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Mother Holly: A Retelling From The Brothers Grimm



Synopsis

Two sisters--kind, industrious Rose and vain, lazy Blanche--experience two very different adventures when each tumbles down a well and into the magical world of Mother Holly. Rose's journey begins accidentally, but because of her generosity to all she meets along the way, and her hard work for ugly but kind Mother Holly, she returns home in a shimmering gown covered in gold. Envious of Rose's good fortune, Blanche decides to visit Mother Holly herself, but her pride, laziness, and foul temper earn her an apt and well-deserved punishment. John Warren Stewig's retelling of this little-known tale by the Brothers Grimm offers children a satisfying new ending that demonstrates how with help, redemption is possible. And Johanna Westerman's lovely, intricately detailed illustrations, as spellbinding as Mother Holly's magic door, are pure enchantment.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Warren Stewig offers a faithful retelling of the Grimm tale featuring the sisters, one kind, the other mean and lazy, who visit Mother Holly and receive vastly different recompense for their efforts while in her employ. Illustrations by Johanna Westerman convey the mean-spirited stepmother and her daughter, and the kind Rose, whose inner beauty shines forth. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Ages 5-8. Stewig breathes new life into a lesser-known story by the Brothers Grimm. Rose is the good, hardworking sister; her stepsister, Blanche, of course, is the spiteful, lazy one. When Rose

follows her spindle down a well, she finds herself in a different land, where she helps an apple tree shake itself free of fruit and milks a cow whose udders are full. She also lives with the ugly but kind Mother Holly and is showered in gold for her trouble. Then Blanche goes down the well, but she finds that the choices she makes lead to thorns. In an ending of his own, Stewig has the girls returning together to Mother Holly, and Blanche is finally rewarded after Rose teaches her helpfulness. In his author's note, Stewig says the story reinforces his belief that with help we can all change. Kids will probably prefer the less-didactic original in which good trumps nasty. Still, this is an engaging retelling that captures the cadence of fairy tales as well as the genre's subtle lessons. Westerman's watercolor illustrations, a good balance of delicate and strong, overflow with lovely detail. Ilene CooperCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The girls love this book. Very big pictures with lots of details they can watch while you're telling the story

my name is Holly and I love when it snows, so the book was perfect.

Fairy-tales were not originally merely "tales told to children." Modern readers, depending upon personal orientation, may be offended or uncomfortable with the sex, violence, subversive social and spiritual subtexts, harsh realities and ambiguous, less-than-happy endings contained within many of these tales. If you are among those readers who prefer their fairy-tales revised and sanitized, please disregard this review and the 3 stars given. Perhaps you will like this book very much and find it deserving of more. If however you prefer your fairy-tales unadulterated, then you, like me, will be disappointed in this re-telling of the Brothers Grimm classic. Mother Holly is unusual among Grimm's fairy-tales and ranks among my favorites because it so openly stars the ancient Germanic witch-goddess Hulda, popularly known as Frau Holle or Mother Holly. It is rare to find such clear traces of Europe's pagan past within a popular fairy-tale. Stewig has changed the focus of the tale from the spiritual relationship with Mother Holly and transformed it into a morality tale. His goal is, as he writes in the Introduction, to demonstrate to children "that with help we can all change the way we behave." (And by "help" he doesn't mean a magical fairy godmother!) The lazy step-sister thus ultimately learns to be more like the industrious heroine and all live happily after. If you desire a direct, straight-forward (okay, heavy-handed) morality lesson, I guess this is fine. If you are expecting a faithful retelling of the Brothers Grimm tale, which originally had a happy ending for only one sister, akin to Cinderella or Vasilisa the Wise, be prepared for disappointment. Ironically

while the subversive, magical, pagan elements of the fairy-tale have been deleted, the racism and prejudice implicit within many European fairy-tales is left intact. The lazy sister is initially depicted within the illustrations as a brunette while the good, industrious sister is blonde. When the lazy girl is transformed by book's end into an equally industrious, polite "good" girl, she literally turns blonde as well. (This is expressed in the text as well as in imagery, so the point can't be ignored.)

What else can one say, the story has been altered. Why does he feel he can write a story that is better than the original? If he feels he can write a better story, then why does he not write his *own* original story from top to bottom. It seems if he didn't use Grimm's name as way to mask his story, no one would be reading his work. For a very good and detailed assessment see the review entitled "Revisionist Fairy-tale".

I agree with the other reviewer as an adult reading folktales, but as a mom to a 4 year old, I appreciate this gorgeous book. The illustrations are breathtaking and it's so refreshing to read a fairy tale that doesn't involve a princess. This story also models compassion and cooperation in dealing with sibling rivalry. I love it and, more importantly, so does my daughter.

The illustrations for this book are deeply, deeply beautiful. The details, the skies, the animals, the hills, the images -- amazing, powerful, breath-taking, and transcendent. The story is powerful and odd and compelling. We are avid children's books people, and we own over 300 kids books, and we read them to our kids every day and night, and this is definitely in the top 10. It is gorgeous and psychedelic and lovely and one of the best.

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