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Opening extract from

The Grimm Conclusion

Written by

Adam Gidwitz

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‘Hair-raising and stomach-churning’

Publisher’s Weekly

‘Entertaining story-mongering, with traditional and original tropes artfully intertwined’

Kirkus Reviews

‘Gory and awesomely dark’

School Library Journal

Praise for A Tale Dark and Grimm

‘This debut YA novel is getting a lot of well-deserved attention. Gidwitz manages to balance the grisly violence of the original Grimms’ fairy tales with a wonderful sense of humour and narrative voice. Check it out!’

Rick Riordan, *author of the Percy Jackson series*

‘Unlike any children’s book I’ve ever read. [It] holds up to multiple readings, like the classic I think it will turn out to be’

New York Times

‘Gidwitz has created a sharp, funny story – a fairy tale with teeth’

Inis

Praise for In a Glass Grimmly

‘Imagine Lemony Snicket does Fairy Tales. Great stuff’

Peters Books, Book of the Week

‘This second foray is even more enjoyable than the author’s acclaimed debut’

Publisher’s Weekly

‘A creative romp through traditional and tradition-based story-scapes, compulsively readable and just as read-out-loudable’

Kirkus Reviews



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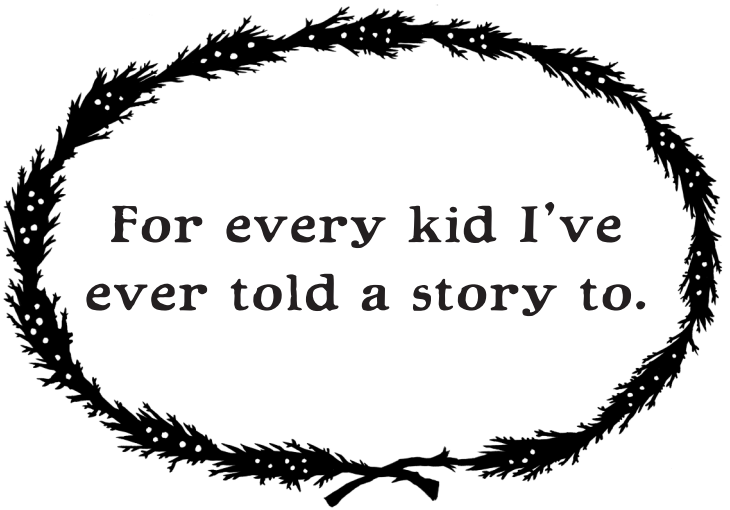
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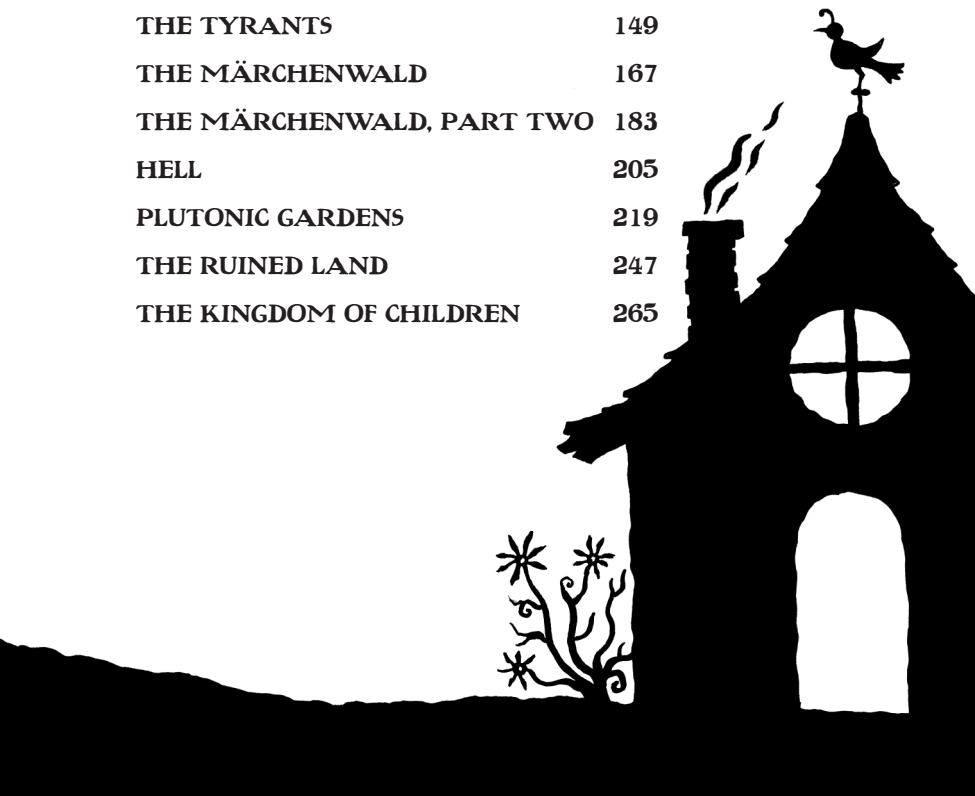
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For every kid I've
ever told a story to.



