

The Envious Siblings: And Other Morbid Nursery Rhymes

Landis Blair

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Charming horror may sound like an oxymoron, but it is an apt description of Landis Blair's whimsical graphic novel *The Envious Siblings*. Inspired by the works of Edward Gorey, the eight macabre nursery rhymes tell tales of skeletal big sisters, a child lost in a monstrous underground, strict parents served rare, and covetous kin trading everything from hair to feet.

Black-and-white illustrations echo the dark content, with crosshatched textures adding overlapping layers and depth to plaid dresses, plush rugs, and the dapper suit and bow tie of a murderous tiger. In "The Awful Underground," these evocative illustrations stand alone, absent of the jaunty, rhyming verse juxtaposed with the nightmarish pictures in other entries, allowing imagination to fill in the fear and foreboding. The title story is another standout, taking sibling rivalry to new heights as two sisters' jealousy leads to lobbed-off tongues and drums played with dismembered hands. Focal characters are rendered with simple features, their bulbous eyes and gaping mouths portraying fear, fury, delight, and madness as the stories demand.

The rhyming verse is light and concise, playing off the intricate illustrations. Amusing turns of phrase, repetition, and other poetic devices are used with intent, propelling the flow of the twisted narratives without distracting from their visual counterparts. Familiar themes and images appear—children enjoying a playground or parents at their wits' end—but surprise endings abound with dark satisfaction, as evidenced in "Honourable Beasts," the story of a merry band of carnivores who invite a young girl to a feast after her mother scolds her.

A mature play on the nursery rhyme archetype, *The Envious Siblings* is an entertaining embrace of the dark side of humor from a rising talent in cartooning.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (September / October 2019)

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