



## Curses, Inc. and Other Stories

*Vivian Vande Velde*

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**Curses, Inc. and Other Stories** Vivian Vande Velde

Unpredictable, chaotic, and not be tampered with casually, magic always has consequences. In these ten stunning short stories, boys and girls take turns-usually unawares-learning firsthand just what magic spells, enchantments, and curses really can do.

## Curses, Inc. and Other Stories Details

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Author : Vivian Vande Velde

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# **From Reader Review Curses, Inc. and Other Stories for online ebook**

## **Randal says**

Good kids collection. A couple of standouts, including the title story. A couple stories dragged a little.

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## **Daydreemer5696 says**

It was alright. I thought it is easy and the stories are kind of immature. They were quick, easy stories but you didn't really connect with the characters you just learned what they did or said and some things happen for no reason.

One story, Witch Hunters, I think it was called, I dislike most. It told the story of a girl, Lyssa, in modern times and she lives with her two parents. When witch hunters come to her house and ruffle through her things they decide she is young enough that she can live with "suitable parents", or however they put it but the satanic books that had to be destroyed included Cinderella. Vivian Vande Velde wrote in the end of the book that she thought this story was her the scariest but I thought completely otherwise. The story was even boring.

None of the stories really kept my eyes glued to the page and I would not suggest this to many people.

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## **Zyra says**

dark collection of stories full of witches & ghosts. short book but was so interesting to read.

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## **Alex says**

I read this book when I was in middle school, I think I borrowed it from a friend. This book has some real stand out short stories that stuck with me for years. Later when I found this at a library book sale I was super excited and made several people jealous with how happy I was to find this book again. A fun short story collection that still has me excited to read them.

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## **Lexie says**

I will review each story individually first

Curses, Inc.--the title story, is about an 8th grade boy who jilts his date a week before the big dance because he doesn't want to spend his game money on some stupid dance. It was funny to see how cheap this boy would be. He originally starts out with a Jinx that would cover the girl's body completely with warts. This turns out to be too expensive so he instead wants her to lose her dog. Each curse thereafter is slightly more expensive and slightly more 'disasterous' to the girl. In the end nothing was as it seemed and the boy learned

a very expensive lesson.

Skin Deep--I loved this story. Ardda is this unattractive sixteen year old girl who lives by herself to avoid having to deal with people. She has the power that her 'wishes' come true and got tired of having the villagers constantly asking for her to wish them things and then make cruel jokes behind her back. She thinks her luck has changed when an injured prince lands in her backyard, but sadly he turns out to be less than princely. She gets her revenge however.

Past Sunset--I cried a little during this story honestly. It starts with the tale of the Lady in White who roams the backalley street the narrator lives on every night after sunset. Despite being warned many kids still wish to sneak a peek to prove how 'brave' they are. One night a neighbor calls out that she needs help, she's dropped her son's medicine. The narrator's older brother volunteers for the mission and all goes well. Until the Lady shows up and it becomes a mad dash to save the boy's life.

To Converse With Dumb Beasts--What would happen if you were granted the gift of talking to animals? Would they really be as interesting as stories make them out to be? A lonely farmer finds out the answer, but the result is less than he wanted and worst than he thought possible.

Boy Witch--The young son of a witch is left to tend the house while his parents are away. A damsel in distress happens by for a cure to her affliction and the young boy makes things only worse.

Lost Soul--This was a cruel tale of a story. A young man, on his way home from a chore he was to have performed, chances across a beautiful maiden by a creekbed. He falls instantly in love and recklessly promises to return as often as she would like. Is she an undine or sylph as his neighbors have warned him? His obsession turns to murder and in the end he gets what he deserves, but hasn't learned his lesson.

Remember Me--A young man in rich clothing wakes up in the middle of the road, having no idea how he got there or who he is. Traveling to the nearest town does nothing, but subjecting him to the casual cruelty of the noble class and servants alike. Who is he? Where did he come from? Is he a prince? Though we're never given the reason he was afflicted with amnesia, we can draw our own conclusions at the end from the courtiers comments.

