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Margery Sharp , Garth Williams (Illustrator)

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Miss Bianca, the elegant mouse Chairwoman of the famed Prisoners' Aid Society, drew in her breath. "The prisoner," she said gravely, "is a little girl of eight. She has been kidnapped by the wicked Grand Duchess and is imprisoned in the Diamond Palace." Careful plans for the rescue are laid, but even the best plans can go wrong. Luckily Miss Bianca has more than her share of wiles and wit.

Miss Bianca Details

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Author : Margery Sharp , Garth Williams (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Miss Bianca for online ebook

Sarah Sammis says

Miss Bianca was a very quick read but there's not much substance to the book. The book is nothing more than a slightly padded fairy story in some sort of ambiguous time where there are buses and horse drawn carriages (if the illustrations have any bearing on the story itself). Normally I enjoy Garth William's illustrations but here they were quite grotesque and over done. Oh well, the book will be off to it's next reader soon.

Rebecca McNutt says

It's been a long time since I read this one, but *The Rescuers* series is an excellent set of books for both children and adults alike. Margery Sharp has an evident talent for imagery and depicting characters, and her writing is incredibly original.

Joann says

Very satisfying, if somewhat short further adventure of Miss Bianca and her faithful companion, Bernard. Some truly blood thirsty and terrifying details. Not sure that this would be a good read aloud for a younger or sensitive child.

Drew Graham says

(3.5)

The sophisticated and savvy Miss Bianca's wit and willingness are needed once again when the Prisoners' Aid Society learns that a little girl has been taken and forced to work as a slave to the wretched Grand Duchess in the lavishly and gaudily appointed Diamond Palace. In her new position as Madam Chairwoman, Miss Bianca feels especially obligated to lead the way to the child Patience's freedom, enlisting the especial aid of the women of the PAS. But things are not what they seem when some troubling truths about the Duchess's servants come to light, and Miss Bianca soon must work her and Patience's way to freedom on her own, never knowing if trusty Bernard is on his way to assist them.

It seemed, based on the synopsis of this book, that it had a few more elements that were used in Disney's first Rescuers film -- diamonds, a young orphan girl, an outlandish villainess, even a pair of dragonish decorations -- so I (not without some effort) found a copy of it and read it after the first in the series. This one was also fun and adventuresome, and focused more on Miss Bianca and Bernard (with Nils out of the way, a little unfortunately, but not unexpectedly), but as a story it was okay. The Diamond Palace was a great locale, sharp and hard and unforgiving in its harsh flashiness, and The Grand Duchess had ultimate potential as a vile, gaudy villainess, a la Madame Medusa, but apart from a few instances of violence and general nastiness, she was just a cranky, hideous old woman, and there wasn't really any resolution for her part of the

story, or concerning her obsequious servant Mandrake. But the real stars here were the alluring and resourceful Miss Bianca, now more comfortable in her role as heroine, and her devoted admirer Bernard, with his keen instincts and unfailing loyalty. They don't get to spend much time together, and the story wraps up pretty simply (after going in a few directions I just was not expecting -- (view spoiler)), but they're still charming little heroes, and Patience is a very nice case for our mice to solve. The ending regarding Patience at least is pretty exciting and then satisfying. The writing was readable and detailed, and it was a little old-fashioned, but that was part of its charm.

I thought the illustrations in this one were a little better (read: less hairy). The Grand Duchess was appropriately horrendous and Patience looked fairly sweet.

This book featured a few more elements that were worked into Disney's first *Rescuers* movie (though it's still definitely its own story), and it was fun to see bits and pieces that were adapted to design the films' characters and plots. The story here was simple and not really complete, but it was still a pretty dramatic little read and refreshingly quite innocent, and it's good to see MFEO Miss Bianca and Bernard developed a little further. I would like to read the rest of the series one day, but that would require some doing since the out-of-print books are pretty hard to come by.

Ivonne Rovira says

Miss Bianca was my favorite children's book for years. The clever little white mouse with the porcelain pagoda and a rodentine United Nations portfolio struck such a chord with me that, years later, I still sigh with appreciation.

I read all of the Miss Bianca books in my school library (although Dade Elementary's library didn't have them all by a long shot), and I enjoyed them all. To this day, I couldn't tell you why I loved them so much. Perhaps it was that, in the 1960s, female heroines of any kind, even literally mousey ones, were rare? Could it be the selflessness of Miss Bianca and her sidekick Bernard? Could it be that I didn't have any pets and, therefore, loved all animals in books? Perhaps, as with jokes, over-analysis ruins the enjoyment.

