

Class 95. 9 – 11 Years. Prose Reading

A Kind of Spark by Elle McNicoll

Addie is campaigning for a memorial in memory of the witch trials that took place centuries ago in her Scottish hometown. In this section, Addie speaks to the village about her connection to the witches, and what they can do to remember them.

‘Centuries ago, someone like me could have been accused of being a witch. Just for being different. I sometimes don’t know how to read people or work out how they are feeling. This can lead to misunderstandings. Sometime my face doesn’t show how happy I really am. I might not seem that approachable. And I’m very easy to bully. Sometimes I even start to believe what the bullies are saying.’

I look at my hand. At Maggie’s name.

‘My sister Keedie is autistic, too. And she made friends with another autistic girl at her appointments. Her name was Bonnie. But, after Bonnie moved away, she couldn’t cope anymore. With school, with her anxiety. So she got put away. By people who didn’t understand her needs. No matter how much she tells them she needs to leave, they won’t let her. They don’t trust her, they don’t think she knows herself.’

I sniff, feeling troubled as I remember Bonnie. The bright, laughing girl who had bad meltdowns but was never bad.

‘If someone told me that I was a witch for long enough, I might have started to believe them. It seems easier sometimes, doesn’t it? To believe the bad things instead of the good.’

I lose my place for a moment and look out at the faces. I don’t know if it’s me, but they seem to be really listening.

‘When I heard what was done to these women, right here in Juniper, it hurt my heart. That they were killed merely for being different or weird, and everyone just let it happen and forgot.’

I see Mr Macintosh look down at his feet out of the corner of my eye.

‘I don’t want to forget them. I want us to have a plaque, something small, dedicated to their memory. Our apology.’

This was supposed to be the end of the speech but I decide to say one last thing.

‘I think different is good. As long as you’re not hurting anyone. We need all kinds of difference in the world. And I know some people think that I’ve been put up to all this. All I can say is, if you believe that, you probably don’t know any autistic girls.’

People laugh