Witch-hunt--This was a chilling tale. A young girl's family is persecuted by the authorities for their satanic vices. We are told the story first from the young girl's perspective--as her home is raided and the Witch Hunters claim her parents, but the end of the story is told from the perspective of the Witch Hunter General and the truth is more in line with Fahrenheit 451 than the Salem Witch Trials.

Cypress Swamp Granny--A young girl in the South, just after the Civil War, learns what it means to appreciate what you have. Despite the fact this tale was serious and the end was anything but funny, the dark humor and irony of the young girl's commuppence is wonderful.

The Witch's Son--A mother tries for 13 years to resurrect her son so that he can take vengeance on those who wrongly murdered him during the War of Independence. I was confused at first why Hugh was killed, but war is a nasty thing and vengeance is even worse. This, unlike many of the other stories, had a happy ending filled with hope.

Overall I'd say the theme of the story was 'Be Careful What You Wish For', since many of the stories focused on a person either wanting better than they had or ignoring what they had. Some were chilling, from an emotional perspective (Past Sunset) and a couple were just hilarious (Curses, Inc. and Boy Witch), but I

enjoyed all the stories. Though classified as 'young adult' I think that even adults might find the morals and humor in each story easily.

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### **Cora says**

I love short stories! These short stories were filled with magic. Each story being different, and having different characters. I would recommend this to someone who doesn't want to fully dedicate themselves to a book. Or anyone who loves the world of magic! It was an entertaining, easy read.

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### **Christine says**

I think my favorite of the ten tales is unquestionably 'Witch-Hunt' as it leads you on a spooky journey with a fantastically true and hilarious ending that will have girls everywhere relating to it. 'Curses, Inc' is another story that stuck out to me, with its ironic turn of events and 'Boy Witch' was refreshing as we rarely hear of tales of male witches. I also thoroughly enjoyed the Afterword. As a aspiring writer myself, I very much enjoy hearing what inspires fellow writers and Vivian Velde doesn't disappoint.

The art on the cover is fantastic as well. I never get tired of seeing what the mind of Cliff Nielsen can cook up, he is definitely an inspiration to a fellow digital artist. Overall, this is a brilliant compilation of tales for anyone interested in the supernatural, or needs a batch of stories for their next sleepover or Halloween party.

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### **Homegrown Reader says**

I've read and reread parts, chapters, and the entirety of this book intermittently since I received it in middle school. Some stories are good for a laugh and some for a tiny spine tingle but none of them are down right scary. When I was young and the Goosebumps-mania was in full swing, I dedicatedly stuck to the choose-your-own-ending version. If it got too scary, I could stop right away. Anything too horror-like gives me nightmares for weeks, if not months. My husband even scans the movie trailers ahead of time, just to be sure that if there's something frightening he can give me ample warning to plug my ears and close my eyes. None of these stories are scary but some can be chilling and they all seem soaked in measure of good sense that doesn't need to bash you over the head with an accordion.

Vande Velde does a great job of creating ten completely separate and equally entertaining stories exceptions to this rule end up not being bad but just not as good. As with the example of "To Converse With Dumb Beasts," which I always end up skipping over. The tales all differ with plot, characters, and the point of view from which it's told. The title story: "Curses Inc." takes magic into the modern day and places it among websites and pop-up ads while "The Witch's Son" which takes place shortly after the American Revolution. Some have ambiguous dates but deal with something besides witchery like the soul-sucking water nymph in "Lost Soul" or the tragic, love seeking spirit "After Sunset." And some like "With Hunt" turn things upside down and backwards and will have you thinking back to them again and again in the days following your reading.

For me the shining jewels of the collection are "Cypress Swamp Granny" and "Skin Deep." The first takes place in the post-civil war American South, and follows the self-absorbed daughter of a plantation owner.

