



★ **The Beginning Woods**

Malcolm McNeill

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“The Vanishings went unwitnessed—until the telltale puddle of clothing was found there was no reason to suppose a Vanishing had happened at all.” In Malcolm McNeill’s *The Beginning Woods*, adults are disappearing all over the globe, and an international conclave of scientists housed in Paris’s Trocadero Palace continues to work against increasingly unsurmountable odds. As it happens, one particularly spooky baby deposited at London’s Surbiton Center for Orphaned and Abandoned Babies started the Vanishings twelve years ago, although no one—not even that former baby—knows that secret.

When a Kobold arrived at the orphanage, all sharp teeth and gangly limbs, everyone knew something was wrong. Told day after day that nobody wanted him, no one was more surprised than the Kobold himself when the Mulgans—jovial, hook-handed Forbes and meek Alice—decided to adopt him. Thus began the life of Max Mulgan, a suburban Londoner and his adopted parents’ last, best dream.

However, Max can’t stop dreaming about his “forever parents.” He immerses himself in storybooks, searching for any clue about the people he’s convinced he really belongs to—that is, until books and many other acts of imagination are outlawed in an attempt to end the Vanishings. But it’s too late for Max. In the grip of his own imagination, he searches for the beginning of his own story in a quest that will take him away from the world he’s known and deep into the Beginning Woods.

Unafraid to grapple with complexity, *The Beginning Woods* changes the geography of fairies back into something as fundamental and frightening as human nature itself. Filled with gorgeous imagery and memorable prose, McNeill’s middle grade novel will break hearts and bind them back together with a happy ending. This is a love letter to the power of imagination.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March/April 2018)

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