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Kelly Barnhill , Iacopo Bruno (Illustrations)

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In most fairy tales, princesses are beautiful, dragons are terrifying, and stories are harmless. This isn't most fairy tales.

Princess Violet is plain, reckless, and quite possibly too clever for her own good. Particularly when it comes to telling stories. One day she and her best friend, Demetrius, stumble upon a hidden room and find a peculiar book. A *forbidden* book. It tells a story of an evil being—called the Nybbas—imprisoned in their world. The story cannot be true—*not really*. But then the whispers start. Violet and Demetrius, along with an ancient, scarred dragon, may hold the key to the Nybbas's triumph . . . or its demise. It all depends on how they tell the story. After all, stories make their own rules.

Iron Hearted Violet is a story of a princess unlike any other. It is a story of the last dragon in existence, deathly afraid of its own reflection. Above all, it is a story about the power of stories, our belief in them, and how one enchanted tale changed the course of an entire kingdom.

Iron Hearted Violet Details

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From Reader Review Iron Hearted Violet for online ebook

Pranta Ghosh Dastider says

Well, I won't be heartless and give Iron Heart Violet any star less. A full 5 it is.

Who am I to search for a flaw in such flawless storytelling? This story could go many places, but it kept being simple and to the point. It showed friendship, family bond, ruthless god, treachery, dragons, love, hope and many more. Written in a magical way this story became enhanced furthermore.

When all fairy tale stars with a beautiful princess, prosperous or in trouble kingdom and so on, this particular story told a different turn. It started with an ugly princess, with her ability to make stories and being elegant at the same time. Then she made a friend, her only friend. Slowly the darkness came upon. Their world crumbled and things must then be done to save everyone. The princess needs to stand her ground.

Overall growth of Princess Violet and her lone friend Demetrius was so down to earth. The narrator also had important parts to play within the story. The king and the queen each had their role, but of course they could have done more (specially the queen).

Many quotes captured my heart easily. I will mention one at least ...

Even the most intelligent designer relies upon trial and error to discover the best solution. Intelligence does not mean infallibility, nor does it mean immobility. Intelligence means the ability to learn.

Anyways, enough chit chat, and zit-zat, just go already and read this book. My words won't do justice to it. Just remember, Kelly Barnhill is a phenomenal storyteller. And this is indeed a great story.

☆ Ashley ☆ says

OMG Simon Vance is the audiobook narrator?!?!?! Ahhhhhhh okay I can't wait to listen #voicecrush ??

Jessica says

How did I not know this book existed until a month ago? It's been out two years! It has a dragon and a little red haired girl on the cover! And it's wonderful! A fascinating and unusual fantasy, like a fairy tale, or a story by E. Nesbit, with strange and wonderful dragon lore. A must read for fans of dragons, magic, and adventure!

C.J. Milbrandt says

Violet is a princess with a storytelling mentor, a best friend (far below her station), and a wondrous castle to explore. But there are secrets that shouldn't have been uncovered ... and terrible consequences when she listens to the whispers coming from the castle mirrors.

Creation lore and multiple worlds. True stories and twisting lies. Captive dragons and captivating stories. Fears and ensnare and grief that snatches away large portions of happiness. I liked this story better than *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, if only because it has a firmer sense of purpose. I'm getting a sense of what Barnhill likes in a story. (A reprise of certain themes.) Still lyrical and mythical and wise. But I don't really enjoy the tone of wistful desperation and brokenness that creeps through her storytelling. Well done, but not to my tastes.

Hannah Greendale says

Princess Violet and her best friend, Demetrius, discover a hidden room in the castle. Inside the room is a strange book that tells of a wicked creature – the Nybbas – who was imprisoned in their world. Violet has no reason to believe the story is true, until she starts hearing a voice in her head telling her to release the Nybbas.

Iron Hearted Violet touts the power of storytelling. In Princess Violet's world, telling and believing in stories is a way of life.

Violet's story, fittingly, is conveyed in a first-person narrative by the court storyteller, Cassian. He's a self-important yet self-deprecating character. Despite his honesty, Cassian sometimes feels like an intrusive narrator, often hitting an invisible pause button to break the fourth wall and interject his personal thoughts and opinions amidst the narrative.

The heart of the story is Violet, who proves a capable female protagonist. More importantly, Violet is not a conventionally beautiful princess. In fact, she is described as having mismatched eyes, coarse auburn hair, a pug nose, tall forehead, and "*when she was just a baby, her skin was freckled and blotched, and no number of milk baths or lemon rubs could unmark her.*" She even speaks with a lisp.

