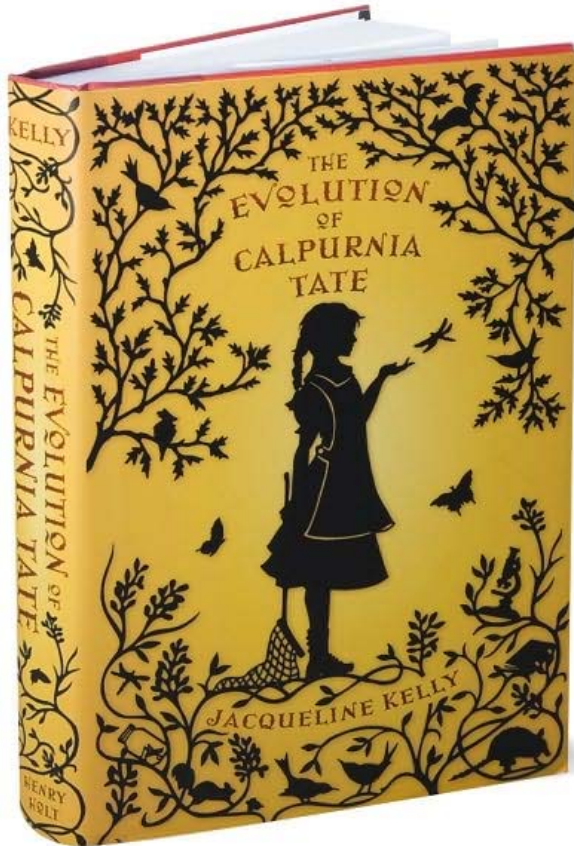


# Evolution of Calpurnia Tate

by Jacqueline Kelly

Reviewed by Maya Borhani – 2/8/2010



Strictly speaking, this book was filed in the Children's section; but for a young adult read, or for those children-at-heart who love tales of intrepid girls and the natural world, I couldn't recommend it more highly.

This captivating tale of "almost twelve-years-old" Calpurnia Tate builds on the unique relationship between Calpurnia and her grandfather (whom six brothers barely know). It's also the tale of a girl on the brink of childhood's end, and the unique perspective that this offers: not yet an adult, not yet a woman, she is yet uniquely positioned to observe the changes in herself, her family, and in the world at large at the turn of the (20th) century.

Set in 1899, the book unfolds the evolution of Calpurnia during the summer before her 12th birthday. She

discovers her grandfather, who has previously seemed inaccessible and distant, as an ally and guide on her journey of scientific discovery. At his side, she discovers the wonders of the natural world, as well as becoming a fan and student of Mr. Charles Darwin. Each chapter begins with a quote from *The Origin of Species*, offered as an opening peek into the social and "evolutionary" issues swarming in the sultry summer heat around her. In addition to discovering an entirely new species together and that Grandfather actually owns a copy of Darwin's already infamous *The Origin of Species* which she alone is allowed to borrow, Calpurnia finds out what it is to grow up in a changing world where women can begin to choose their own destinies.

The book's strength, and unavoidable appeal, is in the voice of the 12 year old witnessing her world honestly, with open eyes, and finding her place in it. Heartwarming, realistic, and deeply funny in the way only a 12-year-old could posit, this is a rollicking and satisfying read. P.S. The author of this book, Jacqueline Kelly, is a lawyer and a medical doctor - and now the author of one very fine children's book. Overachiever!

~ Maya Borhani

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