the death of her father.

## Linay

Linay is a witch who is part of the Roamers. Linay's twin sister was burned and drowned because she was a witch. Linay sees her body and realizes that something is wrong with her. Linay studies black magic to find a way to bring his sister back. Linay learns that if his sister's rusalka, her river ghost form, can exact vengeance on those responsible for her death she will return to her former form. Linay risks everything to do this.

When Linay arrives in Plain Kate's town, he sees her as the perfect victim to steal a shadow from. Linay successfully tricks Plain Kate into agreeing to give him her shadow. However, the loss of her shadow causes trouble for Plain Kate and she ends up back in Linay's care. When Plain Kate learns what Linay is up to, she tries to stop him but she



does not know how. In the end, Linay dies to save his sister despite the affection he has developed for Plain Kate.

## Drina

Drina is Linay's niece. Drina is part of the Roamers' clan that Plain Kate joins when Linay's actions force her to leave her hometown. Drina and Plain Kate become quick friends because they are close in age and they have both suffered the recent loss of a parent. When Plain Kate tells Drina about the loss of her shadow, Drina offers to help her with the little she has learned from her mother's ability to heal. However, helping Plain Kate causes Drina to be attacked. Drina bares no ill-will, however, and later helps Plain Kate stop Linay.

## Daj

Daj is the elder woman in the Roamers' clan that Plain Kate joins. Daj is Roamer language for mother. Daj quickly accepts Plain Kate into the clan and treats her like a daughter. However, when Wen, Daj's husband, becomes ill and Plain Kate is blamed for it, Daj is one of the first to turn on her.

## Behjet

Behjet is a member of the Roamers' clan. Behjet is Daj's son and Stivo's twin brother. Behjet is a kind and gentle man who is responsible for introducing Plain Kate to Daj. Plain Kate trusts Behjet, but fails to tell him the truth after Drina is attacked, a moment that might have changed what would happen next. When Stivo is struck ill and Wen dies, Behjet turns his grief on Plain Kate and tries to burn her alive inside a bear cage.

## Stivo

Stivo is Behjet's twin brother and Daj's son. Stivo is also Drina's father. Stivo warns Plain Kate not to cause trouble for Drina, therefore when Drina is attacked while acting on Plain Kate's behalf, he is the first to turn on her. When Stivo learns that Taggle can talk, he becomes even more convinced of Plain Kate's evil.

## Lenore

Lenore is Drina's mother and Linay's twin. Lenore was killed during the skara rok because she was a witch. The people of Lov tried to burn Lenore, but somehow she got away only to drown in the canal. This caused Lenore's spirit to become a rusalka, an evil river spirit. Linay learns how to free Lenore from this form by seeking revenge for her death. However, when Lenore returns to her human form, it is only for a brief time.



## Rye Baro

Rye Baro is the leader of the Roamers' clan that Plain Kate joins. Rye Baro has the final word over whether or not Plain Kate will be allowed to remain with the Roamers. When he sees that Plain Kate does not have a shadow, Rye Baro orders her locked in a bear cage until a decision can be made about what to do with her.

## Taggle

Taggle is Plain Kate's cat. Taggle is a normal cat at the beginning of the novel. However, when Linay grants Plain Kate her heart's desire in exchange for her shadow, her heart's desire is to have someone who will always be with her. This becomes Taggle. Taggle begins to speak and he is fiercely loyal to Plain Kate, doing all he can to protect her, even giving up his own life.



## Objects/Places

### Cat Objarka

Plain Kate made a cat objarka for herself out of a hard piece of walnut. Plain Kate's father called it her masterpiece.

### Lenore Carving

Plain Kate makes a carving of Lenore's face that she burns in an attempt to get Linay to stop the rusalka in Lov.

### Ojarka

An objarka is a charm that is meant to keep bad luck away. Plain Kate is an expert at carving such items and selling these is how she survives after her father's death.

### Stall

After her father's death, Plain Kate lives in her father's carver's stall. This stall is later axed while she is sleeping in the bottom drawer.

### Box

Linay made a box out of the remnants of Piotr Carver's stall to keep Plain Kate's shadow inside.

### Vardo

Vardo is the name of the wagons the Roamers travel in and live in.

### Punt

A punt is the name of the boat that Linay travels on.

### Roamers

Roamers are groups of misfits who travel from town to town to sell their wares. Like gypsies, when something bad happens in a city it is the Roamers they accuse, often burning them for witches.



