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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

With sardonic wit and a decidedly contemporary sensibility, Koertge retells 23 classic fairy tales in free verse, written from the perspectives of iconic characters like Little Red Riding Hood, as well as maligned or minor figures such as the Mole from Thumbelina and Cinderella's stepsisters... A fiendishly clever and darkly funny collection. —Publishers Weekly (starred review)A much-honored poet and novelist retells, in free verse and from various points of view, twenty-three familiar tales (mostly Grimm, Andersen, and Perrault). With a contemporary sensibility and voice, Koertge pitches directly to teenagers. . . Dezső's choice of cut-paper

illustrations is brilliant, a nod to Hans C. Andersen's skill in that medium despite the radically different tone. •The Horn Book (starred review) The poems beg to be shared aloud, like the best gossip. The sensibilities are wry, often dark, and the language is occasionally earthy... This slim volume is at once simple and sophisticated, witty and unnerving. •School Library Journal

Ron Koertge is the author of many award-winning novels, including *Stoner & Spaz* and its sequel, *Now Playing: Stoner & Spaz II*; *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup*; *Strays*; *Deadville*; *Margaux with an X*; *The Brimstone Journals*; and *The Arizona Kid*. A two-time winner of the PEN Literary Award for Children's Literature, he lives in South Pasadena, California. Andrea Dezső is a visual artist and writer who works across a broad range of media. She is a full-time faculty member at the Maryland Institute College of Art and lives in New York City.

I have all of Koertge's in-print poetry collections and have managed to scavenge a few out of print volumes. I thought *Indigo* was a bust. Setting that aside, how does this collection feel? Frankly, I found most of the poems to be mean spirited. I know this is probably quite true to the original fairy tale versions, which have been diluted down tremendously for the modern audience. But I missed the oblique gaze, wry humor and affection found in Koertge's other "retelling" poems (Superman - several, vampires, 50's horror movies). Having read the book twice in the past 4 days, I'm sitting here trying to think of the most memorable poem. For me it's *Hansel and Gretel* or maybe *Rapunzel*. If you haven't read Koertge poetry before, this isn't the place to start. If you want a modern look at fairy tales in free verse form, with all the darkness left in, you couldn't do better than this book.

I must have pressed the wrong button. When this book showed up, I could not recall ordering it. Still can't. But I have enjoyed its remaking of the old fairy tales in ... strange ways. NOT for children! NOT for traditionalists.

I have yet to read the book, but I really enjoyed the illustrations, which are truly wonderful and fanciful. That's all folks.

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. Overall, *Lies, Knives and Girls in Red Dresses* is an enjoyable and entertaining journey into the creepiness of fairy tales, but one that is likely to appeal more to adults than to teens. I am a fan of fairytale retellings, so when I heard about this creepy collection, and saw the very grim cover, I made sure to pick it up. Although I did enjoy the book, I found myself thinking as I was reading it, "Wow. This isn't really for teens." A lot of the stories are based on more obscure fairy tales, there is definitely some very adult language and imagery in them, and a lot of the humor and irony is very subtle. That's not to say that I don't think many teen readers would be able to understand the poems, they just seem to me that they would appeal much more to an adult audience. I would have trouble recommending this collection to teens who are simply interested in reading fairy tale retellings, as I feel there are many more appropriate and enjoyable books for the age group. To older teens and adults who want a taste of the macabre, however, I would suggest giving this one a try. Like my reviews? Check out my profile for a link to my blog for more recommendations!

If prose poetry or novels in free verse is new, you are in good hands with *âfÃ¢â ¸Ã ¸the wisest, most entertaining wise guy in American poetry* according to Poet Laureate Billy Collins, of Ron Koertge, b. 1940 (He is 74 years old!) Winner of Publishers Weekly Best Book 2012 and Kansas City Star's Top Books 2012, *Lies Knives and Girls in Red Dresses* is a wonderfully chilling knock outside the door. It is a free verse treatment of classic and

obscure fairytales for the modern retelling; hand in hand with visually sharp and deeply lined woodcut art formed illustrations by Transylvania born, Andrea Deszo who currently serves as art professor at Amherst College. Twenty three archetypes or tales reappear in an imagined space with varied voices viable with points of view which open up the conversation and inner landscape for the life-long reader. A sixteen year old, a twenty six year old, a forty six year old and a seventy six year old scans the same text but reads necessarily not the same book from each. The truth Koertge carries through all the voices and personas led me to read these fairytales as archetypes from the collected unconscious. These stories allow the reader to be predator and prey, light and darkness, lost and omniscient against the classic backdrop. I leave you with a quote from the book's illustrator, Dezso who shared, "We didn't have access to contemporary publications (in Communist Romania), so we read the classics. We lived in books. Traveled through them." For those of us who lived through political oppression, violence and censorship about the threatening Brave and Modern World, we retreat through the portals of fairytales no longer to restore our Innocence but to spread light of Experience onto what was once absent in the dark corners and to name those who Appeared to speak Lies and wield Knives.

This isn't usually my thing. I like Fairy Tale retellings but I like them in novel form, with a lot of plot and character development. Short stories have never appealed to me. That being said, I actually enjoyed *Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses*. It's clever and the humor is dark. And I like my fairy tales dark. Though my ARC didn't have the beautiful cover art you see above, there was art on the inside, each drawing perfectly suited to the story. It's a quick read. The stories are short and grim, sometimes shocking, but never simply for the sake of being grim or shocking. They're purposeful and expertly written. I will say that it is definitely intended for an older, more mature YA audience. It wasn't exactly the kind of story I would want to share with my preteen aged neice.

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