



Karen Rivers

on writing

THE GIRL IN THE WELL IS ME

One day, my son—who was nine at the time—came home from his weekend with his dad very upset. He had found out, he said, that his dad had been in jail and now he couldn't love him anymore. It was very black-and-white to him. If his dad had been in jail, that meant he was a bad guy and you can't love a bad guy. Period.

It was a misunderstanding. (His dad had been in a jail once, visiting someone; he wasn't actually a convicted criminal.) But there was something about my son's absolute devastation in that moment that really struck me, as well as the fact that he was so certain that love was no longer an option. And this was his dad, whom he loved so much.

I wanted to explore those absolute feelings, to find a character whose dad could let them down in this way, and see what she did with that, to see if she could find a path back to love again.

Around this same time came the anniversary of Baby Jessica being rescued from the well, an event I remembered vividly from my childhood. It happened pre-internet, yet Jessica's story was everywhere, on the news every night and in the paper every day. The stories included diagrams of how the well would be approached to get Baby Jessica out with the least danger. I'd forgotten how long she was in there, but in my memory, it was several days at least. It was all anyone could



Kelley Goodwin

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has written novels for adult, middle-grade, and young adult audiences. Her books have been nominated for a wide range of literary awards and have been published in multiple languages. When she's not writing, reading, or visiting schools, she can usually be found hiking in the forest that flourishes behind her tiny old house in Victoria, British Columbia, where she lives with her two kids, two dogs, two birds, and two fish.

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AUTHOR INSIGHTS

talk about at the time. I suppose it captured our imaginations because it was so singularly terrifying. After all, anyone could fall into a well. It's one of those accidents that seems so entirely random.

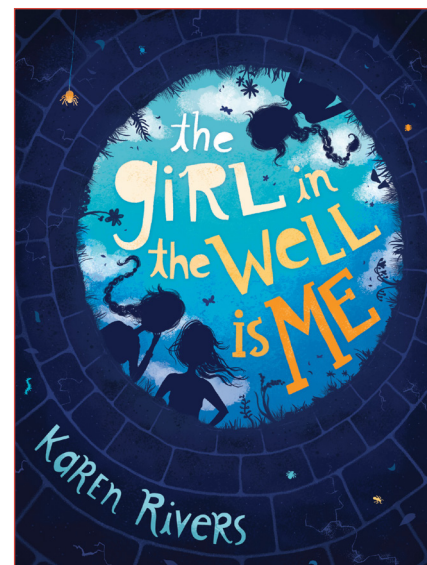
I am always braiding together stories to turn them into something more, so I wove the idea of a girl falling into a well with the “what if your dad is a bad guy?” scenario, and suddenly, there was Kammie. I saw her in her orange bedroom with all of her cats and her pop star posters. I saw her down the well and desperate to talk about how hard it was to start a whole new life in a whole new place in a whole new set of circumstances—in addition to being stuck in a well. I was actually in the middle of writing something else at the time and I thought, “Oh, I'll just sketch this idea out and then finish up what I'm doing.” And I ended up taking about a month and writing the entire book from beginning to end, straight through. I thought about nothing else. My kids thought I was losing my mind, but this story and this character became so real to me so quickly that I had to get it down while it was fresh and clear. I was writing snippets on my iPhone in the grocery store. I was saying, “When we get home, remind me that I said ‘the Well Book needs zombie goats,’ OK?”

It's absolutely the most fun I've ever had writing a book. Honestly, not all books are a pleasure to write 100 percent of the time. Usually there's a part where they get hard, or a time when you end up deleting as much as you write, but there wasn't a single second when I was writing this book that I had doubts about it or that I had the feeling, “Uh-oh, what if this is terrible?” I knew it was unusual. Writing it became a gift to myself. It was very liberating. And I love this book all the more for it. I miss writing it, actually.

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