

## Cursed: An Anthology of Dark Fairy Tales

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A curse is a wish gone sour, twisted sideways, and stuck into the softest spots. Titan's *Cursed* collects twenty skin-crawling, tooth-grinding scary and sensuous stories and lyric poems that revive traditional fairy tales and create beautiful new horrors as well.

In many entries, magic pervades real life; trolls, fairies, and spirits brush shoulders with unsuspecting people. In Catriona Ward's "At That Age," a pair of creepy twins emit "a strange, delicate scent ... like the fruit bowl at home when those little flies start hanging over it." Normalized magic increases the spooky factor of stories like "New Wine," suggesting that life could go sideways at any moment.

The wrong word is enough to invite danger here; *Cursed* revisits well-loved tales about Snow White, Peter Pan, and Little Red Riding Hood alongside a smattering of modern stories. Many entries pay homage to traditional images, incorporating otherworldly visitors, poison, and unexpected powers. However, these tales' deliberate amorality suggests that, for modern magic, curses are a matter of chance. Bad luck is equal opportunity and could happen to anyone. Curses are portrayed as natural disasters or a necessary evil, as when heartbroken Jack trades places with a maybe-malevolent beast in Neil Gaiman's "Troll Bridge." The troll diagnoses Jack's innate troll-ness, his selfishness and inadequacy. After a lifetime of failure, Jack chooses the bridge, setting the creature free.

Monsters, hexes, and mythology mingle with everyday people, suggesting that the veil between daily life and certain doom is much thinner than presumed. Curses arrive as punishment, but are not linked to any particular misdeed. Jane Yolen's eerie poems about haunted castles bookend the stories.

*Cursed* is an excellent collection whose unforgettable, spooky images invoke the magic of daily life.

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