



## **Mothers Grimm**

*Danielle Wood*

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*A sly, cheeky and blackly comic telling of mothering, heartache, heartbreak, desire, love and death.*

In the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm, Rapunzel's mother trades her firstborn child for a handful of leafy greens, and

Hansel's step-mother abandons him in a clearing in the forest. In 'The Goose Girl', the queen sends her daughter away

to her fate with a bloodied handkerchief tucked in her bosom, and in 'Sleeping Beauty', Mama's best efforts cannot

prevent one little prick from having disastrous consequences for the heroine. Danielle Wood's *Mothers Grimm* brings characters from these stories into the modern world in a collection of four long stories that interrogate contemporary

womanhood and motherhood. Happy endings not guaranteed.

## **Mothers Grimm Details**

Date : Published September 2014 by Allen & Unwin Australia

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Author : Danielle Wood

Format : Paperback 224 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Fiction, Retellings

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## From Reader Review Mothers Grimm for online ebook

### **Kelly says**

What an incredible thought provoking and heartfelt journey. Mothers Grimm is a selection of 4 short stories that are about mothers loosely based on the Grimm fairytales.

An incredible eye opening book that will challenge any woman, particularly mother who reads it. It is like nothing I have ever read before, it makes the reader keenly aware of the pressure that women and mothers feel on a daily basis. The characters were all relateable and their plights will be felt leaving the reader pondering for quite some time after finishing.

I would recommend this book to any mothers, it was an eyeopening journey that makes one aware of the daily struggles a mother faces

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### **Denise says**

I LOVED IT! Four tales and I laughed at each one. Expectant mothers should be given a copy when they announce they are pregnant. Throw away "What To Expect When You're Expecting" and read this instead. Far more important to know what you are up against when the sprog arrives. Easy to read and, in fact, I read it in one go. Love, love, love it.

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### **Emmy9394 says**

More a three and a half for me. I had been coveting this book for a long time and was disappointed to discover that it was not what I expected.

I cannot deny that the book was beautifully written - the prose made me incredibly happy - but it didn't speak to me as a twenty-year-old university student. I truly believe that to enjoy this book in all its glory it is important to have the experience of a mother.

Made up of four short stories and a prologue, Mothers Grimm is a very subversive exploration of fairytale mothers.

The prologue is divine - the description of the difficulties of parenting and the comparisons mothers draw between themselves. This is encapsulated in the form of the 'good mother', the woman everyone strives to be but never will be.

Lettuce - loosely based on Rapunzel - is the story of a prenatal yoga group and the friendships between the women, and their obsession with the good mother in their group. A twist at the end proves that the good mother isn't all that she appears to be.

Cottage, a Hansel and Gretel reworking, explores the guilt mothers feel leaving their children in childcare.

Sleeping Beauty is reinterpreted in Sleep which portrays the overwhelming difficulties new mothers face when coping alone.

The fourth story, Nag, which I believe is based on 'The Goose Girl' didn't capture my attention as much as the other three - possible because I don't know this story particularly well and therefore didn't understand Wood's interpretation. It captures the often difficult relationships mothers have with their daughters.

I would still recommend this book, but to a certain audience - not to my university friends, but perhaps to my mother's friends and to new mothers. The prose itself is enough reason to read the stories, even without the experiences which would make it a perfect read.

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### **Sally906 says**

I have to say the book wasn't quite what I expected. I assumed that each of the four stories that appear in MOTHERS GRIMM would be a recognisable retelling of some well-loved Grimm brother's fairy tale. However what I felt I actually got were contemporary stories that were so twisted from the original tale that the connection was at best very tenuous, and in the case of at least one of them I just didn't get it at all. The prologue set the stage and I absolutely loved it. It described the 'good mother' the one we all strive to be, but no real mother can ever achieve the goal, and concludes that "...why it is, in fairy tales, that the Good Mother is always dead." Once the prologue was completed the stories commenced - Lettuce, inspired by Rapunzel; Cottage by Hansel and Gretel; Sleep, naturally by Sleeping Beauty; and, finally, Nag inspired by The Goose Girl. Set in Australia the main characters are all mothers who are each more familiar to me than the mythical perfect mother. Mothers-to-be taking yoga classes to ensure a stress free, pain free birth all obsessing over one of the other women; a working mother who is traumatised at having to leave her precious (dare I say spoiled) son at a day-care centre, a teen suddenly rebelling and falling pregnant and desperately needing sleep, and the final one was about an overworked housewife and mother. In all of the tales the reader is told of the fairy tale link, although except for the last one I am sure most readers will pick up on it themselves. I really enjoyed the first two stories, however, the last two stories were not really my cup of tea and the last one, Nag, didn't draw me in at all. Each of the stories are very well written and many of the fictional mothers shared thoughts with the reader that seemed hauntingly familiar to some of my own thoughts as a first time mother - their insecurities, fears and mind-numbing tiredness. I didn't find it funny - well there was humour in the prologue, but the stories that followed steadily seem to increase in bleakness. As it says on the cover 'Happy endings not guaranteed.'

