



Beauty & Cruelty

Meredith Katz

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Cruelty, once an evil fairy and now working in fast food, comes home one day to find the lazy, drooling King of Cats on her doorstep. Worse, he comes bearing news Cruelty would be happier not hearing: Sleeping Beauty has gotten tired of lying around and is trying to save the world Cruelty left long ago.

Any respectable Archetype knows it's a waste of time; their chances of survival are much better if they can hide in the human world. But since nobody sent her an invitation to the world-saving, she's practically obligated to interfere.

Beauty & Cruelty Details

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From Reader Review Beauty & Cruelty for online ebook

Annabeth Leong says

I picked up this book without much expectation. I wanted a fun read, saw "lesbian fairy tale," and thought, yes please. Then the book turned out to be so well written and so philosophically interesting.

The book is built on a Tinkerbell-type premise: creatures in a fantasy world are in danger because a growing human lack of belief in them is making their world crumble. But it gets much more interesting than that superficial description, and the answers the characters come up with felt very satisfying to me, in no small part because they engaged with conversations I'm very interested in about diversity in fiction writing. There are some really interesting meta-level insights about story peppered through this book, bits of analysis that have real depth and made me see tropes, motifs, and archetypes in different ways. What I love most about this is that the author made those conversations plot-relevant, so they're not digressions that bog down the story. They're a key part of the intellectual journey that the story needs to make. I am personally a huge fan of this type of intellectual-mystery-as-conflict. I lean a bit cerebral, and I love recognizing in a book the sense of exhilaration I get when I'm realizing important things.

That's not to say that the book is all philosophy, though. There are plenty of dramatic moments, and plenty of touching moments. The main character, Cruelty (the evil fairy from the Sleeping Beauty story) has a satisfying character arc and changes over the course of the book in plausible, important ways. I teared up a few times over her relationship to Beauty, and I also teared up over the book's Beauty and the Beast subplot (different Beauty).

Speaking of character arcs, it is pretty incredible that the author pulled off having an asleep Sleeping Beauty as a main character. Her story raises issues around the active/passive dichotomy, empowerment/being rescued, and consent. I thought she was vividly drawn, in a way that felt dynamic and made her a driving force in the book. (**Slight spoiler alert** I thought the book's main sex scene was hot. I was impressed by how the matter of her consent was handled, and I felt comfortable that it was enthusiastic.**)

I also loved the mix of stories the author selected to riff on. Swan Lake, The Six Swans, Donkeyskin... Some of my favorite more obscure stories were included.

I was very sorry when I reached the end of this book. I wanted to spend more time in this world.

Chasia Lloyd says

Yes, yes, you caught me - I grabbed this because it's a F/F fairy tale.

The evil fairy Cruelty a.k.a. Rue spends most of her time in the human world these days, working tedious minimum wage jobs to support her book-reading habit. The girl she's enchanted in her home world, Sleeping Beauty, is rising up with a plan to draw humans into their world and give their stories new purpose. Of course, Cruelty and Beauty are madly in love with each other, even if Rue won't easily admit her feelings for Talia.

The story has a lot of good things going for it - interesting characters, positive queer representation,

feministic unpacking of traditional fairy tale tropes. But I didn't find myself to be too fond of the writer's style, and I was very uncomfortable with the love scene as it went down. It was technically consensual, but it still had some weird vibes. But it could totally just be me.

Beauty & Cruelty may not be my favorite fairy tale, but there was definitely some things I took away from it I enjoyed.

e-ARC provided by NetGalley

Louise says

4.5

Another wonderful book from Meredith Katz -- and totally different to her last story I read, The Cybernetic Tea shop. Beauty & Cruelty combines a number of things -- lots of fairytale characters, a pinch of 'our world' and a bit of fantasy, and a morally grey plan to save a dying world.

