



A Well-Timed Enchantment

Vivian Vande Velde, Cliff Nielsen

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It's bad enough that Deanna has to waste her summer in France and her only friend is a mangy black cat, but now she's staring hopelessly into a well, trying to figure out what in the world to wish for.

Before she can make a wish, the cat scratches her, her watch falls into the well, and then . . . so has she!

Except that now she's in medieval France, the cat is a handsome young man, and her watch has the power to completely change history.

Maybe a quiet summer *would* have been nice?

A Well-Timed Enchantment Details

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From Reader Review A Well-Timed Enchantment for online ebook

Yvensong says

A delightful light fantasy with unique fair folk/elves and an enchanted well which is the tool Velde uses to bring Deanna to another world. One of my favorite characters in this story was Oliver, though I won't say why. I don't want to ruin the little surprises he brings to this tale.

Joanne Roberts says

The story follows Deanna as she vacations with her mother in the French countryside. It isn't long before Deanna and a neighborhood cat end up enchanted by fairies back in medieval France on a desperate quest. The humor borders on the ridiculous. Horn Book calls it "slapstick." But what bothered me this second time through (thirty years later) was the helpless heroine.

Deanna tries to take charge of her situation, but she spends a lot of time getting interrupted, shoved around, and thwarted...not very heroic. She is always moaning about not having anyone to help her and ends up trusting just about everyone else instead of making her own decisions.

It's okay for the main character to lose control of the situation, especially in a comedy where the frustrating results can be hilarious. Unfortunately, as a reader I mostly just felt annoyed that Deanna didn't walk away from these buffoons and get on with her quest.

Elizabeth (to whom the book is dedicated) and I both agree that the ending might have been stronger, more satisfying. It's still worth reading, but not Vande Velde's best work.

Denae Christine says

VVV and Eoin Colfer write some of the shortest endings!

I like a little "settle down" time. More than five pages. Not one hundred (bother some authors), but at least VVV made it clear how the story would continue. I just wanted to read about it!

Oliver's character was well-done and not too ridiculously heroic. He got food poisoning! Not too ridiculously romantic either.

Deanna was a little oblivious, but most book-characters are. She was realistic, though, and messed up in the most absurd ways.

The elves, er, fair folk, were well-done too by being totally otherworldly, powerfully magical, and distant. Though at least they were sort of helpful.

Who'd've thought a Mickey Mouse watch would cause so much trouble?

Deanna says

I remember receiving this for Christmas one year (can't remember what year though...) and I was so surprised the main character had my name! I've loved it ever since. Spent a lovely afternoon in the sun re-reading this.

Shanna says

Deanna accidentally drops her watch down a magic well, where it is transported to Medieval France. Elves send Deanna and her cat-transformed-into-a-person on a quest to retrieve the watch. Deanna is just stupid and helpless- bumbling along expecting everyone else to do her work for her. The medieval character were weird in a stereotypical-fairy-tale way. Parts of it were even cartoonish. The story premise was good, though.

Emma (Miss Print) says

I don't particularly like cats in real life, but I've noticed recently that they are generally a lot more appealing in fiction. *A Well-Timed Enchantment* by Vivian Vande Velde has a cat that's cool like that.

The story starts when Deanna, a fifteen-year-old spending the summer with her mom in France, drops her Mickey Mouse watch down a well. Turns out the well isn't your average well: it's magic. To make matters worse, Deanna didn't drop her watch into the well, she dropped it into medieval France. Now she has to get the watch back before things get really out of hand. Deanna gets some help in the form of Oliver, the black cat she befriended back in modern France. Except now Oliver is a human.

I first read this book when I was sixteen. I loved it so much I read it twice back to back. *A Well-Timed Enchantment* is one of those books that never get old. You can read it again and again and the story is still just as good as the first time.

Vande Velde's narrative style here is similar to her other "fairy tale" books (like *The Rumpelstiltskin Problem* or *Heir Apparent*) with a blend of traditional story telling and her inimitably modern sensibility. The novel is written with a third person narration that follows Deanna's perspective.

This novel combines a lot of different elements to great effect. One of the best characters (in any of) Vande Velde's work is Oliver. Turns out cats don't see things the same way humans do. I don't know how convincingly anyone can write in the voice of a cat-turned-human but Vande Velde seems to do a good job of it.

The story is quick and fairly simple. There are a lot of things that older readers can enjoy and comment on, but the story is straight-forward enough that younger readers can also keep up. I might even go as far as to say it's a great feminist-oriented book for children (some might call it "anti-princess") because Deanna plays a significant role in fixing things (getting back the watch) even though Oliver does help quite a bit.

My only issue with *A Well-Timed Enchantment* is the ending. Some readers will tell you they like a good, open-ended finish. It's more realistic, it encourages readers to use their imagination, etc. There is a time and place for open-endedness. This book does not happen to be the best place for it. Vande Velde acknowledges

this in her dedication (it's dedicated to a girl even though she hated the ending). Over the years the ending has rankled less because, having given the matter more thought, I've been forced to conclude that there might not be a better way to end things. But it still left me frustrated after my first reading.

Despite the somewhat irritating ending, this book is amazing. The characters are endearing, the story is fun, Oliver is awesome. Vande Velde is as creative and fun here as ever.

You can find this review and more on my blog [Miss Print](#)

Aleena says

Having loved Vande Velde's *Companions of the Night*, I NEEDED more of her work, and this one sounded fun. Oh, it was.

It's on the young side of YA, unlike *Companions of the Night*, but that doesn't detract from the fun. It's a little bit silly, a little bit witty, and very adorable. And the ending-- I'm beginning to wonder if open endings are Vande Velde's thing-- is perfect. A good all-ages read!