3 stars – Above average. Was very readable and I really liked it but was easily able to put it down and walk away for a while.

With thanks to Allen & Unwin and the author for this copy to read and review

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### **Joyce says**

This book was just...very average. That is the most accurate description I can think of. Each story was fairly nondescript, blending into each other – I've just finished the book, and already I cannot recall details from

each individual story. I just know that all the women in the book were crazy.

There are books that go out with a bang, and books that go out with a whimper. This one goes out silently. You are reading, and then suddenly the word 'acknowledgements' greets you in big letters, and you realise that the book has finished. There is no actual conclusion to *any* of the stories.

I've said this before and I'll say it again. I give two types of three-stars: the 'meh' type, and the 'some-bits-were-great-but-some-were-terrible' type. This was (if you haven't already figured it out) the 'meh' type. And that is the worst insult you can give a book, I think. I know that if I were an author, I would prefer readers to rant over my book over simply letting it slip from their consciousness the moment the book finishes.

Read it...read it if you are looking to catch up on your Reading Challenge. That's why *I* read it. It's fairly short, it's fairly painless, and if you're looking for an inoffensive, bland interlude between heavy literature or trashy YA, this might be the book for you.

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### **Sharon says**

I received my copy of "Mothers Grimm" from TheReadingRoom and Allen & Unwin for which I thank them :)

Wow - a pretty amazing read and one that I read in one sitting I enjoyed it that much. "Mothers Grimm" as you can probably tell by the title is something of a twist on the Brothers Grimm. I never really cared much for many of the Grimm fairytales as a child - they seemed rather cruel and quite nasty to me, which of course they were!

Author Danielle Wood has written 4 short stories which deal with motherhood, each story entirely different and totally believable - although I didn't care as much for the last story 'Nag' as I did for the first three, 'Lettuce', 'Cottage' and 'Sleep'. These first three were absolutely riveting, managing to make you smile but also make your heart break in two. As it says on the cover - Happy endings not guaranteed!

Mothers Grimm wasn't exactly what I was expecting but it was so much more - an incredible read and if it wasn't for the final story not quite doing it for me, I would have given 5 stars, but I've settled for 4 (it would be 4.5 if Goodreads had half stars!)

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### **Figgy says**

I try not to judge a book too much by what my expectations were going in, but sometimes it just can't be avoided.

In this instance, I fell like I was offered modern day magic, or at least something "other". But each of these stories only had a very small link to the original fairytale, more often than not unfeasible in this modern, real world they were thrust into.

The rest of this review can be found [here!](#)

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### **Alison Stegert says**

A full review can be found on my blog, Spilling Ink, here.<http://ali-stegert.com/2014/09/03/boo...>  
I love fairytale retellings. It's my "thing." So, when I saw Mothers Grimm, I was instantly hooked--especially with the fabulous cover and the blurbs on the front cover. Tell me--Who can resist "wickedly dark, astonishingly funny?"

But I have to admit, this book wasn't what I was expecting. If you're after "Once-upon-a-times," "love's first kiss," and "happily-ever-afters," this isn't the book for you. (Incidentally, that's not what I'm after either. I like dark, rich archetypes and stories that zap the slumbering collective-unconscious, neither of which I found in this book.)

Though the fairytale link is tenuous, what this book offers is fantastic writing. Danielle Wood's stories of motherhood, love, and female friendships thrum with truth. On page after page I encountered creepily familiar thoughts, insecurities, and reflections, things I'd assumed to be my own unique brand of weird. Who knew other women were plagued with such things? Maybe I'm okay after all...

Raw and honest?--Yes. Absolutely. "Astonishingly funny?"--Not for me. Sorry. I found the stories in the book beautiful in their bleakness and honesty but not funny.

There is a lot to admire and enjoy in Mothers Grimm--even if there is no big, bad wolf or wicked witch. 3.5 stars.

I received an uncorrected proof from Allen & Unwin for an honest review.

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### **Sonia Bowditch says**

Excellent book. An honest exploration of much of the hard stuff that comes with motherhood and all with a nod to Grimm's fairy tales that we know and love. This book is funny, heartbreakingly and amazingly perceptive.

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### **Emma Monfries says**

This book is fantastic. It begins with a summary of the 'good mother' archetype and then retells four fairytales. The tales are very dark, and while the central theme is motherhood, the stories are truly about womanhood, and society's unrealistic and unfair expectations of all of us. I found the stories enormously insightful as to how we think of ourselves and others, and of the dark places that perfectionism can take us. Highly, highly recommended.

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## Marianne says

From an Uncorrected Proof kindly provided by Allen & Unwin and The Reading Room.

