

Terrible Tales: The Absolutely, Positively, 100 Percent True Stories of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Those Three Greedy Pigs, Hairy Rapunzel, ... and Gretel as Told at the Beginning of Time

Jennifer Quaggin

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Upside-down fairy tales target greed as our heroes turn to villains.

Fairy tales are turned inside out in Jennifer Quaggin's book, *Terrible Tales*. With the darkness of Grimm and the comedy flair of Roald Dahl, Quaggin retells popular stories like "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," and "Rapunzel."

Using greed as the main theme, Quaggin's stories keep many of the same elements as the originals. Thus, the book will speak to both younger readers who love fairy tales and adults who like tongue-in-cheek takes on the classics. The book's beauty is in how the author twists and updates the stories—for example, in the world of *Terrible Tales*, Prince Charming is anything but charming.

The book opens as Sir Jasper Gowlings is punched in the stomach by Felicitatus Miserius. Sir Jasper is then handed this book of tales and told to take them to heart or be cursed. Quaggin's use of the second-person point of view pulls the reader right into the action.

Quaggin takes the familiar elements of fairy tales and flips the details upside down. The witch in "Hansel and Gretel" is not evil but instead a doting grandmother. Though poor, she takes care of her orphaned grandson Peter, building him a home crafted from sweets, situated in a forest. Hansel and Gretel are greedy children who invade the home and eat everything from the roof to the furniture. When it begins to rain, the children take the only remaining shelter, the oven. Their own gluttony and selfishness cause their demise.

Villains in these tales are sometimes two-dimensional: Cinderella finds happiness in cruelty; she routinely rolls around in the dirt so that her dressmaker has to repeatedly repair or replace the clothes. Though this conveys an important lesson about privilege and power, the character could have been more than a basic villain.

The rhymes at the end of the stories are often unnecessary for such tongue-in-cheek tales. For example, "The Three Little Pigs" closes with this couplet: "Try to rule the world with hate, / and you'll end up on someone's plate." These rhymes try to sum up the stories, yet the tales are strong enough to hold up on their own.

Quaggin takes the fairy tale canon and both flips the script on the popular stories and gives readers important life lessons about truth, greed, and power.

LISA BOWER (September 23, 2013)

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