One night amidst a hushed crowd, Violet tells the story of a dragon who falls in love with an ugly princess. She is immediately reprimanded:

"You have made a beginner's mistake! You have forgotten the beauty! A princess is never ugly. Everyone knows that a real princess is always beautiful."

Throughout the book, Violet's struggles to accept herself the way she is. Despite being learned, smart, capable and brave, Violet's physical appearance is a continuous point of conflict.

The fundamental message of Violet's story is that beauty is found within. However, the strength and importance of this message is undermined by the illustrations, which depict Violet as a doe-eyed beauty with an oval face and cascades of dark hair.

While the writing is not as floral as Barnhill's Newberry Medal winner, *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, this

book offers occasional flourishes of striking prose:

It was a beautiful creature, though quite old. Its skin was as luminous and deep as the night sky, with a spangle of glinting flecks like stars cascading across its back.

[The fire] was too bright, too . . . strange. It didn't spread or flash or roar the way a wildfire is supposed to do. There were no columns, no plumes of ash, no tornadic twists of flame. Indeed, her eyes should have been watering from the smoke. She should have had to tie her kerchief over her face to ease her breathing. But no. The air was clear. The flames bulged and wobbled like a living thing – a many-tentacled monster with a multitude of hard, bright eyes flashing in the dark.

Much like *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, this book also has an extensive list of characters; however, in the case of *Iron Hearted Violet*, it's quite clear who is the book's protagonist. Nonetheless, the excessive number of characters convolute and slow the story.

Finally, character emotions feel rushed and unfounded, often making swift and sudden changes without sufficient reason.

With deities and dragons, mythical folk, and a strong-willed female protagonist, *Iron Hearted Violet* has much to offer, but it's strengths barely balance its weaknesses.

Arielle Walker says

3 stars for me

4 stars for the age group it's intended for...

Barb Middleton says

Pug nose, blotchy skin, mismatched eyes... meet the ugly princess. Now that's an interesting premise. Ignore the illustrations that make ugly Princess Violet look cute. Obviously, the artist didn't get the theme in this enjoyable fantasy. Violet has a strong personality, quick mind, and mouth. She's likable and strong-willed with a best friend, Demetrius, whom she explores the castle with on a daily basis. The castle is alive and has corridors that grow, shrink, and move making their adventures exciting. When the two stumble upon an ominous painting they release an evil into the world that threatens to destroy humankind. They must look within themselves to save the world.

I couldn't put this book down. Kelly Barnhill writes with a lot of action and tension. Her plot points aren't always clear, but overall I find her stories quite different and entertaining. The narrator tells the story in first person omniscient and then there is a switch to 3rd person with other characters. The narrator is the court storyteller and he weaves the story with humor, self-deprecation, and foreshadowing. He disappears in the middle of the story but he's a coward and it takes him longer to find courage than Violet and Demetrius so it didn't bother me. Some might find it jarring when he jumps back into the mix after an absence.

Themes of friendship, loyalty, heroism, love, internal strength versus looks, kindness, importance of stories and more are sprinkled throughout this novel. There is plenty to discuss and the creation story is unique. The dragon steals the show with its wisdom and humor and I wanted him to whisper in the king's mind the

wrongness of enslaving him. I understood that the Nybbas used mirrors to control people but I didn't quite understand why the queen got sick and how she knew the future. There was no mirror involved with her so it wasn't clear how the Nybbas was working his magic. I also wanted more of an explanation of the creatures that came out of the Mountain King's mirror and their history with the Nybbas. The story with the old gods and the Nybbas needed more hashing out, but it didn't keep me from reading the entire book in one sitting. A fun fantasy.

Reading Level 6.5

Amanda says

Sometimes, you just need something simple. Something somewhat predictable, charming and just downright classic. That's what I needed when it came Iron-Hearted Violet, and it fit the bill perfectly. Simple. Charming, and just adorable.

Violet isn't like most princesses -the storybook kind, that is. She isn't pretty. She isn't fragile. And she isn't anywhere near graceful. And in the stories that Violet enjoys telling so much, the princesses are always beautiful and the dragons are always evil. But Violet may have found the answer when she finds a forbidden book -and begins communicating with a mysterious creature on the other side of the mirror who claims that he can solve all of her problems. But all things come at a price.

Told through the eyes of the court storyteller, Iron-Hearted Violet tells a tale of beauty, dragons, and the power of the heart -no matter who that heart belongs to. Even though I don't read much Middle Grade fiction, it's sometimes a nice change from everything else out there, and I can really appreciate the simplicity of these types of fairy tale-esque novels. And Iron-Hearted Violet does an excellent job of sticking with the "theme" but giving it a little something different.