Please do not be put off by the dreadful Disney cartoon adaptation in *The Rescuers*. Disney's Miss Bianca bears about as much resemblance to the original as Disney's *Little Mermaid* does to Hans Christian Anderson's original.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

In contrast to *The Rescuers*, the second installment of the Miss Bianca series is a tale in which everything that possibly can go wrong does. Murphy's law is in full force, requiring quite a lot of resourcefulness on the part of the eponymous heroine and her faithful squire-at-arms, Bernard to rescue little Patience, the hopeless prisoner of the evil Grand Duchess. Perhaps someone spoke to the author about the too-frequent felicitous coincidences in Vol. 1. However, all's well that ends well in Storyland, ensuring that the reader comes away with the taste of honey, not gall.

From some of the reviews, today's parents never read the original Grimm Brothers fairytales. I grew up on them, and they never did us any harm because *we knew they were stories*. You know, fiction. Not real! Even

at about age 6, my friends and I knew it was all make-believe. And we made up stories and acted-out games in which little kids (ourselves) were the hard-used heroines of tales just like this one--and just like Snow White, and Hansel and Gretel, and a hundred others. This book (long title: *Miss Bianca; A Fantasy*--concerned parents please take note) must have been the primary inspiration for the dreadful Disney cartoon entitled "The Rescuers." I only saw it once (and that was enough)but I remember an evil queen/duchess and a couple of servants and, I believe, a pair of crocodiles (!) instead of bloodhounds, which somehow gave me the impression that it all happened in the Louisiana Bayou. There's something eminently satisfying for a child to dream about outwitting, outrunning and outdoing the Evil Grownups, and ending up in The Perfect Farmhouse, surrounded by comfortable people bigger than yourself who are delighted to take you in and make much of you.

Barb says

Miss Bianca, Chairwoman of the Prisoners' Aid Society (a charitable mousy organization dedicated to the comfort of incarcerated humans), has a new project to suggest. The last daring adventure, the rescue of a Norwegian poet from the infamous Black Castle (pause for ominous music) was obviously a great ego boost to the mice, and they are consequently quite boisterous and full of themselves. Miss Bianca, waiting for the Society's latest meeting to come to order, muses that

"...their common adventure had given mice an unfortunate taste for flamboyance in welfare work. Not one, now, thought anything of sitting up to beg a prisoner's crumb - in the long run one of the most useful acts a mouse can perform. Crumb-begging, like waltzing in circles (even with a jailer outside the door), was regarded as mere National Service stuff, barely worth reporting on one's return from the regulation three weeks' duty..."

The new mission is the rescue of a little girl who is being held in an abusive situation by the wicked Grand Duchess in the magnificent but icy-cold Diamond Palace. Miss Bianca appeals to the Ladies Guild of the Society to assist her in the daring rescue, and of course things do not go as planned. Miss Bianca is left behind in the general rout of the rest of the mice when the Duchess' ladies-in-waiting, far from being tender creatures terrified of mice, turn out to be much more "hardened" than planned for!

This is a playful book; Margery Sharp indulged herself with a full flow of flowery and elaborate language, rather a challenge for young readers (but not necessarily a drawback), and the references are aimed rather at their elders over the heads of the child-audience; perhaps this was a book meant to be read aloud, with a nod to the parent as well as the child?

The villains in this little saga are properly villainous; the Duchess' black-hearted Major-Domo, Mandrake, has committed "...a very wicked crime, of which only the Duchess now had evidence..." and he is her willing (though cringingly obsequious) partner in crime. Even her two unkempt carriage horses "...had criminal records; each having once kicked a man to death..." And so on.

If the story has a flaw (and it does have a few, being a slight work in every sense of the word) it is that the parody and melodrama are a bit too "over the top" for perfect comfort. The wee prisoner, the aptly-named Patience, is the latest in a long line of small children the Duchess has enslaved and apparently killed (!) - though most children will shiver deliciously at the peril their two heroines find themselves in, my motherly

brain says "Killed! Was that really necessary, dear author?!" And I don't think we ever do get the full story on how the Duchess obtained Patience in the first place.