Her desires for everything that her friends and neighbors have leads her to a witch in the swamp who cautions against fires of passion but relents in helping when the girl offers a year of her life to the old woman. Through a few clever twists and turns, the fires of passion are exactly what end up consuming her.

The other story "Skin Deep" follows an unattractive but kind and thoughtful young woman with the power of wishes. When an injured young prince happens across her secluded home, she doesn't hesitate to help him and wishes that to him she looks decent enough that he can look at her without wincing. When he recovers he asks her to marry him but she knows that she can't continue with this relationship if he doesn't know what she truly looks like. Delving into the self-confidence issues many young women face, the girl ends up a champion full of wisdom beyond her years.

I could go on and on, as is easy to do when confronted with sharing a favorite but I'll stop here and leave you with this note. The foreshadowing, irony, and twist of circumstance that lay hidden among these pages truly make for a marvelous read that will leave the reader gasping

Favorite Quotes:

"You really ought to learn to loosen up a bit." – Curses, Inc.

"All she could have said was that sometimes the truth has nothing to do with what you can see." – Skin Deep

"Perhaps if just one person stopped to help her, maybe that would set her spirit to rest." – Past Sunset

"That's hardly a fitting reward for saving my life." – To Converse with Dumb Beasts

"When you can understand the consequences and weigh choices, then I will teach you." – Boy Witch

"It was wonderful to see her, he thought, to see someone so obviously in love with life." – Lost Soul

"They tell me I'm calmer than I've ever been before, and more patient and kinder. Which sound like compliments, until I think about it.

"What was the appeal, she wondered with contempt, of a book whose only purpose was to deceive?" – Witch Hunt

"Girl like you should be satisfied with what you got. You should enjoy the sweet life the Lord give you while you can." – Cypress Swamp Granny

"Second chances didn't come to everyone. She hoped they would all do well with theirs." – The Witch's Son

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## Kitty Jay says

*Curses, Inc.* by Vivian Vande Velde was one of my favorite books growing up, and I half-hesitated before picking it up again. What if it didn't live up to my childhood memories? What if it was more goofy than spooky?

Thankfully, my fears were unfounded. Vivian Vande Velde shines as much to me now as an adult as she did when I was in elementary school. She is an absolute master of the short story, with a twist at the ending of most - if not all - that never feels forced or smug. Sometimes you can see the twist coming, sometimes not, but every time is a delight. She also has a keen sense of humor that shines in her stories. Even the first story, the namesake of the anthology, mixes modernity with ancient superstition in a quick-witted, tongue-in-cheek story of revenge.

My personal favorite, however, will always be "Past Sunset", a mournful and melancholy tale about a small town in France where one never opens their shutters after dark. For years, this story haunted me well after I

read it. It's thrilling and tense at parts, and achingly sad at others.

Other stand-outs include the funny "Skin Deep" and "Boy Witch", the wicked just-desserts "Cypress Swamp Granny", and the historical morality tale, "The Witch's Son".

A collection not to be missed, Vivian Vande Velde was great as a kid and - as proven by myself - still a delight to adults.

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### **Saralyn says**

Fun short stories. Screwy sense of humor, which I enjoyed.

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### **honestly mem says**

I suspect I would have enjoyed this book more if I had first stumbled upon it when I was actually in the targeted reading group! That is, in the fifth grade.

One thing I haven't touched on in my previous reviews (so called) of Vande Velde's stuff is that she does possess a rather sharp wit and she clearly enjoys tweaking the reader's expectations for comedic value. With the exception of a few of the more serious stories in this collection, her sense of humor is on fine display here. To Converse with the Dumb Beasts - which isn't a story so much as a prolonged joke - is particularly fun, as Vande Velde gleefully dismantles the popular fantasy convention of the talking animal. The titular Curses, Inc. is the sharpest of the lot and perhaps the most satisfying; of all the stories in the collection, it's easily my favorite.

