



## Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses

*Ron Koertge , Andrea Dezso (Illustrator)*

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*Yes it's blue and Yes it tickles and Yes  
he's had a lot of wives  
and nobody knows what happened to them*

*but he's fun at the party and omigod  
that castle!*

Once upon a time, a strung-out match girl sold CDs to stoners. Twelve impetuous sisters escaped Daddy's clutches to jiggle and cavort and wear out their shoes. Bluebeard's latest wife discovered she'd married a serial killer. And Little Red Riding Hood confessed that she kind of *wanted* to know what it's like to be swallowed whole.

You see, Ron Koertge knows what really happened to all those wolves and maidens, ogres and orphans, kings and piglets of fairy tales, and he knows about the Ever After. So come closer--he wants to whisper in your ear.

## **Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses Details**

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Author : Ron Koertge , Andrea Dezso (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses for online ebook

### Paperback says

This is a truly original book-of-fairytales rendition. It provides narration for all of the famous (and some not so famous) fairytale characters from legend. They each take a turn telling their story, each example gruesome and completely new. Some of it is in verse, some in documentary-style explanations, others in brief monologues--all are provided with sinister black-and-white illustrations. Koertge keeps the original fairytale themes, gore and all.

I know Ron Koertge through his previous novel "Stoner & Spaz," which is a hysterical but contemporary novel. I did not expect such a startling genre departure for him. I do have to admit, like others have said in reviews before me, that this may not necessarily be a book for teens. Not to say that teens couldn't understand it, because there are many adults I know who wouldn't be able to handle the material. This is one of those books that isn't defined by an age group, but by an interest group; I'm not sure who this book would be for, except fairytale-lovers.

Personal note: "Godfather Death," "Wolf," and "Rapunzel, a Story in Five Parts" are my three favorites.

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### Sesana says

Really uneven. The idea seems to have been to do a series of fairy tale retellings, in free verse. I like that idea, it's why I picked the book up. But the execution varies wildly. Some of the poems are essentially straight retellings, but from a different point of view. The Cinderella poem that opens the book, for example, would only seem novel if you'd never heard about the stepsisters' original fate. There are one or two gems (The Princess and the Pea, for example, which gets into some of the darker implications of the princess's extreme sensitivity) but most of the poems aren't very original, or come off as though they're trying too hard to be.

That said, the art is universally successful. Done entirely in the sort of silhouettes seen on the cover, the art is both gorgeous and very effective. More than once, I felt like the art had done a better job telling the story than the poems had.

I'm curious as to who Koertge thought of as his audience for this, though. It's obviously too mature to be a kids' book. Both YA and adult fantasy are full of truly innovative fairy tale retellings (the various Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling anthologies, for example) so neither teens nor adults are likely to find much new and exciting here, unless they're very new to retold fairy tales. As for me, I just couldn't get into it, beautiful art or no.

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### Dora says

Ron Koertge's free verse writing adds a modern, older audience twist to the usual fairy tales we all know. He includes brief perspectives or versions of Cinderella, the Frog Prince, and as the title would have it, Little Red Riding Hood. I could not help but laugh as I read through the piece titled " Red Riding Hood, Home at Last, Tells her Mother What Happened." In this free verse, the reader comes to know more about Red Riding

Hood and her thoughts behind her actions. She is definitely not a little girl. Her choice of words and intermittent questions is a dead giveaway that this is a teenager/young adult who is not as naive as the audience might think. For example, she begins with:

"So I've got the basket of goodies you gave me for Gram and I'm remembering what you said about the forest but now that I'm, like safe and all, I can tell you I was totally looking forward to that part. With the wolf and all. I'm into danger, okay? What? You said to tell you the truth and be, like, frank."

This is geared for more mature audiences with a different sense of humor. Filled with innuendos and symbols, I would gear it towards a more late high school crowd. Great for comparing other story structures and first hand perspectives within the same tale.

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### **Cassy Skellington says**

I found the art to be the most entertaining part of this book. The fairy tales - not so much.

Parts of them were alright, but most felt either rushed or poorly constructed, plot wise. The author took major poetic license, twisted the stories - which is what I expected - but rather than lending them intrigue or satire, they just were confusing and oh so desperately trying to be controversial or "edgy". You know, if you find incest and copious amounts of profanity to be hip.

In closing, it's a quick read, so if you're looking to boost your book-count for the year, it's easy to get through without resorting to an actual kids book to do so (though, you'd probably be better off). Some of it is laugh-out-loud ridiculous, though, I doubt that was the intended result. Kids should stay away from this, but late teens and adults, read, but with the idea that it's not as promising as it seems, though I'm sure some will still enjoy its absurdity.

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

Interesting collection of fractured fairy and folk tales told in the form of poems. They're all rather dark and grim, and those based on Grimm fairy tales are obviously taken from the original violent and unexpurgated versions. None of the poems really stood out to me, but teens would probably enjoy them.