Beauty & Cruelty has such a clever and original plot, I loved it. The way the Archetypes worked was a little confusing at first, and I had to reread a few paragraphs, but it was well worth it once I really got into the story. I loved seeing the 'fairy-tale' world, the castles, the magic and all the inhabitants. I also really liked seeing Rue in 'our' world -- at her day jobs and her book-filled apartment

There's a good number of fairytales mentioned but the main characters are Rue and Talia -- Cruelty (Maleficent) and Sleeping Beauty -- who are assisted by Tim/Tom (Schrodinger's cat), The Beast, Sixth (from The Six Swans), Odile and Odette (Swan Lake) and a kidnapped human, Martin. I really liked all of the characters and how their relationships developed but I would have liked to see a little more of The Beast and Martin getting to know each other or how Odile, Odette, and Sixth go from rivalry to a relationship. Talia and Rue had a really interesting dynamic and I really liked both of them as individuals as well. Together with Martin, they had the most developed personalities.

I really liked all the themes Katz managed to work into the story -- dreaming versus taking action, feeling unrepresented in traditional fairytales, Western stories ousting other cultures, empowerment/ powerlessness, sacrificing the few for the many, consent (physical for Talia, emotional for Martin) -- alongside a really good story.

Beauty & Cruelty is a fantastic story, perfect for fans of Once Upon a Time, or anyone looking for a unique, modern and slightly deeper look at their favourite fairy-tales.

Find more of my reviews at foxesfairytale.wordpress.com

Christine Close says

Jan 3 at 1:28 PM

Five Star: Contemporary Fairy Tale

Five Stars

I was sent this book by Inked Rainbow Reads in exchange for an honest review.

After reading this book the question I asked myself was, is this A very good true fairy tale being told, or, A good very true tale, being fairly told?

If you are looking for a happy magical light tale based on fairy tales this is not the book for you. If you are looking for a well written book that turns fairy tales on their heads and associates and aligns them and then incorporates them into real life situations then this is a book you should read.

I found this quite a heavy book in many ways, it touched on so many aspects, race, sexuality, politics, relationships, what is amiss in society to name but a few. It is the sort of book that allows you to make your own connections, reach your own options, allows you so many insights into life while permitting you to reach your own judgements. I have no doubt that readers will each reach their own opinion and conclusions.

There are some humorous interludes, many by the Cat and Rue herself. The author weaves a really intricate tale, I particularly liked the play on words with Cruelty's name which was just one example.

I do recommend this book and think it's one of those books that the more times you read it the more things you will identify. A very unique and original book.

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Nicole Field says

Ah goodness, what to say about this one. I've spent a lot of time considering it, and how to rate it, because I felt this was definitely more an 'issues' book rather than a 'romance' book.

Romance is a part of this novel, to be sure, the romance between the two title named characters, Beauty, and Cruelty. Cruelty is our only PoV character. At the start of this book, she lives in the 'real world' rather than the world of fairy tales and fables. She has a home that is full of books, and she tries hard between her two day jobs to be able to keep as much of her magic as she can without making it too obvious that she is a magical figure herself. There is, of course, a danger of being taken away by the CIA or similar to be studied if that happens.

That pretty much sets the scene for the issues side of this book. These old, magical tales are out of touch with a modern world that is so scientifically focused. Because the lack of belief from humans is so much, it is threatening the world in which the fairy tale characters live. While Cruelty has been hiding out in the real world, Beauty has come up with a plan to bring magic and belief back on her own. But I ultimately felt that, though the plot was strong throughout, the heavy presence of the issues made the story as a whole more dense than it probably needed to be.

Cruelty was a difficult character to really persevere with for the first half of the story as well.

The romance between Beauty and Cruelty comes much later, but is incredibly sweet and satisfying when it happens. It's definitely a slow burn book, which gave us a lot of time to really get to know both of the main characters.

There was also a side romance between the Beast and his male love interest, which I absolutely loved. So many favourites were cameos in this book and had amazing and original personalities. That was definitely a highlight in the read.