Surprisingly, I enjoyed the more serious stories more than I did the comedic ones. The Witch's Son, Past Sunset and Lost Soul are especially effective, for while I had forgotten most of the stories in the weeks since I first read this book, these few remained with me. Ultimately that's why I'm not giving this book a higher score than three stars: her prose is light and strong, her stories brimming with wit, and I certainly enjoyed the lot of 'em, but, well, by and large, they aren't very memorable. So: three stars it is.

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### **Marsha says**

Ostensibly for teens, these stories raise a chill or a laugh as people wield or encounter magic and find that the results aren't necessarily what they expect or want. Showing a deft touch for storytelling and characterization, Ms. Velde has written a collection of short stories that display her mastery of the short tale as well as that of longer stories such as A Well-Timed Enchantment and Heir Apparent. There are lessons to be learned in "Curses, Inc." and "Boy Witch" and we feel a palpable pang of sorrow after reading "Lost Soul" or "Past Sunset" as humans fall prey to otherworldly creatures or their own furious desires. A fine book to be read at Halloween or anytime.

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## Awake at Midnight says

A lot of the best horror is crossover. William Sleator, for instance, is a science-fiction writer, but his stories all resonate with an edgy fear that will keep you up at night contemplating aliens that may be more deadly than nice (and in really creepy ways, too). Similarly, Derek Landy is Adventure/Horror with his undead detective Skulduggery Pleasant. Vivian Vande Velde is one of the masters of this crossover horror, her stories often set firmly in the fantasy genre yet instilled with imaginative elements that might well churn your innards if you think about them too deeply.

Her anthology, *Curses, Inc.* and other stories is a collection of not-too-horrifying shorts that will make you think or make you smile, but make you hope to heaven that it never happens to you. Any of these stories could be perfectly adapted for an episode of *Are you Afraid of the Dark?* She has other similar anthologies titled *Being Dead* and *All Hallows Eve: 13 Tales*.

For the full review visit: [Awake at Midnight](#)

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## Aimee says

Vande Velde expertly mixes horror and humor as well as the best and worst that human nature has to offer in this collection of short fiction, and she does it without relying on blood and guts. The best of these stories is the title piece. Bill has invited Denise to the school's end of the year dance, but decides to spend the money for the dance on video games instead. He abruptly and callously breaks their date after Denise has already bought her dress, and she is furious. Not only that, Denise's friends and Bill's alike are disgusted with his cheapskate ways, and they are not shy about showing their contempt. Bill is put-upon and decides that he wants revenge on Denise for turning the whole school against him. So it seems like a dream come true when Bill goes online and discovers a link to "Curses, Inc." in his Services menu.

The site promises to lay any kind of curse, small or large, on anyone you choose ... for a price, of course. Cheapskate Bill starts small, but somehow none of his curses work out quite the way he hoped, and Denise emerges from every disaster smelling more and more like a rose.

In desperation, Bill goes broke and buys a curse that is supposed to "give Denise the very worst day of her whole summer." Such a curse is very expensive and Bill's previously well-guarded funds are totally depleted. And Denise's "worst day of the summer" turns out to be the kind of day most people would call their best ever. In a rage, and completely broke, Bill complains to the Curses, Inc.'s webmaster, Edanna, and learns that he isn't the only one who found the website and bought a curse as an act of revenge ...

In "Boy Witch," Clarence is left home alone when his witch mother goes on some errands, and he is sure he can take over her witch duties while she's gone. So when Emma visits the cottage for help undoing the prank haircut her brothers gave her the night before she's to meet her betrothed, Clarence is happy to give her a helping hand. But he soon learns that it isn't enough just to watch his mother work her magic, and after Emma has been rendered bald, had her hair restored but in the form of a beard, and even had a large rabbit affixed to her head, she and Clarence decide he should stick to less exciting, but much more helpful, mundane advice.