Author Kelly Barnhill's writing is completely engrossing and downright enchanting. I enjoyed how the story had something of an edge to it, and the enemies were truly frightening -which is a nice change from most MG novels, which seem to prefer to skirt the villain issue entirely. Violet captured the spirit of the genre perfectly while still adding something new to it.

While I wouldn't expect anything amazing or unique from this novel, it's an inspiring and charming story that's perfect for young readers.

Miranda Reads says

There's no such thing as complete when it comes to stories. Stories are infinite. They are as infinite as worlds.

When the whole world is trying to hide something, ***what would you do to discover what that is?***

Demetris and Violet are two peas in a pod - only she's **the princess of the castle** and he's **a peasant son** - but that never mattered to them.

They are too busy having adventures, raising a ruckus and **exploring the unfathomable castle**.

And one such adventure will set them on a pathway neither of them would ever have anticipated.

There is a hidden room, **deep within the castle**.

Within that room there's a malevolent...thing...**intent on bringing itself back into their world**.

It is the source of **the nameless terror** that swept across Princess Violet's kingdom centuries ago and after centuries of waiting, **it is ready to come back**.

There is no hope without risk.

BUT - when no one around Violet and Demetris will even speak of **the thing** (for fear of making it stronger), how will they ever defeat it and reclaim their world?

All stories are lies until someone believes in them.

I LOVED this one - Barnhill was able to take a tried trope (princess saving her kingdom) and create a wildly fresh and exciting tale. **This adventure is one for the ages!**

One way that Barnhill gave a little twist to her princess tale is through Violet.

For example, Violet may be many things - **brave, strong, loving and clever** - but there is one thing she is certainly not, and that is beautiful. I really appreciated how that **played into the story** but did not dominate it.

I adored **the story-telling aspect** - both Violet and her friends constantly tell wild and whimsical stories which entertain the entire castle.

In addition, world that Barnhill created was truly amazing.

It was **wild and whimsical** - the mirrored sky, the legends of the dragons and the hidden passageways and monsters - all absolutely awesome!

Honestly, there is just SO much about this one that I loved - you should totally check it out!!

Love transforms our fragile, cowardly hearts into hearts of stone, hearts of blade, hearts of hardest iron. Because love makes heroes of us all.

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Pamela says

This was rather a surprise. A spur-of-the-moment checkout at the library based mostly on the cover (which is a very silly way to pick books, as a rule, since a lot of really insipid books have really pretty covers). However, this one was surprisingly, wonderfully deep, thoughtful, and poetic.

The titular Violet is the last princess of her realm. She doesn't look like a princess "should" look, at least according to the stories told by Cassian, the story's narrator. She's got crazy hair, lopsided eyes, and loads of

freckles. No skin smooth as ivory, lustrous locks, or enchanting eyes. She befriends Demetrius, the stablemaster's son, who has quite a way with animals. The two of them explore the castle and discover a curious mirror and an even curiouiser book. The book is frightening and alluring all at once. The friends vow to leave it alone, but the wicked god trapped in the mirror pulls Violet back with promises of beauty. We all know how *that* is going to go.

There's loads more to the story: dragons, absent fathers, friendship, and a really interesting theology built on the multiverse concept. Although I found the main enemy a bit too Gollum-esque for my liking, this was extremely well-done. No silly love triangles (thank you, thank you, thank you!), a princess who's not conventionally pretty AND WHO STAYS THAT WAY (hooray!), and a smart commentary on the power of stories. I found the ending ... heartbreaking. No pun intended.

It's a bit long for the intended age group, I think, and perhaps a bit beyond them in its themes. I also wish that the drawings reflected Violet as the author described her--Bruno drew her as rather conventionally attractive the whole time. Sigh.

On the whole, however, I thought this was an interesting and refreshing take on high fantasy for middle-schoolers and young adults. And the older adults who love to read YA. :)

Lata says

3.5 stars. Lacking some of the charm of Barnhill's more recent "The Girl who Drank the Moon", this story took longer to engage me but I did find about a third of the way in I did want to know how things would turn out for Violet.

Interesting points raised by Kelly Barnhill about the damage stories prioritizing beauty of the girl/princess over sense and intelligence, cause incredible harm to Violet and countless others in her land. Violet does grow terrifically over the course of this story, and I also really liked how there are women in a variety of martial and other positions in the kingdom and it's no big deal. And it was refreshing to read a story where the heroine isn't pretty, in fact, is pfairly plain, and succeeds because she uses her brain and decides to be brave and finds a way to deal with a dangerous being.

Kells Next Read says

Enjoyable read overall, but I did find that the story fell flat in multiple places.

Actual Ratings: 2.75

Eva says

I think the problem was that I read these books in the wrong order. I enjoyed The Girl Who Drank The Moon so much - and then the Witch's Boy was honestly pretty forgettable. This one - there was so much potential, but it was never really fully realised until TGWDTM.