## **Rusalka**

A rusalka is a river spirit that comes into being when a witch is drowned. Lenore becomes a rusalka after her death, and Linay fights to return her to her human form.

## **Samilae**

Samilae is the name of the town where Plain Kate is born and raised.

## **Toila**

Toila is the name of the town where Plain Kate is to prove her worth to the Roamers by selling her objarka. Toila is also where Drina is attacked by a mob.

## **Lov**

Lov is the name of the town where Lenore was killed and where Linay plans on getting revenge, returning Lenore to her human form.



# Themes

## Grief

Grief is a major theme of this novel for multiple reasons. The first reason for the theme of grief is because of Plain Kate's loss of her father. Plain Kate has no other family than her father. When her father dies, Plain Kate is not only devastated over this loss, but she finds she has nowhere to go and no one to care for her. This situation only adds to Plain Kate's overwhelming grief.

Grief is something that Plain Kate and Drina have in common. Plain Kate and Drina lost their parents at the same time and now continue to live with the struggle of everyday life without an important person guiding their way. This helps bond the girls in a special way. Grief also impacts Stivo, Drina's father, who continues to grieve over the death of his wife. It is also grief over the death of his father and brother that cause Behjet to try to burn Plain Kate to death.

The largest example of grief in this novel, however, is that of Linay. When Lenore is burned and then drowned, Linay is devastated. When he sees his sister's body, Linay is convinced that there is something unnatural about her death. Linay eventually discovers that his sister has become a rusalka. Linay cannot allow this to happen, cannot allow his beloved sister to suffer in such a condition. For this reason, Linay learns black magic and does all he can to save his sister, spurred on by grief.

## Loneliness

Loneliness is a theme of this novel because it is a major theme of Plain Kate's existence in the days after her father's death. Plain Kate has never had any friends because of the belief that her skill with carving makes her a witch. Therefore, when her father dies, Plain Kate has no one to turn to, no one to care for her. Plain Kate lives such a lonely life that her only friend is a cat.

As the novel continues, Plain Kate is offered her heart's desire, which turns out to have a single person to speak to who will never leave her. This turns out to be her cat, Taggle. Taggle is given the ability to speak to fulfill Plain Kate's desire. Plain Kate's loneliness was overwhelming before meeting Linay, before joining the Roamers, before becoming part of a family. For this reason, loneliness is an important theme of the novel.

## Family

Family is a theme of this novel because to Plain Kate, being a part of a family is the most important thing in the world. Plain Kate has never really known a family. Plain Kate's mother died when she was born and her father was all she had until he died. Therefore, when Plain Kate joins the Roamers, and is treated like family, she is

overwhelmed by their acceptance and kindness. The Roamers clan is one big family, no matter how each person is related. Plain Kate is a terribly lonely person who needs to feel accepted. This group's acceptance is all she wants and she fights hard for it and is saddened when she loses it.

At the same time, family is of utmost importance to Linay. Lenore is his sister, his closest relative. When Lenore becomes a rusalka, Linay is willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save hers. If not for Lenore, Linay would not have started down the path that led him to Plain Kate and caused him to change her life. For these reasons, family is an important theme of the novel.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person limited. The narration remains with Plain Kate throughout the novel, showing the story through her eyes. However, the point of view is limited because it remains with Plain Kate throughout and because there are occasional examples of the authorial voice, suggesting that Plain Kate is not the narrator, but the author is.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because it builds an intimate relationship between the main character and the reader. This point of view is also important because it keeps the reader focused on the main character alone, without muddying the narration with the emotions and thoughts of other characters. This point of view tells a strong story without confusing the reader, therefore it works well with the plot.

## Setting

The novel is set in a time period sometime centuries in the past in a place that has the feel of a European location. The time period is one in which witches are still burned at the stake when bad things happen and superstition is still more important than religion.

The setting of this novel is important to the overall plot of the novel because the setting itself helps set up part of the conflict that propels the plot. If not for the fact that witches are still burned in the world where Plain Kate lives, she would not have a reason to be afraid for her life in the small town where she lives. It is this fear that Linay plays off of in his attempts to take her shadow. It also because of the burning of witches that Linay's sister was killed and he finds himself in need of a shadow. For these reasons, the setting of the novel is very important to the overall plot of the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel is simple in most of its language, but there are some words in the novel that are foreign unfamiliar to most readers. These words are clearly explained in the text in most cases.

The language of the novel reflects the education and age of the main character. Most of the language is fairly simple, lacking in the complicated language a more educated person might use. The novel is set in a European country and is filled with all kinds of different characters, therefore there are foreign words used in the novel that could cause some confusion to the reader. However, these words are explained in the text and present little trouble. For these reasons, the language of this novel fits the overall plot of the novel.