Ah, well. To sum up: a diverting little parody of an adventure story. I think it should definitely follow *The Rescuers* to make more sense to the reader; it has a very sequel-ish feel to it, though it could stand alone if need be. Quite nicely written in a very flamboyant voice (to use Miss Bianca's own word); definitely not dumbed down to a younger audience vocabulary- or style-wise.

This book #2 in a series, the first four of which are illustrated by the incomparable Garth Williams. I believe all except the newly re-released *The Rescuers* (New York Review Books, 2011) are out-of-print. Some are very easy to find second-hand, but the more obscure later titles may require some serious online sleuthing.

■ *The Rescuers* (1959)

■ *Miss Bianca* (1962)

■ *The Turret* (1963)

■ *Miss Bianca in the Salt Mines* (1966)

■ *Miss Bianca in the Orient* (1970)

■ *Miss Bianca in the Antarctic* (1971)

■ *Miss Bianca and the Bridesmaid* (1972)

■ *Bernard the Brave* (1977)

■ *Bernard into Battle* (1978)

Read-Aloud: I think so. Ages 6 and up, perhaps? The prisoner Patience is eight; much is made of her sad life and deceased predecessors and bleeding fingers, but the tone is optimistic - this is, after all, why the child very much needs a heroic rescue! Neatly tied up happy ending, with the mice going off to their next adventure.

Read-Alone: Hmmm. Maybe 8 and up? Or a very strong younger reader. Definitely can be appreciated by an older readership (including adults); Margery Sharp was an accomplished social satirist and this story is full of her wry observations, though they often escalate into full-blown parody much more so than in her adult novels.

Storm says

Miss Bianca certainly has a task set before her!

Orphaned young, Patience is taken into the custody of the Duchess, a wicked woman who cares nothing for the people she hurts, only how they can best serve her. When Miss Bianca learns of this, she calls on the Prisoners Aide Society to see if they can help the poor girl. It's definitely not their usual task!

Miss Bianca grows more as a character this time around, just as she did before, and it's wonderful to see that she can act independently of her male counterparts when the need arises. Bernard too shows his true colors doing everything he can to help Miss Bianca and her young charge.

Lacey Louwagie says

I didn't like this book as much as I liked the first in the series -- it was definitely heavier on plot, with there being no question about exactly WHY the little girl in question needed rescuing -- but it was lighter on character development, which was what really set the first book apart for me. There was more humor as a slew of semi-competent mice abandoned Bianca in the diamond palace at the first sign of trouble, then congratulated themselves anyway, but less of the charming interactions. The reunion of Bianca and Bernard, anticipated throughout all their adventures in this volume, was lackluster to say the least.

Still, this book does gain points for its creepy undertones -- mechanical "ladies in waiting", an aged duchess who employs only people who have committed great crimes so that they are beholden to her not to make such crimes known, and a little girl whose fingers ache and freeze from being forced to polish silver every day.

Still, this book was lacking that special "shine." After the first, I hoped to love it. Whereas that one pleasantly surprised me, this one unpleasantly disappointed.

LobsterQuadrille says

"Miss Bianca" is a cute, creative, and humorous story of heroic mice, a downtrodden servant girl, and a cruel Grand Duchess. The premise is nice, as is the writing, and Miss Bianca and Bernard are likable and quite well-developed.

However, something about the book feels insubstantial and not entirely satisfying. This is likely due in part to the Grand Duchess, who is a very two-dimensional villain with no apparent motivation, simply being evil for the sake of being evil. Another factor is that aside from Bernard and Miss Bianca, none of the characters are really developed at all. Even Patience, the servant girl they rescue, has very little personality, or even much of a backstory.

Also, the climax of the story annoyed me a bit. Could Miss Bianca and Patience simply slip away unnoticed in the night? No, because the Duchess has to spontaneously wake up so she can send bloodhounds after them to make the escape more difficult for the sake of thrills. Can the escapees make it into the farmhouse in time? No, because Patience has to be too tired to knock loudly enough with the heavy door knocker, and the farmer and his wife of course must ignore the noise coming from the dovecote just so things can be more suspenseful. Now, this is just me nitpicking, and it would have been kind of dull if the escape went flawlessly, but the plot placed so many obstacles in their way that I kept thinking things along these lines:

"Oh come on! Now Patience is too tired to knock the heavy door knocker loudly enough for the farmer to hear? Now the Chief Ranger's coming too? Seriously, give Bianca and Patience a break and let them reach safety already!"

