

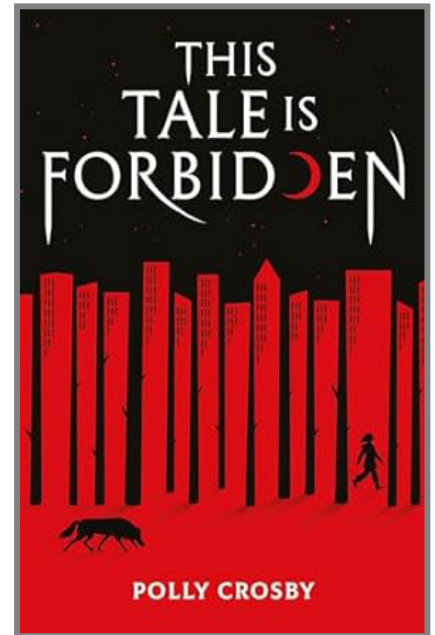
# This Tale is Forbidden

AUTHOR  
**POLLY CROSBY**

SCIS: 5478459

ISBN: 9780702325601

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary



## SYNOPSIS

Control the story, control the world . . .

Nesta believes in the fairy tales—the true stories of powerful magical women who shaped and ruled the world decades ago. But the world has changed since then, and now, she is forbidden from wandering too far from the isolated woodland cottage where she lives with her grandmother.

Nesta longs more than anything to see the city that lies beyond the forest, and when her grandmother is abducted, she gets her chance, journeying there in the hope of rescuing her.

But once there, she is horrified to see her grandmother’s warnings were true: girls are forced to wear certain clothes and punished if they don’t behave in certain ways. The city’s Authorities have rewritten history, replacing the fairytale heroines with weak girls who must rely on men. Worse still—everyone believes this is how the world has always been.

Only Nesta knows the truth. But truth is a dangerous thing, and suddenly she finds herself a target. Can she evade the Authorities long enough to rescue her grandmother and liberate everyone else, bringing magic back into the world?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Polly Crosby grew up on the Suffolk coast, and now lives with her husband and son in the heart of Norfolk.

Polly writes gothic historical mysteries for adults. Her first novel for young adults—*This Tale is Forbidden*—is a dystopian fractured fairytale with hints of the Brother’s Grimm and *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

In 2018, Polly won Curtis Brown Creative’s Yesterday Scholarship, which enabled her to finish her debut novel, *The Illustrated Child*.

Later the same year, she was awarded runner-up in the Bridport Prize’s Peggy Chapman Andrews Award for a First Novel. Polly received the Annabel Abbs Creative Writing Scholarship at the University of East Anglia.

Polly can be found on Twitter, Instagram & Tiktok as [@WriterPolly](#).

**STUDY NOTES**

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - What can you see happening on the cover of this book?
  - What genre do you predict this book to be, and why do you think this?
  - Who do you think is likely to be the protagonist of this novel? Hypothesise as to some of the challenges that they might be likely to have to overcome.
  - When and where do you think that this novel might be set? What makes you think this?
  - After reading the back of the book, do you want to change your answers to any of the previous questions? If so, why and in what way?
- The people in the city had to own a copy of the sanitised fairy tale book, and it was the only book that they were allowed to own. This means that any time that they might want to read a story, they had exactly one book to choose a story from. If you were only allowed to own and read one book for the rest of your life, which book would you choose, and why? Write a brief summary of the book you would choose, and a short explanation of the reasons why you chose it over all other books.
- Part of the way that Bellwether managed to twist the thinking of the people in the city, is by rewriting traditional fairy tales to cast all the women and girls in helpless and subordinate roles. Many of the fairy tales which we have in our world also feature this stereotyping of girls and women as weak and needing to be rescued by a man or boy. Choose one of the fairy tales you know that features a girl or woman who needs to be rescued from her fate, and do the opposite of what Bellwether did. Rewrite your chosen fairy tale into a completely different version where a female main character is shown as strong, courageous, taking charge of her own destiny and worthy of respect.
- Why do you think that Bellwether both feared and coveted the power of the clamouring? Which do you think was uppermost in his mind, fear or covetousness, and why do you think this? Write an analysis of Bellwether's attitude to the clamouring, including evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- When Nesta first walks into the city, she finds the environment to be so alien to anything that she has ever experienced before, that she struggles to make sense of what she is seeing. What techniques does the author use to help the reader understand Nesta's experience? How do they convey her utter confusion and misunderstandings to the reader, while maintaining the narrative from Nesta's viewpoint? As a class, reread the passages where Nesta first enters the city, and attempt to identify the variety of literary techniques which the author has employed.
  - Individually, write a fictional scene of your own from the point of view of someone entering an environment which is utterly strange to them. Use at least one of the literary techniques identified during your class discussion. After completing your task, write a brief analysis of what you found difficult, what you found easy, and how well you think you did.
- How does Nesta's attitude towards the wolves change over the course of the novel, and why does it do so? Write an analysis of her changing perspective regarding the wolves, and the different factors that you can see contributing to this. Include in your analysis evidence from the text to support your assertions. Be sure to include consideration of the difference between lived experience, and reported facts in your analysis.
- Rewrite the courtroom scene from the point of view of Kit.
- If you were to find a piece of Trove lying around in a second hand shop, what would you like it to be? Write a description of your imagined piece of Trove, and the story that you would love to hear it tell.
- When Nesta finally comprehends the reality of life in Bellwether's city, she quickly realises that women and girls are oppressed, and treated as subordinate and lesser. On the other hand, the overwhelming narrative that kind and well-meaning people such as Kit are exposed to, and believe, is that women and girls are vulnerable, fragile, and in need of protection, and that the oppressive restrictions are all designed to protect them. As a class, discuss these two very different attitudes. Some things to consider in the course of your discussion might be:
  - Are these two viewpoints a matter of reframing the same considerations and simply seeing them through a different lens?
  - Can the two different attitudes, in your opinion, be seen as two sides of the same coin?
  - Who do you think should be in charge of deciding what women and girls need? Why do you think this?

- Who decides in the city what is in the best interests of women and girls? How do they decide this?
- Can you think of any analogous situations/nations/cultures in reality, where women are limited and restricted in a similar way?
- No-one would argue that a toddler should be allowed to play in traffic, similarly no-one would argue that an adult should not be allowed to cross the road on their own. Where does the line between protection and repression lie, and how can we differentiate between the two?
- Did the ending of the novel surprise you, or had you predicted that this is how it would finish?
- What do you think is most likely to happen in any sequel to this novel? What would you like to see happen in another novel set in this same universe?
- How does Nesta's universe differ from ours, and in what ways is it similar?
- Write brief character outlines of Nesta, Grandma, Bellwether, Kit and Oberon.
  - In small groups discuss your outlines, and use the group's feedback to help you refine and improve your outlines.
  - Individually, use your outlines to help you write a character description of one of these characters. How does the author develop them over the course of the novel? Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.