Honestly, my controversial opinion in this book is that I feel as though the wrong character was picked to be the PoV. I found Beauty's arc from Sleeping Beauty to the Freedom Motif to be the far more interesting trajectory. I feel this even proves that particular issue with regards to the modern day relevance of fairy tales and fables.

Lexi says

[Beauty and Rue had sex when Beauty was sleeping even though her ghost was there to consent. It still felt icky. Also, for the beauty and the beast story line, it felt rushed when the whole the Beast

Book Gannet says

This one is tricky to review because although I liked aspects of this book – the story, Rue’s modern life and changing attitudes, the twists on old fairy tales – I did struggle to maintain my interest at times. Mostly, I think, because of Beauty and Rue’s relationship with her. That just didn’t work too well for me.

Anyway, the good things. Rue is an interesting character, packed with attitude and independence. She’s a bad fairy and she’s not interested in saving anyone but herself. Except even she’s struggling in these modern times. There’s just not enough belief in fairy tales anymore to sustain all the stories, and even she’s feeling the pinch. Which is why she lives in the human world, sustaining herself on a diet of books while working two dead-end jobs as a way to get by. I’m not quite sure why I liked Rue, yet I did. She’s selfish and snarky and not interested in being helpful – and yet, she kind of can’t help herself either. She has to meddle, and returning to the other world to see what Beauty is up to is the ultimate meddling.

I really liked most of the Archetypes encountered in this story. Tom and Tim the Cat were a wonderful mix of arrogance, wisdom and feline disdain, the Sixth son add his own intriguing dimension to the tale, while the story surrounding Odile and Odette was cleverly woven in. I particularly loved everything to do with the Beast, and to be honest I would much rather have read more about what was going on there (or with the swans) than anything to do with Talia/Beauty.

I just found Talia boring. Bossy and boring and her relationship with Rue was all kinds of uncomfortable. It just didn’t work for me. Yes, the two of them have been bound up together in the same story for a very long time, yes, Talia is beautiful and kind and graced with all the gifts, and yes, Rue does come along and help an awful lot, but the dynamic between them was always a little off for me. Even with Rue’s changes they’re still so very, very different that I couldn’t quite buy the romance there. (view spoiler)

It might also have been nice to have seen more evidence of how the Archetypes were changing the humans’ beliefs. Only two humans play any kind of role in this book (and a third has a slight influence), while the rest are just background sheep that really play no part in anything. I would have liked to have seen some evidence that Talia’s plan was working or at least that there was more to the plan than *Bring ’em in. Ship ’em out. Fingers crossed, everyone!*

So, yeah. It’s a clever idea, but the story itself never quite caught me as much as I’d expected. Some of the characters are interesting and the side plots are definitely intriguing, but overall it just feels like an okay read.

(I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.)

Melanie says

Beauty & Cruelty is an interesting take on the classic fairy tale characters. Their worlds are dying as fewer and fewer people believe their stories, and Talia, also known as Sleeping Beauty, has taken over, trying to get their belief back before the fairy tale world is completely destroyed. Rue, or Cruelty, Talia's curser, has been living in our world for ages, and knows Talia's plan needs to be handled on a larger scale. Even if she doesn't want any part of it.

This is a solid story with good writing, but it is so introspective that it tends to drag a bit at times. It feels like it's trying too hard. I like the concept, but am having a bit of trouble with the execution. I think there needed to be more action, more dialogue, to move the story forward. We spend a lot of time in Rue's head, and she feels...apathetic at best. It leaves the reader in a similar mood.

But, that being said, it definitely had potential, and I will have to try something else from the author before I write them off. The idea behind the story is just too interesting to ignore.

lov2laf says

"Beauty and Cruelty" is a really unusual and delightful read.

I've read a few fairy-tale revisions now where the starring couple is f/f but Katz puts a whole new spin on the traditional stories making them more relevant to our present day.