There's also a short tale about a man who finds a magic acorn and wishes to be able to understand the talk of the animals around him, but quickly finds out that his dog, his cat, and the squirrels in the woods are some of the most boring and idiotic conversationalists around. And in another story, we meet Lyssa, whose family is in danger of being broken up and her parents imprisoned because of a single book she possesses, which the authorities have banned.



The most chilling story may be "Cypress Swamp Granny." Marietta lives in post-Civil War Louisiana, and she is a spoiled, self-absorbed debutante who visits a voodoo woman to try to make herself the most desirable belle in the town. Granny's price seems small to Marietta: each wish Marietta makes, Granny takes one year off her life, "off the end" where Marietta won't notice it so much.

The spell works all too well, and Marietta learns, too late, that you really should be careful of what you wish for.

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## **Sarah Crawford says**

**Curses, Inc.** A boy backs out of a date he had with a girl, not wanting to spend money for clothes for himself and a present. He'd rather use the money for buying video games. He ends up trying to put a curse on the girl, but finds out the meaning of the term "first come, first served."

**Skin Deep:** Ardda lives outside of a village. She has the ability to cast spells. She's sixteen and unfortunately is considered to be unattractive. She rescues a prince who has been shot (with arrows) and nurses him back to health, only to have him turn away from her when he sees what she really looks like. The prince (might eventually) learn not to judge from appearances only.

**Past Sunset:** Another olden village, this time with warnings about avoiding a pale-looking woman. Marianne is the name of the main female character in the story. No one knows what will happen if the ghost (everyone assumes it's a ghost) catches someone.

One night a neighbor's child desperately needs medicine. Marianne's brother goes to get the medicine but, coming back, he encounters the lady and finds out what happens when one meets her.

**To Converse with the Dumb Beasts:** A man named Kendric saves a woman running from a bear. The woman gives him an acorn that will allow him to understand what animals are saying. Be careful what you wish for.

**Boy Witch:** Clarence's mother is a good witch. His mother has to go away for a bit and a girl shows up needing a witch. Clarence tells her he is one even though he's not, really. She needs him to fix her hair up since her brother cut it and messed it up.

What happens next is really funny, a complete comedy of errors.

**Lost Soul:** A guy in a forest sees a beautiful female. He falls in love with her and turns his back on his farm and the girl he was promised to; instead, he wants to spend all his time with the girl in the forest. This seems to be a story that needed fleshing out a little, in my opinion, and is the weakest in the book so far.

**Remember Me:** A woman has done something to a guy and he has total amnesia. He finds that experiences can make a person better, even if they don't know what they were like before.

**Witch-hunt:** Lyssa's parents are taken by witch-hunters. The shock, though, comes when we find out just when this is all taking place, and the name of the "Satanic" book that the witch-hunter general wants to destroy.

**Cypress Swamp Granny:** Marietta is a girl in post-Civil War New Orleans. She's 17, and complaining that there are no boys in the area worth marrying. Ceecee is a younger black girl that is working for her parents

and she takes Marietta to see her grandmother who knows spells.

Mariette decides the guy she wants is the one who is engaged to her cousin and she trades a year of her life to Orilla for the proper magic.

She wants the attention of one particular guy, gets it, and finds she doesn't want it. She then wants some physical alterations made in her appearance. She then wants more money. She's never satisfied with what she has.

The Witch's Son: 1776. Abigail Brewster is a witch and tries to bring her 19-year-old son back from the dead on the first anniversary of her death. She succeeds only for a short time, and finds out what she had been told about his death was not true.

It wasn't until 1789 that she was actually able to bring him back from the dead physically and have him remain there. There's also reference made to how badly the independence movement in the colonies split apart former friends. Tessa remembers how it was and how Hugh was murdered by her father and his friends.

Abigail tells her son that, unless he kills the one remaining person left alive who murdered him, he himself will die again at midnight. The question is, can a good-hearted boy like Hugh kill someone in cold blood so he himself can live again?

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