I know this sounds like a lot of complaints, but generally I did enjoy this little book. It was a nice enough story with some subtle humor (my favorite part is when Bernard disguises himself as a member of the Ladies' Guild). The story and most of the characters weren't well-developed, but I at least don't regret reading it. Still, I'll probably send my copy of this book off to a new home with my young cousin.

Jewels says

This fairy tale harkens back to the days when everything wasn't quite PC or pleasant as Disney would have us believe. I doubt very much that any of the movies that they might have made concerning *The Rescuers* would have contained the grisly ending of any of the old Duchess' servants. I am particularly fond of the original Grimm's fairy tales, so this was actually somewhat familiar to me. We had purchased this series for our young daughter, and along with her Roald Dahl books, we feel that they will give her the correct notion that the world is not a jolly happy place full of rainbows and unicorns. Sometimes it's a hurtful place and one has to be careful. This tale fits right in with that lesson, as well as being an enjoyable adventure that flowed to a happy ending despite itself.

Tracey says

Thanks to a thoughtful Valentine's Day gift, I've been revisiting one of my favorite childhood book series - the Miss Bianca series by Margery Sharp. After seeing the 1977 Disney film based on these books (*The Rescuers*), I got the first 5 books as Christmas and birthday gifts and nearly read the words off the pages. While my original copies are probably long gone, my husband found copies of the Dell Yearling paperbacks with the Garth Williams illustrations, and I spent a couple pleasant hours reacquainting myself with the stories.

The 1977 animated Disney film owes a bit more to this book than the one it shares a title with, as both feature a young orphan girl being the object of rescue from a cruel, rich woman obsessed with diamonds.

But instead of being set in the swamps, the orphan Patience (not Penny) is held by the evil Diamond Duchess in her palace, and then in a remote hunting lodge, from which Bernard and Miss Bianca must free her, with an exciting bloodhound chase providing the climax of the story. I remember thinking the clockwork ladies in waiting were kind of creepy as a child; now I see them as a steampunk element!

There's definitely a formula to these books; but the details of each prisoners' situation, along with the trials and tribulations the two mice face, manage to keep things somewhat fresh. Miss Bianca is easily the star of these novels, with Bernard playing the (usually) loyal sidekick. The supporting cast of characters vary from book to book, but are sufficiently well-drawn to fulfill their roles. The objects of rescue are a little less-well-defined; and the villains are also somewhat two-dimensional. The Garth Williams illustrations are utterly charming and add to the book's appeal.

The style of writing is a bit dated, and rather British at times; but its gentle humour and generally engaging plotlines make these books good candidates for late elementary readers who enjoy "talking animal" stories with a bit of adventure thrown in. Miss Bianca is a fairly good role model; despite being a mouse of class and breeding, she demonstrates intelligence, loyalty and bravery throughout the series. I quite enjoyed revisiting this series and may pass them along to my nieces (and/or nephews) at some point.

Jane says

Miss Bianca is such a role model. She has panache. Joie de vivre. She is adroit. She exhibits espieglerie and elan. How many more French words do you need to describe her?

Elizabeth says

Admittedly, the Rescuers books are based on a rather strange premise to begin with, but this one was odd even by those standards. The story was compelling, if weird, and there was a lot of action. I could see a child picking this up and really liking it. The length was also good for the upper elementary age range. As an adult reading it, I wish it had more polish like the first book in the series. I can't put my finger on why, but this one felt just a little sloppy. I think it could have been the combination of action with little character development and the odd story line. My only concern is there is a lot more sexism in this one than in the first book. If that bothers you, beware. If not, and if you like books about animals where they get to be the heroes, then you'll find this enjoyable. Also beware the little girl is treated dreadfully by the queen. She is ultimately rescued and given a happy life, but she doesn't have the best start.

Trish says

This is a good little read for girls 3rd to 5th grade. It is the sequel to The Rescuers. Garth Williams is the illustrator. There is a bit too many exclamation points!!!! and Miss Bianca is a bit pompous!!!! However, if it stimulates a child to read and go on to bigger and better things, so be it. !!! It took the Nancy Drew Series when I was a girl to really interest me in reading.....and then I went on to more mature writing and learned to tell the difference. I can recommend this for the Logos Library.