As people's beliefs in fairy-tales wanes so too does the fairy-tale realm itself. We follow Rue, a curmudgeon bad fairy otherwise known as Cruelty, that's hedged her bets and splits her time between our known world and her fairy-tale universe. She's a fun one to follow because we aren't usually in the shoes of the evil person in the story. We not only get her dour attitude and sarcasm but who doesn't love a reluctant hero who's a softy at heart?

The story itself is entertaining but the author wrote the narrative with self-reflexivity in a clever way. It's not all fluff and confronts racism, exclusion, cultural relativism, and ideas of beauty. None of it is preachy and it's all completely integrated into the plot but, if one chooses, there are some interesting topics to chew over.

Despite the book being about fairy-tales this is not a YA read. However, it's not explicit, either, having mild sexual depictions and an odd cuss or two. It's consumable from the teens and above.

Katz manages to throw in a lot of imagination, great writing and characters, a mix of sexualities (m/m, f/f, f/m/f), a funny cat, a pleasing story, and a sweet romance while successfully pulling us into her mythical world.

My only question now is, what happened to Rick?

4.25 stars

Dannica Zulestin says

So, there's a sort of parallel world of fairy tale archetypes that gain or lose power based on belief. Our protagonists are Talia (Beauty) and Cruelty, a sleeping beauty and an evil fairy. Talia has a plan to boost belief by bringing humans into the fairy tale world and Cruelty goes along with it, partly to save her world and partly just because Talia knows how to pull her strings.

I really liked the narrative voice, which had the right balance of emotional investment and practicality I expect out of a fairy tale. The fairy tale world exists with the same ease as the real world--it's archetypal but

still matter of fact, the characters aren't perfect and sometimes are kind of dumb, and the magic works so we don't ask how. I also loved Cruelty, who is all about standing up to oppressors and being wronged but also can admit she might actually just be petty in some cases. Katz does a good job of showing how her reactions are sometimes right and sometimes wrong, and how she's slowly changing to regret some of her "evil" and maybe become a new sort of archetype. At the same time, there's something fun about her theatricality, her wickedness--locking people into her castle, verbal sparring with her captive princess, punching jerks in the face--kind of the best of both worlds. She's just a fun main character.

Did I ship her with Talia? ...so-so. They had mad sexual tension (which comes to a head about halfway through the novel in a very sexy scene which I much enjoyed), and I liked Talia's effects on Cruelty. But Talia herself is something of a flat character. She's the protagonist; at the end of the story that's still really all I'm getting from her. And since in this story she's technically not even that--Cruelty is very clearly the main character--there's not much to love. Interesting as a foil to Cruelty, kind of dull on her own.

Also, the concept itself put me off at times. I'm not crazy into the whole "power of belief" idea, and I'm equally eh about diverse fairy tale retellings that preach about the power of diverse fairy tale retellings, why they're needed in the modern world. The first feels kind of cheesy, the second kind of...self congratulatory and overly meta, and though I can see how it works within the context of this story it does put me off. So these things made me a little less enthusiastic.

On the other hand, I liked that the one human the story focused on was a gay black man. He was probably my favorite minor character, and his entirely valid critiques of fairy tales were a good counterpoint to Talia and Cruelty's single minded drive to bring back something that maybe is past its time. So...mixed feelings.

Overall, enjoyable. I'm interested in reading more by Katz in the future :)

Katarina Ross says

Its fantastical reality, involving fairy tale archetypes, characters and powers, feels remarkably natural in this story of autonomy in the face of irrelevancy. The protagonist has two names, Cruelty and Rue. This encompasses the story's heart as it tackles what one is expected to be versus what one chooses to be. At first, Cruelty/Rue, is content to let her home world disappear as humans no longer believe in fairy tales, then is challenged to match the efforts of her foil, Beauty/Talia, who is trying to save it.