Alice Rose Sea says

It was cute.

Trin says

Like William Sleator, Vande Velde is one of the writers I read compulsively when I was about 12 or 13, even though I was often surprised at the rather dramatic shifts in quality from work to work. This novel is not one of Vande Velde's worst, though neither is it one of her best. It is, however, one I've read before—something I realized only halfway through, which suggests that this is also one of her more forgettable books. Yeah: there's really not all that much of note here. While on vacation in the French countryside, Deanna accidentally drops her Mickey Mouse watch into a magic wall, potentially causing a paradox that she must go back in time and correct before the future is altered. With the help of some rather gay elves, she finds herself back in medieval France. Unfortunately, as Vande Velde writes it, the past is as Disney as the watch. Way too much of the narrative is spent on Deanna fumbling around this plasticy version of a castle filled with plasticy lords and ladies (and even a plasticy wizard). The only really interesting part of the book involves Deanna's cat Oliver, whom the elves turn into a boy and send back in time to help her. I liked Oliver's mix of humanness and catness (he's amusingly literal—like Anya, in a way!) but his and Deanna's relationship is glossed over until the very end, which puts a dampener on what's by far the most original part of the novel. So, judging by my poor memory, this book didn't impress me much when I was 12, and it doesn't impress me much now either.

Stefanie says

If you like fairly straightforward fantasy adventure stories with some wry humor tossed in and can forgive

some semi-ridiculous plot points and characterization, you'll enjoy this book. Also, a cat turns into a human boy! How can you resist that? I know I can't.

I picked up this book at a used bookstore because I have some serious nostalgia for Vivian Vande Velde books (her *Companions of the Night* is one of my top favorite vampire books EVER; pretty incredible standing given it's YA) and hadn't read this one. I breezed through it in one day and my favorite part was the dry, observational humor that Vande Velde threads throughout, particularly through the voice of the main character, Deanna.

Deanna's stuck in France, bored, with only the cat Oliver for companionship. One day she loses her Mickey Mouse digital watch down a well - only it's a wishing well! - and some naughty time-traveling elves pull her in too, and Oliver jumps after. They've actually pulled her into medieval France, and she must get the watch back in 24hrs or her modern future is toast. Oh, and they turn Oliver human just so he can help.

That isn't even any spoilers, that's just the basic set-up of the story! Bananas, right? And that's before we get to Castle Delesse and the wacky family inhabiting it, around whom Deanna must do her investigations.

My suggestion to future readers is just relax and go with it. It's slightly preposterous, but this book is also suitable for middle grade readers, so you have to keep things on a certain simple Disney level right? Vande Velde does that, but her writing keeps things amusing even still. Somewhere in the background of this, Deanna starts growing attached to Oliver in his human form, but this storyline I think was handled less well - it should have been developed more or left out entirely. (There's threads of this star-crossed romance in *Companions of the Night*, but much better done.)

Anyway, I liked it well enough, but I think this will be enjoyed by younger readers more so than adults.

John says

This early work lacks a spark that shows up pretty reliably in later ones, methinks--it just reads like a short story that was stretched out. I did like the way Deanna was sort of dragged into taking charge, forced by events into becoming an active agent rather than a passive victim.

Collin says

Cats. And time-travel. And Vivian Vande Velde, who, according to my cousin, is always amazing. Three out of three.

And it was pretty dang awesome. It took me a while to really get into it, probably because of Deanna - she just wasn't -that- interesting of a character... by herself. But once Oliver got humanified? Her interactions with him really made the book.

Scratch that. Oliver made the book. I adore cats, they're my favorite animals, but I think I'd be too terrified to try to write a humanified cat. Cats are so much better than humans, and, as long as I've had cats, I don't think I could capture them. But Vivian Vande Velde just... got it. Oliver was such a CAT. He was amazing.

The ending, too, was really great. Actually, all of it but the first twenty pages or so was great. Read it.

Amy says

I have no words to praise it because it's soooooo AMAZING.....AWESOME work.....;D

Amanda Maria says

This is a book I randomly picked up because it looked interesting. It is very short and because of this the story seemed to be very abrupt. Different parts of the story seemed to be randomly thrown in and it didn't make much sense. I thought the overall concept of the story was good but the execution was poor. The author spent a lot of time on describing insignificant details but then would throw others quickly into the plot that made no sense. I certainly could have done without the random romance part because it did not fit and seemed like more of an afterthought. While the beginning of the book really caught my interest, the ending was a big disappointment for me. Maybe if the main character had not been such a whiny child things would have made more sense and I would have liked it better. Overall, I did not dislike it, I just did not enjoy it the way I thought I would.

Lissibith says

There's two kinds of good YA books. The first are great when you're young, but you grow up and realize... hey, this is just as good when I'm an adult! Maybe good in a different way, but good no less.

The other kind is great when you're young, and when you revisit it as an adult you find its just... not quite like you remember.

This is one of the latter. Its not a bad book, either as an adult or a child, but it doesn't distinguish itself either. The plot is a bit simplistic, the characterization is a bit obvious and the lesson a bit heavy handed. These aren't flaws per se, but it does mean that if you come to it as a more sophisticated reader, you may have trouble getting into it and immersing.

The story is a time travel fantasy with history and elves and a pretty cool cat, in the literal sense. Our heroine never got grating, though a few times I wanted to sigh over her lack of understanding about certain things and her odd jealousy. the side characters were... eccentric and really added to the story I think. But overall, this book was okay. Not bad, not great, just okay.