Mothers Grimm is the third fiction book by Australian teacher and author, Danielle Wood. It is a collection of four short stories that offer strikingly different versions of fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm. The prologue describes for readers The Good Mother, a woman we all recognise but can somehow never actually be. The first story, Lettuce is Rapunzel in deep disguise; Cottage is Hansel and Gretel with a modern day twist; Sleep, of course, takes a different look at Sleeping Beauty; while Nag is a very alternative interpretation of The Goose Girl. These stories have beautiful women and crones; babies are abandoned at birth, or taken and left daily in the woods known as child care; mothers suffer from sleep deprivation, loneliness, rejection, exhaustion and lack of support. As well as being blackly funny, these tales are thought-provoking, clever and occasionally heart-breaking enough to produce a lump in the throat of the most cynical reader. The characters are familiar from the preschool, the mothers group, the yoga class and the café. The prose is often wonderfully evocative: “You turn your back and walk out the door and, as you do, you hear your [baby] screaming. The effect is like having your uterus torn out through your earholes.” “Being the younger sister, Lauren thought, was a bit like turning up in the afternoon to a garage sale once all the good stuff was gone.” “...the rich smell of coffee made Meg’s lemon and ginger tea taste even more like the overpriced hot water that it was.” “His crying echoed within her all the way to the car, all the way to work through the morning-choked streets, stowing away in the curling corridors of her ears...” Being a mother is NOT a prerequisite for enjoying this novel, but it is certainly a book that will appeal to mothers. Reading (or rereading) the original versions of the fairy tales is likewise not absolutely necessary, but doing so (and Wikipedia is helpful here!) will demonstrate just how cleverly Wood incorporates various elements of the original tales in her own creations. Really quite brilliant!

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## Tien says

*In a fairytale, the only good mother is six feet under. All the others are bad news.*

By this part of the blurb alone, it should be pretty obvious what we’re getting here. None of that Disney fairy tales with an Happy Ever Afters. By the last line of the Prologue; *“...why it is, in fairy tales, that the Good Mother is always dead.”*, I questioned the timing of my reading this book on motherhood (*FYI, am expecting my second baby in about 6 weeks*). Yet, I continued reading with some foreboding...

There are 4 stories in this novel which I supposed inspired rather than a retelling of any fairy tales. Each story was preceded by some phrases of a fairy tale on which stories are based. These stories are set in more contemporary times with loose interpretations on fairy tales’ mothers. What is missing from these stories are the magic usually employed in fairy tales, the basic good vs. evil, and the ultimate love prevails overall sort of path. In spite of this, these stories are cleverly realistic and frighteningly Grimm-like.

The black and white of distinction between good and evil is blurred as these stories dug into the human psyche. These mothers are far from perfect and each carry own unique struggles in her role as a woman and a mother. These well-told tales carried the burdens of motherhood throughout the ages into contemporary settings where appearances are just never what they seemed. This was highlighted throughout by black humour; pushing out or aside that darkness within us all can sometimes be overpowering.

My instincts tell me that if I were to read this a decade or so from now, I would've appreciated it more. But in consideration of my current situation, my heart ached for the future: the upcoming birth, the joys & pains of small children, and further on, the promised heartbreak when they will eventually leave home. These are, of course, the natural course of life though reading *Mothers Grimm* made it all so awfully real to me –that these all collided in to one point in time so near rather than throughout the next decade or two. This book is one I'd like to re-read one day in the distant future to hopefully better appreciate.

*Thank you, Allen & Unwin in conjunction with The Reading Room for copy of paperback.*

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### **Carolyn says**

The author sets the tone for this collection of short stories with her prologue with a description of the Good Mother, you know the one with the white as white washing and the perfectly behaved children who sleep through the night and never cry. But as she surmises, in fairy tales the Good Mother is always dead.

In this retelling of four popular fairy tales in a modern setting, women fall short of their aspirations to be the Good Mother and instead the realities of motherhood drive them want to give away their children in exchange for a stress-free lifestyle or just a really good long sleep.

Witty and clever, I enjoyed these re-made tales particularly "Lettuce" and "Cottage" a reworking of Rapunzel and Hansel and Gretel. As promised in the introduction, unlike in traditional fairytales, happy endings are not guaranteed.

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### **Karina Almeroth says**

Flawless.

The most perfect book! I love how (only the truly great) fairytale writers, retellers of fairytales, weave that spell over you. This book is magical.

It's dreamy, it casts a spell over you, it's both wickedly funny and heartbreakingly devastating. It's all about motherhood, the pain, exhaustion, how it rips everything out of you, yet you adore your kids..

It's all fairytales about mothers. And you know what they say about mothers....'The best ones are all in the ground.'

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### **Bec says**

Wood has written four short stories that explore motherhood, riffing on an altered fairy tale theme. I appreciated that she tried to get at the complexities - she didn't just cover the usual ground of "motherhood is so hard but in the end I love my kid so much and it all turns out fine". Each story is messy and she departs from the fairy tale theme as none of them end neatly with a happy ending.

At some points the writing tended to get a bit too flowery and some characters seem more cliche than reality. That does fit with the fairy tale theme but at the same time made it a bit harder to engage.

Overall though, there was a tone throughout the book of melancholy that I found quite beautiful. It was very readable and I'd recommend it to most of my friends.

Note: I received an uncorrected proof of this book for free from Allen & Unwin.

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