I enjoyed how easy this book was to read and how natural the interactions felt even between supernatural creatures. Rather than feeling separate from my own reality, I could believe that these beings might exist somewhere. In fact, I wanted them to exist. Even the ogres, since they add drama and challenge. Fantasy, in a world humanity has tamed, reminds us what's important. Fairy tales need to be relate-able yet they should also challenge us to see beyond what we consider real and view the world in new ways. I would highly recommend this story, as both a modern fairy tale and a journey of empowerment.

Amy says

4-1/2 stars

I received an ARC of this book from Inked Rainbow Reads in exchange for an honest review.

I'm not sure if this concept has been done before or not, but I found it refreshing and innovative, and it immediately grabbed my attention and dragged me into the book. The idea of these fairy tale Archetypes dying from disbelief, and deciding to do something about it just hit me the right way at the right time. Our main character, Cruelty, or Rue as she's known in the human world, is a villain, only she's not doing many villainous things these days. Whether that's because she's trying to survive or because the human world has changed her is a matter for debate, but I think it's a little of both. And she isn't the only one who's changing. The heroine of her story, Sleeping Beauty, is changing as well, and it is changing their world. The basic conflict is that since humans don't believe in fairy tales anymore, the Archetypes of fairy tales are finding their world disappearing. The solution? Get humans to believe again. The way that they go about this goal changes them, their world, and the relationship between them. The best part of this is that Cruelty is a reluctant participant, in every way. The changes are making her seem less a villain and more of a kinder, gentler fairy. And she doesn't like it one bit. But Change is rolling over her, and she has the choice of going with it, or getting flattened by it. The story ends with hope, but it isn't exactly a happy ever after, for Beauty and Cruelty, or their world. Which is exactly what Cruelty's personality can accommodate, and a clever decision by Katz. I definitely recommend this book.

Nikki "The Crazie Betty" V. says

4.5 Stars

I'm not usually one to read fairy tales and fairy tale re-tellings, but when I read about this on Netgalley, I had to request it because it just sounded so fun!

And it was. Fairy tales are REAL! And they all live in one place as "archetypes" essentially stating that some characters appear across numerous stories because they are the archetype for that character.

We start the story being introduces to Cruelty aka Rue (to those pesky humans) who is the evil fairy, commonly thought of as Maleficent. She is living among the humans because the fairy tale world is crumbling and breaking given that there are so few believers nowadays. Cruelty decides to go back to basically harangue Talia (Beauty) because she is bringing humans into their world to try and force belief. Cruelty wants to tease the princess because, really, how can she do anything from lying there on her bed in a constant state of "death-like sleep"? Turns out Beauty has something of an astral projection of herself so that she can talk to those that come into her room but it's not a physical being, really just an image.

ANYWAY! We get to see a lot of the old familiar faces such as Beast and Odette/Odile (one of my favorite stories honestly) and it's truly fun to see these quite real "people" interact with each other and discuss their own stories.

There is only one reason that I knocked off half a star for this otherwise exceptionally fun and entertaining read, (view spoiler). And really that's it. I loved how this book challenges typical relationship beliefs as well as showing that our old fairy tales really don't encompass the majority of individuals anymore (all fair hared, white, and m/f matches). (view spoiler)

I would definitely recommend this author and will also be watching for future releases from her.

I received a copy of this title for free through Netgalley in exchange for my honest review.

Lindsay says

Fairytale dilemma

Cruelty now lives with humans and works 2 jobs while revisiting her land when she can, she has a tempestuous relationship with Talia 'Beauty ' and is struggling to find her place.

A sweet read of trying to find a place to fit and finding romance in the most unexpected places!

Bri says

I went into this expecting a fairy tale romance with a modern twist. However, this book isn't so much a fairy tale romance itself, but more of a meta commentary *on* fairy tale romances. Not what I expected, but still a fresh and engaging story. I liked that many lesser-known fairy tale characters were included.

The framework and ideology of the novel is solid, but I'm not sure the execution worked for me. There is too much "telling" and not enough "showing," and the ending felt much too rushed. Even so, I think this would make a great series, and I would definitely be interested in reading more.