## Structure

The novel is divided into nineteen chapters, each with its own specific title. The chapters are all fairly long, often spanning over weeks or months of time. The story is told both in narration and dialogue, showing a story as well as telling it.

The story contains one main plot and several sub plots. The main plot follows Plain Kate as she is first tricked into giving up her shadow and later forced to stop the use of her shadow to destroy an entire town. A subplot of this novel deals with Plain Kate's relationship with her cat. Another subplot deals with Plain Kate's relationship with various characters in the novel, including Linay and Drina. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



## Quotes

"A long time ago, in a market town by a looping river, there lived an orphan girl called Plain Kate." Chapter 1, pg. 6

"The stranger was white. His hair was white-gray like bleached wood, his eyes white-silver like tin, his skin was white as if he were a day dead." Chapter 2, pg. 15

"Roamers were wanderers; they lived in tents and traveled from town to town, trading, singing for supper, telling fortunes. Begging, sometimes. Stealing, people said." Chapter 3, pg. 20

"Despite what Drina said, it turned out you could go the Roamer way without riding. Mostly, you walked." Chapter 5, pg. 45

"So much had happened, but no time had passed." Chapter 7, pg. 78

"Rye Baro looked at her, long and careful. 'Child,' he said, 'you have no shadow.'" Chapter 8, pg. 90

"She rocked like a cradle. There was a chuck, chuck like a dove or waves on a dock. Plain Kate woke." Chapter 10, pg. 99

"The next day, Plain Kate looked for it and saw it: the hole in Linay's shadow." Chapter 12, pg. 115

"There was nothing human in her face, nothing lovely—just a bottomless avidity." Chapter 14, pg. 130

"Linay, who could move in a blink, who had struck Taggle down with an uplifted finger." Chapter 16, pg. 147

"And Taggle, who was beautiful, who had never misjudged a jump in his life, leapt toward her with his forelegs outflung. He landed clean on the blade." Chapter 18, pg. 165

"Something flashed through her, surprising her with a string of tears. She thought it was bewilderment, anger, fear—before she recognized it: grief." Chapter 19, pg. 176

## Topics for Discussion

Who is Plain Kate? Why is she called Plain Kate? What is Plain Kate's profession? What causes Plain Kate to be left to fend for herself at such a young age? Why do many people consider Plain Kate a witch? Is she? Why does Plain Kate take in three cats? Who is Taggle? How does Taggle become such an important part of Plain Kate's life?

Who is Linay? What does Linay want from Plain Kate? For what reason? How does Plain Kate respond to Linay's request? Why does Plain Kate eventually allow Linay to take what he wants? What does Linay give Plain Kate in return for her gift to him? How does this gift change Plain Kate's life?

Who are the Roamers? Why does Plain Kate begin traveling with the Roamers? Where do they go? Why does Plain Kate need to leave her home? Who is Drina? How do Plain Kate and Drina become friends? What is similar about their lives? What is different? How does Plain Kate initially feel about Drina? How does this change?

Who is Behjet? What does Plain Kate think of him when they first meet? How does Behjet treat Plain Kate? How does Plain Kate respond to this treatment? Why does Plain Kate not tell Behjet the truth about Drina's attack when he asks? What is Plain Kate afraid of? How does Behjet react when he thinks Plain Kate is responsible for the death of his brother and father? Why? How does Plain Kate respond to the fact that Behjet survives the ordeal that takes so many lives? Is this a fair reaction on her part?

Discuss the rusalka. What is it? Where did it come from? What does it do? Why does it feed on blood? Who feeds it? For what reason? Why does Linay want it to follow him? Where is he taking it? For what purpose? Why does Plain Kate help Linay with this creature? To what result? What happens when Linay tries to free the rusalka?

Discuss the relationship between Plain Kate and Linay. How do they feel about one another? Why does Plain Kate waffle between trust and distrust of Linay? How does Linay feel about Plain Kate? How does Linay's plan impact Plain Kate? What does Plain Kate find after Linay dies? What does this say to Plain Kate about Linay's feelings for her?

Who is Lenore? What happened to her? Why does Linay fight to free her spirit? What does Linay owe her? How does Linay plan to free her? Who was Lenore's husband? Her child? How do these people come into Plain Kate's life? Why does Plain Kate want to stop Linay from helping Lenore? What happens in the end? How does Lenore help Plain Kate?