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Once upon a time, fairy tales were grim.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary **defines the word *grim* as 'ghastly, repellent, or sinister in character'. Their example of how to use the word is this: 'a *grim* tale.' (Really! It says that!)**

Once upon a time, fairy tales were Grimm, too. That is, they were collected by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

You know the tales of the Brothers Grimm.

For example, raise your hand if you've ever heard of a story called 'Little Red Riding Hood'.

You haven't?

Oh, you have. Then why aren't you raising your hand? Go ahead and raise it. I don't care how stupid you look, sitting in the corner of the library by yourself, or on the school bus, or in bed at night, raising your hand for no apparent reason. How else am I

supposed to know whether you've read 'Little Red Riding Hood'?

Raise it.

Thank you.

OK, raise your hand if you've heard of 'Hansel and Gretel'.

Do it.

Thanks.

Raise your hand if you've heard of 'Rumpelstiltskin'. (I assume you're raising your hand.)

'Sleeping Beauty.' (Your hand's still up, right?)

'Snow White.' (Of course you have.)

'Cinderella.' (Your hand *better* still be in the air.)

But now you're thinking: *Wait a minute. You said fairy tales used to be grim – i.e., ghastly, repellent, sinister. These stories aren't ghastly, repellent, or sinister at all. They are cute, and sweet, and* boring.

And, I must admit, these days you are correct. The versions of these stories that most people tell are indeed cute and sweet and incredibly, mind-numbingly, want-to-hit-yourself-in-the-head-with-a-sledgehammer-ingly boring.

But the original fairy tales were not.

Take 'Rumpelstiltskin', for example. You may know 'Rumpelstiltskin' as a funny little tale about a funny little man with a funny not-all-that-little name.

But do you remember what happens at the end of that funny little story? The girl guesses his name, right? And he gets very angry. And do you remember what happens then?

No?

Well, in some versions of the story, Rumpelstiltskin stamps his foot and flies out the window.

Which makes no sense. Who has ever stamped their foot and suddenly gone flying out of a window? Impossible.

In other versions of the story, he stamps his foot and shatters into a thousand pieces.

This is even more ridiculous than him flying out of a window. People don't shatter. People are fleshy and bloody and gooey. *Shatter* is not something that people do.

So what actually happens when the girl guesses Rumpelstiltskin's name? In the real, Grimm version of the story?

Well, he stamps his foot so hard that it gets buried three feet in the ground. Then he grabs his other leg, and he pulls up on it with such force that he *rips himself in half*.

Which, it must be admitted, is indeed ghastly, repellent, sinister – and *awesome*.

The story I am about to tell you is like that, too.

It is Grimm. And grim.

In fact, it is the grimmest, Grimmest tale that I have ever heard.

And I am sharing it with you.

Yeah. You're welcome.

Jorinda
and Joringel





Once upon a time, in the days when fairy tales really happened, there lived a man and his wife. They were a happy couple, for they had everything their hearts desired. They had a little house, a little garden, and in the centre of that garden, they had a pretty little juniper tree.

Yes, they had everything their hearts desired. Everything, that is, except a child. More than anything else – more than their house, their garden, their tree – this couple wanted a child. But they did not have one.

One winter's day, the wife stood in the garden beneath the juniper tree – which is a handsome pine with needles so dark they are almost blue and little red berries that look like drops of blood. She was peeling an apple with a knife when her hand slipped, and she cut herself. A drop of her blood fell to the snowy ground. She saw the drop of blood on the snow, and

she thought, 'Oh, how I wish I had a child, as red as blood and as white as snow.'

Hold on. I have to interrupt.

You think you know this story. You think it's 'Snow White'.

You think wrong.

If I wanted to be educational, I would explain that fairy tales often share 'motifs' with one another – images and phrases that crop up again and again, even in tales from different countries and cultures. Which is a little bit interesting.

