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Lies, Knives, And Girls In Red Dresses



Synopsis

Writing in free verse honed to a wicked edge, the incomparable Ron Koertge brings dark and contemporary humor to twenty iconic fairy tales. Once upon a time, there was a strung-out match girl who sold CDs to stoners. Twelve impetuous sisters escaped King Daddy's clutches to jiggle and cavort and wear out their shoes. A fickle Thumbelina searched for a tiny husband, leaving bodies in her wake. And Little Red Riding Hood confessed that she kind of wanted to know what it's like to be swallowed whole. From bloodied and blinded stepsisters (they were duped) to a chopped-off finger flying into a heroine's cleavage, this is fairy tale world turned upside down. Ron Koertge knows what really happened to all those wolves and maidens, ogres and orphans, kings and piglets, and he knows about the Ever After. So come closer " he wants to whisper in your ear.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Written in free verse, this macabre collection of poems and creepy illustrations includes twenty-three retellings of classic fairy tales. Featured tales range from "Cinderella," told from the perspective of the stepsisters, "Hansel and Gretel," who want revenge against the father that allowed them to be abandoned in the woods, and a monologue from "Red Riding Hood" who is relaying what happened to her mother once she is home safe from Grandma's house. Seasoned young adult author and poet Ron Koertge delivers a chilling set of retold fairy tales in *Lies, Knives and Girls in Red Dresses*. The collection is brief and can easily be read in one sitting, although many readers might want to go through some of the chapters twice so as not to miss any gruesome details. In terms of enjoyment,

some of the tales fare better than others. Although the book is marketed for the young adult audience, only some of Koertge's retellings will appeal to teen readers. Teens will likely enjoy tales like "Red Riding Hood, Home at Last, Tells Her Mother What Happened," "Hansel and Gretel," and "Memoirs of the Beast," all grim but witty retellings of stories that younger readers will undoubtedly be familiar with. Other chapters, such as "Godfather Death," "The Little Match Girl" and "The Robber Bridegroom" are taken from tales that aren't as well-known, and are far more grisly, making them less likely to resonate with the young adult audience. In fact, when factors like language, characterization and imagery are taken into account, this collection seems more appropriate for an adult audience. At most, it will entertain very sophisticated teen readers who will understand all the nuances in each retelling and be familiar with the original tales they are derived from.

When I came across this one in my preparations for Fairy Tale Fortnight, I was immediately struck by the dark and direct tone of the cover, and took it as an indication of the tales found inside. In some ways this is what I got: the retellings are gritty and dark and very pared down, stripped of any residual fairy dust and ball gowns. Koertge plays on the original tales, in all their dark and twisted glory, but he also plays with our Disneyfied modern expectations. But even though Koertge did sort of give me what I was expecting, it somehow managed to not be quite what I wanted. The book is very brief, tackling 23 different tales in less than 100 pages, including illustrations and title pages for each story. This means each story averages about 2 pages of well-spaced text or free-verse, and this means Koertge only has the space of a few blinks of the eye to make an impression with each story - blink and it's over...I will say, I think Koertge certainly tried to create memorable, concrete images that would linger with the reader, plunging straight into the heart of each with a wry, jaded style. There's also a really good mix of well-known and little-known tales, and Koertge changes up the narration slightly in each tale. But even the narration at its most different (like Little Red's vapid prattling) still has a sameness to it. Some readers will appreciate this and feel the sardonic tone running throughout is the thread that holds it all together. Other readers - like myself - will feel that what the book really needs is a shake-up. The stories, different as they are originally, blend one into the next in Koertge's hands, and in the end, I would have been hard-pressed to tell you what happened in which, and how - if at all - the narrators differed.

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