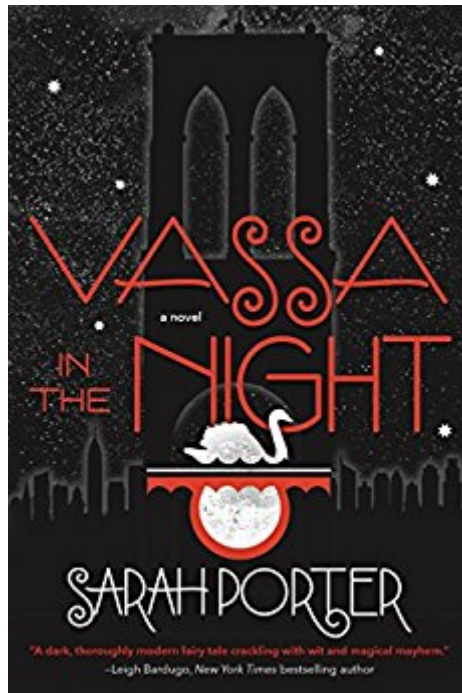




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# Vassa In The Night: A Novel



## Synopsis

“A dark, thoroughly modern fairy tale crackling with wit and magical mayhem.” —Leigh Bardugo, New York Times bestselling author of *Shadow and Bone* “An enchantingly twisted modern fairy tale, perfect for those who prefer Grimm to Disney. Inventive, darkly magical, and beautifully written, it will stay with me for a long time.” —Kendare Blake, New York Times bestselling author of *Three Dark Crowns* *Vassa in the Night* is a powerful and haunting modern retelling of the Russian folktale “Vassilissa the Beautiful” for teen fans of urban fantasy, fairy tales, magic, and horror who enjoy books by Leigh Bardugo, Kendare Blake, Catherynne Valente, and V. E. Schwab. In the enchanted kingdom of Brooklyn, the fashionable people put on cute shoes, go to parties in warehouses, drink on rooftops at sunset, and tell themselves they’ve arrived. A whole lot of Brooklyn is like that now—but not Vassa’s working-class neighborhood. In Vassa’s neighborhood, where she lives with her stepmother and bickering stepsisters, one might stumble onto magic, but stumbling out again could become an issue. Babs Yagg, the owner of the local convenience store, has a policy of beheading shoplifters—and sometimes innocent shoppers as well. So when Vassa’s stepsister sends her out for light bulbs in the middle of night, she knows it could easily become a suicide mission. But Vassa has a bit of luck hidden in her pocket, a gift from her dead mother. Erg is a tough-talking wooden doll with sticky fingers, a bottomless stomach, and a ferocious cunning. With Erg’s help, Vassa just might be able to break the witch’s curse and free her Brooklyn neighborhood. But Babs won’t be playing fair....

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A wonderfully weird and magical read! If you love Brooklyn, spooky happenings, contemporary retellings of traditional fairytales, and lush, lovely language and imagery that stays with you long after you finish reading, this book is for you.

Incredible, vivid prose, engrossing, delightfully weird storyline. A little grisly in parts so maybe not for the youngest young adult reader but a pleasure for us older folks. tore through this book in less than 48 hours. Her best yet!

The concept is amazing, the execution not so much. Sarah Porter's writing style is stilted and all over the place. Could not get past chapter 4.

Scary, intense, gorgeous, revelatory. Full of crazy weirdness, and yet somehow rings so true. I can't wait to read it again.

This book is Young Adult in that the heroine is a teenager, but I'm an anything-but-young adult and I thought it was wonderful as writing, as a character study, and as an invocation of magic. The very beginning, "Prelude in Night," shows how lyrical the writing can be: "When Night looked down, it saw its own eyes staring back at it. Two big black eyes, both full of stars." Lyrical is not the writer's only strong mode, however; she can do humor just as well. She does a particularly wonderful job of designing icky fantasy foods and other products to stock the magical convenience store in which most of the story takes place. Her characters are also excellently developed, particularly Vassa, the teenage heroine, who matures in many ways in the course of the story. Other characters are also interesting, including Erg,

Vassa's talking-doll protectress; Vassa's mother, who appears in memory/flashbacks; and Babs, the modern version of evil Russian witch Baba Yaga, who owns the convenience store chain. (The story is a contemporary retelling of a classic Russian fairy tale, Vasilissa the Beautiful.) The idea of Baba Yaga, complete with traditional chicken-footed house, in charge of a convenience store is fun enough to make me give the book at least four stars for that alone. Finally, the book has a feeling for magic that is found only in the best fantasy authors, such as Neil Gaiman, Charles de Lint, and newer arrival C. S. E. Cooney (Bone Swans). They recognize that magic is not simply a matter of waving wands or reciting spells, but grows out of who you are and what (for better or worse) you are willing to let yourself become. Like those other authors, Porter does not merely adapt the form of a fairy tale for a modern audience; she gets at the soul of what fairy tales are really about.