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### **Kwoomac says**

My first read-through of this modern retelling of many well known fairytales left me a little cold. Okay, they're clever, but maybe a little too clever, too edgy, too precious. So, believe it or not, I decided to give it a second chance. What? I'm sure I've done that once or twice in my life.

So the second time through, the stories sort of grew on me. There were subtleties I missed first time, probably when I was rolling my eyes. I wasn't in love with all the stories and I was confused by the inclusion of the story of Bluebeard. Isn't that a pirate story? The author was inspired by Grimm's fairytales, or more likely responding to the Disneyfication of these tales. They're retold in the current day.

A similar theme runs throughout. It seems "Ever After" might not be such a happy place. The life characters have longed for are not entirely what they'd hoped. What originally appears to be a gift may also be a curse.

The beast in Beauty and the Beast states: *We're happy now. We're very, very happy. But I have to admit there's not much to do in Ever After. It's always sunny and 78 degrees. Every night the fireworks light themselves.*

The prince in Rapunzel: *But sometimes I go to the window instead and close my eyes and Rapunzel says, "Sweetheart, what's wrong?" And, God help me, I'm not sure I even know myself.*

Cinderella's not so innocent and the evil stepsisters may have been misunderstood.

The artwork in the book is wonderful. It is mostly black and white (except for the book cover) paper cutouts. Please note the cover because it's pretty cool. The illustrations are very bold and very graphic. Even without the use of color, you know there's blood and gore.

Which brings me to a final point, who is book written for? Not kids obviously. What doesn't terrify them will go right over their heads. And I think it's a little too mature for preteens. So maybe teens who enjoy graphic novels but are open to other experiences might get a kick out of it.

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### **Nancy says**

Twenty-three very short stories, paired with black silhouette illustrations, come together in this mediocre fractured fairy tale book. I wasn't impressed with the modern retellings, although fairy tales are made to be retold in settings that readers will connect with, and thus learn from. However, I like my fairy tales in the more classic style so talk about CD's, stoners, dialysis, Porsches and America's Funniest Videos turned me off.

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### **Gina says**

To enjoy this book, you probably need two things: a strong gut and a wicked sense of humor. I have both, so almost all of this book was an absolute pleasure for me to read, if only because it was so very darkly amusing. Free verse poetry is my favorite kind of poetry, and every single one is as creative a satire as the last. Things these days are going back to darker and edgier all the time and this does just that to all the favorite fairy tales, but in a way that relates to now--mentions of GPS and iPods are not uncommon between the twisted thoughts of the characters about whether or not they want to be saved or killed ("Bluebeard"). The violence isn't all that graphic (mostly it's just frank; the illustrations are more gasp-worthy than the poems themselves), but if you have a vivid imagination as I do, the strong gut will come in handy. Honestly, I just wanted the theme to "Dexter" the television series playing during my entire reading of it.

As a side note, my very favorites were "The Emperor's New Clothes: An Afterword" and "Red Riding Hood, Home at Last, Tells Her Mother What Happened."

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Written in poetry form, this modern retelling of a classic but disturbing fairytale wasn't really a bad idea, but it just ended up being really lame, like if *Twilight* and a Lifetime movie were blended together. The characters were shallow and boring, and it was hard to relate to them.

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### **Greta is Erikasbuddy says**

I love fairytales.  
I love retellings.  
I love short stories.  
I love free verse.  
I love silhouettes.  
I did not love this book.

I wanted to so badly to dive into this and squee with dark horror delight but it just wasn't for me.

I found the bits to be something I've seen before. And some of this just seemed thrown together. Rushed. That's not saying that it's bad... that's just saying that I'm picky. I just never got that WOW moment.

The pictures throughout the book are very nice.

In my opinion, if you are looking for a short fairytale retelling with a poetic side you should check out *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* by Francesca Lia Block.

I will give you a warning: This book shouldn't be read by young ones that you don't want to hear cussing or sexual references. While I understand this is YA, the cover might make the little ones think it's for them.

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### **Jo says**

*"Do you want to sleep? Find another story teller.  
Do you want to think about the world in a new way?  
Come closer. Closer, please.  
I want to whisper in your ear."*

### **Initial Final Page Thoughts.**

Eh..

### **High Points**

Interesting new perspectives on fairy re-tellings . Great selection of fairy tales- some that I've only heard of in passing. Creepy. Illustrations. The macabre. Who said Ever After has to be happy? Imaginative. Princess in a coma. "Solar panel poetry machine with biceps". Men in tights.

## Low Points.

I think the difficulty with reading and reviewing anthologies of poetry (or short stories, for that matter) is that there will always be a few of them that you don't really like.

The main problem I had with this was that all the poems got a bit similar. The fairy tales were inverted- the princes weren't perfect and neither were the princesses. The beast was an alright guy. Hansel and Gretl were ruthless killers.

I just sometimes felt like I was reading the same story over and over again.

I mean, I love Diet Coke but would I want to drink it every day of the year?

Um... actually, that's a horrible example because yes, yes of course I would.

A lot of the stories/poems had some absolutely great ideas but they didn't go into the depth that I wanted.