I do not, though, have any desire to be educational.

No. I just want to tell you this completely messed-up story.

Well, a month went by, and the snow with it. Two months, and the world was green. Three months, and flowers came out of the ground. Four months, and the trees of the forest pressed hard upon one another and the green branches all mingled together. The fifth month passed, and the wife stood under the juniper tree as its blossoms fell to the earth. When the sixth month was gone, the berries had grown big and firm, and the woman became very still. After the seventh month, she snatched at the juniper berries and ate so greedily she grew sad and sickened. When the eighth month had passed, she called her husband and wept

and said, 'If I die, bury me under the juniper tree.' With that she took comfort and was happy until the ninth month. Then she bore twins: a little boy with dark hair, dark eyes, and lips as red as blood; and a little girl with dark hair and green eyes and cheeks as white as snow.

She brought them to her husband. This man took one look at his two beautiful children, and he was so happy that he died.

WHAT? He was so happy that he *died*?

Yup.

That sort of thing used to happen all the time. It was just... 'Oh, I'm so happy! I'm so happy! I'm so ha-a-a-ack-ack-ack...'

Dead.

On the infants' very first night in this world, their mother sat by the fire and wept with joy for her living children and with grief for her dead husband. The infants, off in their crib, wondered where their mother was, and why she was not holding them, and where that distant crying sound was coming from. At last, because a baby needs to be held, the infant girl reached out her tiny hand, and the infant boy reached out his, and they held onto one another.

Now, this mother was a very learned woman. She was known far and wide for her collection of old

books and her mastery of dead languages. But no amount of learning or knowledge had prepared her to raise two children on her own. She had no books for that – and what she did read about children in her ancient books had very little to do with these two delicate, squirming, crying creatures.

She was afraid. She feared that she would raise them badly. So she pretty much left them alone. She would feed them and clothe them and then she would retire to her study and pore over her ancient books in dead languages and try not to think too much about the babies who cried for her from the room upstairs.

Well, these babies grew, as babies will. Soon they were scampering around on their own, laughing and running and playing.

Everywhere the little boy went, the little girl went. And everywhere the little girl went, the little boy went. They tended to the house together and played together out of doors and tucked themselves in bed at night and told each other bedtime stories – so their mother wouldn't have to stop her studies. And they rarely called each other by their names, which were strange and German and hard to pronounce. They called each other Little Brother and Little Sister, even though they were just about exactly the same age. They loved each other so dearly that one grew sad when the other was out of sight. The little boy would often say to his sister, 'If you won't leave me, I won't leave you.' To which

the little girl would always reply, 'I will never, ever leave you.'

Now, even though the children called one another Little Brother and Little Sister, I can't manage to tell their entire story without using their names. I did try, but it gets very confusing. For example, if I want to let you know that one of them looked little, I can't say, 'The enormous, murderous ogre peered down at little Little Sister.' That would sound weird.

Since I'm going to need to use their names, you're going to have to learn to pronounce them. Even if the children, generally, didn't bother.

The little girl's name was Jorinda. You pronounce that YOUR-INDA.

The little boy's name was Joringel. You pronounce that: YOUR-INGLE.

Yes, German is weird.

As the years went by, the mother became more and more worried about her children. She worried that she neglected them, and she worried that they had no one who knew how to guide their growth properly.

So she decided to marry again. She consulted all the ancient books that she owned, considered all the single men in the village, and decided on her husband.

The man she chose was neither handsome nor very kind, but he was a good cook, and the mother had

read that growing children need good, hearty food to help them grow.

Also, he had two beautiful daughters, just a little bit older than Jorinda and Joringel. So the man knew how to raise children. That, the mother decided, was good, too.

And everything was good. For a few days.

Jorinda (that's the girl) and Joringel (that's the boy) always cleaned the house and took care of all the chores, so their mother did not have to interrupt her important studies. Well, one day, they asked their new stepsisters if they wanted to help clean the house.

The girls flipped their long, beautiful hair and laughed. 'Why would we *want* to help?'

'You look like you're doing a fine job on your own!'

And they walked away giggling.

So Jorinda and Joringel went into the kitchen where their stepfather was cooking and asked if they could have some help with the laundry, now that there was twice as much of it to do. He brandished a wooden spoon and chased them away.

Soon, Jorinda and Joringel began to realise that their new family members did not like them very much. In fact, the stepsisters loathed Jorinda and teased her cruelly. And the stepfather hated Joringel with a passion as hot as the hottest coal. I don't know why. He just did.

* * *