\*\*\*Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog\*\*\*  
Vassa in the Night by Sarah Porter  
Publisher: Tor Teen  
Publication Date: September 20, 2016  
Rating: 4 stars  
Source: ARC sent by the publisher  
Summary (from Goodreads): In the enchanted kingdom of Brooklyn, the fashionable people put on cute shoes, go to parties in warehouses, drink on rooftops at sunset, and tell themselves they've arrived. A whole lot of Brooklyn is like that now—but not Vassa's working-class neighborhood. In Vassa's neighborhood, where she lives with her stepmother and bickering stepsisters, one might stumble onto magic, but stumbling out again could become an issue. Babs Yagg, the owner of the local convenience store, has a policy of beheading shoplifters—and sometimes innocent shoppers as well. So when Vassa's stepsister sends her out for light bulbs in the middle of night, she knows it could easily become a suicide mission. But Vassa has a bit of luck hidden in her pocket, a gift from her dead mother. Erg is a tough-talking wooden doll with sticky fingers, a bottomless stomach, and a ferocious cunning. With Erg's help, Vassa just might be able to break the witch's curse and free her Brooklyn neighborhood. But Babs won't be playing fair. . . .  
What I Liked: There are not nearly enough stories in YA that are heavily based in magical realism, at least in the last ten years or so. Magical realism isn't just fantasy or paranormal aspects; it's the combination of realistic elements with surreal or magical elements, in which the surreal or magical elements don't seem surprising or out of place. What comes to mind when I hear the words "magical realism" is Gabriel García Márquez, who wrote some masterpieces in magical realism. This story is a fairy tale retelling, set in an enchanted modern-day Brooklyn, following a young girl who is meant to be something extraordinary. Vassa lives with her stepmother and two stepsisters, the oldest who loves

her, the middle who hates her. The family lives in Brooklyn, where Babs Yagg has a BY's convenience store, famous for beheading shoplifters. One night after midnight, Vassa's mean stepsister orders her to buy light bulbs, and the only store opened after midnight is BY's. Out of defiance, Vassa goes. And while she isn't beheaded, she becomes trapped at BY's, forced to work there for three nights and sleep there during the day. While she's there, Vassa begins to figure out how to undo Babs Yagg's enchantment, and how to free the mysterious watchman motorcyclist who is made more of darkness than humanity. This book is written in first-person present, following Vassa. However, there are a few chapters that delve into the past (and they are clearly marked), and they are in third person. While those few chapters were interesting, they also didn't feel totally necessary. This entire book is so unique, starting with the setting, the characters, the retelling itself, and the bizarre plot. I mentioned that this story takes place in an enchanted modern-day Brooklyn. Most of the story itself is in BY's, in which Vassa must thwart Babs Yagg night after night to stay alive. The setting is fairly-tale-esque, but in a more modern place and time! I love how imaginative and richly detailed everything is, especially the setting. I got a good feel for this distinctive world. It was a slow-build type of world-building, which I was fine with. Everything about this book is slow-build, especially the reveal of information and plot. We don't get everything all at once, which is great (no info-dump) and sometimes a little mean (you want more information about this or that NOW!). At first, Erg (the alive wooden doll) is a mystery, as well as Vassa's parentage and how she ended up with her step-siblings and stepmother. I liked Vassa. At first I was a little annoyed with her, because of how she put up with Erg and her stepsisters, but I had a lot of respect for Vassa. When she becomes trapped in BY's, she isn't always thinking about how she's going to survive. She wonders about the night watchman who drives aimlessly round and round BY's, who is made of night and darkness. She is determined to free two lawyers who came to BY's, as well as the watchman motorcyclist. Vassa is kind and selfless, even if she thinks that her heart is hard. I love the magical realism in this book! It's totally normal and accepted for a convenience store to behead shoplifters and display the heads on pikes outside the store... just like it's normal for the store to dance around on bony legs... just like it's normal for the store's "employees" to be two severed hands, scuttling about... weird, right? Vassa doesn't question any of this. I love how the author wove in these little details that are quite significant. And really, this book is full of magical things. The dancing store, the severed hands that are "alive", Erg the walking, talking wooden doll, the swans made of snow, the motorcyclist made of darkness. So many interesting aspects of this book lie in the magic. There is a small romantic part of this story! At first, it seems like the motorcyclist will be a love interest (which literally makes no sense since he never talks and he's made of darkness - i.e.

nothing really tangible), but then it becomes clear that someone else is a love interest, someone more on the same wavelength as Vassa. Which I was fine with! That boy is sweet, though he wasn't at first. The ending was pretty satisfying! There was one part, about the motorcyclist, that I thought could have been a little clearer. But it was a very good ending with everything wrapped up. In fact, I'd say it's a very positive ending for what I was expecting. I vaguely know the story of Baba Yaga (the children's version, though), and I don't know the original story's ending, but I will say that this version's ending is good! What I Did Not Like: Ehhh, nothing I can think of specifically. The book started a little slowly and didn't really begin to get REALLY good until the light bulb scene happened in the middle of the night, and Vassa went to get some at BY's. I was pretty hooked after that. I did mention that I would have liked more clarity on the part of the ending about the motorcyclist and the darkness. We know that a certain thing happened, but the "how" eludes me still. Would I Recommend It: If you like magical realism, and/or fairy tale retellings, then this might be one for you! Magical and mysterious, the story is every bit as unique as I'd expected. When I finished the book, the first word that came to mind was "bizarre" - this book was bizarre, and a little dark, and very enjoyable. Rating: 4 stars. I actually didn't know much about this book before I received the advanced reviewer copy (thank you, Tor!), but I'm glad they sent one my way. This book was exceptional! I don't think I did it justice, with this review.

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