I kind of felt that his ideas were bogged down the verse (and made them just OK) and the verse watered down his ideas (and made them just Ok).

If that makes sense?

With that in mind, I'm not sure whether this would be a good place to start your journey in the land of verse... but I'd still recommend it to people who had already moved in and settled.

## Theme Tune.

Frou Frou – I Need a Hero.

Not bad but not as good as the original.

Because Bonnie Tyler is a goddess.

## Sadness Scale Grimmness Scale.

7/10. Eeeeh some of these poems/stories were *grim*.

There are countless mentions of sex and drugs and murder and *themaleanatomy* so if that's not really your kind of thing then I'd be hesitant to recommend this to you. The imagery is pretty stark and, on occasion, it didn't really feel like it was necessary to the stories/poems.

That might just be me... sensitive soul, y'know.

But, of course, the joyful thing about short stories and poems is that you can just skip or skim the ones you don't like or aren't interested in.

There's also blood and guts (hurraaah) and these are perfectly accompanied by the dark and twisty illustrations by Andrea Dezso.

Sometimes you just need the visual of someone slicing and dicing, don't you?

## Recommended for.

People who like their fairy tales retold. People who have ever wondered what the Beast *really* thought of his marriage to Belle. People who don't trust creepy blonde children who leave trails in wooded areas.

*I received a copy of this book from the publishers.*

I read this book as part of my "A Week in Verse" feature... find out more.

You can read this review and lots more exciting things on my blog [here](#).

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**Eris Vianney says**

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## Misty says

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.

There just weren't any stand-outs. Maybe it's because of my admitted immersion in fairy tales - maybe others who pick this up on a passing fancy, who don't read and breathe fairy tales, will find this fresh - but I felt like I'd seen it all before. This isn't necessarily bad on its own, because these are retellings, after all (so of course I've seen it before), but if you're going to put forth these "little gem" retellings, every effort needs to be made to make each and every one memorable in its own way. And when they're verse on top of that! well, every little bit of space matters. No word should be wasted; they should *all* serve a purpose. I know I hold things like this to a high standard, but there should be *something*, some turn of phrase or image or pleasing sound to the language itself that makes each story stand on its own. Instead, these felt (oh god, you have no idea how much it pains me to write this) amateurish. I cringe to write that, I really do, but the stories felt like writing prompts or Creative Writing 101 exercises. And in the end, whether because of their style or brevity, I quickly forgot them.

So maybe others won't feel this way, I don't know. Maybe people who don't eat, sleep and breathe fairy tales, and who haven't read a flipping shit-ton of short story retellings that take very similar tones and tacks to the ones in this book but do so *better*, will find this collection fresh and entertaining. At the very least, it's easily read in 1 sitting, so I would advise those who are considering picking it up to *actually pick it up* and flip through a few stories first - they're all pretty much the same, so if you like one, you'll probably like them all.

[And if instead you're looking for short fairy tale retellings with a variety of stories, styles, and twists, I cannot recommend enough the fairy tale anthology series edited by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow. Especially Silver Birch, Blood Moon, which I adore.]

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### **Kate says**

This collection of poems twists fairy tales like they've never been twisted before. Most are extremely dark and look at either the secondary characters or at the life after the tale ends. All of them will make you think of these old, familiar stories in a completely new way. The Red Riding Hood story is the girl's explanation of events to her mom after the fact, told in the style of a modern teenager. In the Cinderella story, the two stepsisters talk about how they were unjustly punished and suddenly the beautiful, kind princess seems like a total psycho for the revenge she took.

The illustrations are all silhouettes but are a little graphic for a younger reader. I would recommend this for high school age readers due to some of the themes and language.

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### **David says**

If you like your fairy tales warm and chaste with no pesky disturbing sexual undertones, then dear God in heaven run from this book as fast as your innocent little legs will carry you!

Ron Koertge re-imagines a whole herd of fairy tales in wildy creative free verse diddies. Some will make you squirm. Some will make you laugh out loud. Some will make you wish you had some penicillin. All of them are inspired little explosions of unique craft that do not play nicely. At all.

The "fairy tales aren't for children anymore" concept is not new, but rarely has it been boiled down into a lean, mean outburst of disobedient glee like it is here. I've re-read "Red Riding Hood, Home at Last, Tells Her Mother What Happened" over and over again and snorted with delight every time (yes, that is incredibly unflattering imagery I just used, but so be it- it's true!). "Memoirs of the Beast" tantalizes with its longing over things lost after the "happily ever after" with Beauty. "Hansel and Gretel" is a nasty little thing (and awesome for it), and "The Frog Prince" is just a wonderfully evil little trifle about the hypocrisy of sexual objectification.

This kind of thing is certainly not for everyone. But for those intrigued by the idea of a first rate poet remixing fairy tales into throbbing little tales of hidden desires (or at the very least, bringing those latent feelings already present in fairy tales to the forefront) with a wicked sense of humor and a dark, dark heart- this will do the trick!

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