



# Fearless Fairy Tales

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Reviewer:

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Editor's Choice:

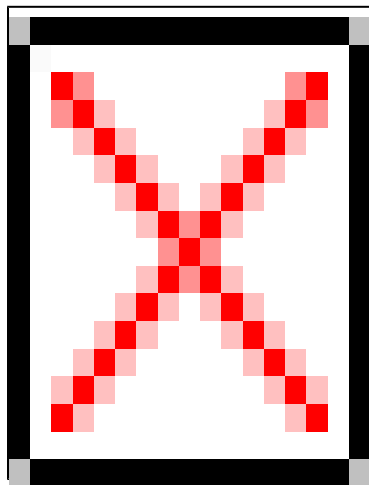
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The possibilities that open with retelling fairy tales have tempted all sorts of authors from Anthony Browne to Margo Lanagan, Babette Cole to [Hilary McKay](#) [4]. After all, these are often the stories that we hear first, and they can shape our understanding of the world. Konnie Huq and her writing partner James Kay have clearly thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of bringing some favourite stories up to date and yes, they have been pretty fearless in their approach, using the stories to make some pointed comments on how we live now. Fairy tales after all have always existed to call out unfairness and give voice to those generally underrepresented. In Huq and Kay's version of **Pinocchio** for example, the 'puppet' is a news anchor on an Italian TV network, run by Sly Fox, whose boss presses him to boost the ratings by telling bigger and bigger lies; you can guess the effect this has on poor Spinocchio's nose. Their magic beanstalk grows from baked beans and giants move down to the land below, taking jobs as builders and handymen until their new neighbours decide things have got 'too gianty' and force them out. If the messages occasionally feel heavy-handed, they're balanced by humour, so that *The Three Little Pugs*' story of a tenancy dispute with their greedy landlord Wolf, resolved by the Canine Advisory Board, is told via very lively rhyme. When Marian is elected new MP for Bottybum, she, 'set the townspeople's taxes at a fair level and made sure it was means-tested so that the richest people paid the most.' The story then concludes, 'All the tax revenue was spent on roads, schools and hospitals and they all liveth happieth ever aftereth.'

There's a very different kind of contemporary issue examined in surprisingly touching *The Boy Who Cried Wool*, in which a little woollen toy boy, called Angora, helps explain to macho toys and to his owner that it's OK to cry, and that it can even be the best medicine for sadness.

Written with the same direct-to-camera dash that distinguishes [Huq's](#) [5] [Cookie](#) [6] series, this is hard to resist and Rikin Parekh's illustrations bring in a great set of characters, comic and recognisable. If it occasionally misses the mark, nonetheless this is fresh, funny and very engaging.

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