Andrea says

This story is told via the device of a court storyteller (one who keeps addressing the reader as "my dears"), and has a strong fairytale air, mixed with an epic fantasy plot. It is the tale of both Violet and Demetrius, as well as the storyteller.

Violet is an intelligent, lively, curious, mischievous princess, born to loving parents after many miscarriages, who happens to have very curly hair, uneven skin, an average sized body, mismatched eyes and a not precisely symmetrical face. She's not exactly ugly (certainly not in the illustrations throughout the book), but she doesn't meet the incredibly high standards of fairytale princesses, and though she's apparently loved by her family and the land's people, occasional slips of the tongue have served to make her keenly aware of failing to live up to impossible standards of beauty, and thus she feels deep-down that she's not a "real" princess. [Note: this kingdom has men and women serving in the military, and Violet is its only heir, but she's never shown learning how to run the kingdom other than when she's worried about her mother and keeping close to her, and there's no actual reason why she needs to be beautiful beyond that in stories princesses are beautiful.]

Demetrius is the head groom's son, shy, assured, loving. He becomes Violet's only friend (given that the people of the kingdom theoretically adore her, I have no idea why she has no other friends). They get up to mischief until they find a hidden library and a book which allows the Nybbas - an exiled god whose history is verbatim - to worm its way into Violet's heart, play on her belief that she's not a real princess, and try to escape its prison, taking advantage of the Demetrius' absence on a dragon hunt led by a king (who has grown obsessed with that dying race).

The Nybbas is evil because it's evil. Demetrius is impossibly good. The Queen is fridged. Violet gets to be taught a lesson that beauty is not what real princesses are made of.

I really didn't connect to this book. The storyteller's voice definitely didn't work for me, and I didn't warm to any of the characters.

TheBookSmugglers says

Ana's Take:

The end of their world begins with a story – and with a birth. Princess Violet was born to supportive parents and a loving kingdom. She is smart, loves telling stories and enjoys adventures with her one friend Demetrius.

But, as it just so happens, Violet is not a True Fairytale Princess (TFP) because as we all know, TFP are impossibly beautiful and Violet is no such thing. With her mismatched eyes, lopsided face, blotchy skin and unruly hair, she is far from perfection. Still, nobody cares about Violet's looks because everybody loves her so much.

Until that is, darkness starts to spread around Violet's world. It all begins with a hidden book and an untold story. A forgotten God, imprisoned by Mirrors, whose diminishing power is reborn. All of a sudden, whispers start and they say ugly things about Violet. That maybe it is her fault that things are going so bad. That maybe she is not a True Princess at all. And she believes it. And makes a wish that might end their world forever.

This is a story about what being a True Princess really means. But also about the power of storytelling and of friendship and about the last dragon in existence.

I am on the fence about Iron Hearted Violet. There are several things that commend it. The strength of its female characters is one of them. In this world, women occupy positions of power (including within the army) very naturally and without it being an issue. Violet herself is a worthy protagonist and I loved her arc and her learning journey about what it takes to be a real princess and how to assume responsibility for one's kingdom. I loved the importance given to loyalty and friendship as well as the thematic core of the novel and the importance of stories and storytelling. One of the biggest draws for me was the narrator – omniscient and intrusive, self-aggrandising but often self-deprecating (which was super fun to read) – but what was a draw for me personally, might well be a turn off for other readers as it often happens with narrative choices such as these.

That said, I continuously questioned the “truths” portrayed in the novel and some of the internal rules of the story seemed rather...illogical?

For example: even though we are told over and over again how this is a Good Kingdom, and how Violet is loved by everybody, Violet is still completely friendless apart from her friendship with Demetrius. That doesn't make sense within the confines of the book – unless you consider how for the story to actually work, Violet needed be a lonely girl which just means that her loneliness is an extremely contrived plot point.

Another point that confused me is the story behind the creation of the world and the forgotten God, The Nybbas. On the one hand, nobody could talk about the The Nybbas because the story has established that merely speaking about it means giving it power. On the other hand, the other Gods who imprisoned him (they couldn't kill the God for good for...reasons) seemed to be counting on the fact that The Nybbas would make a comeback which can only mean that people would talk about it. It is a nonsensical conundrum if I have ever seen one.

One of the main themes of the story is how the idea that a Princess must always be Impossibly Beautiful (i.e. too long, heavy hair, tiny feet which makes walking properly impossible, etc) is made fun of and is often criticized. The book pokes fun at classical stories where Beauty is the sole defining characteristic of princesses and it makes a point of showing that Violet, despite not being classically beautiful (quite the contrary) was in fact, a True Princess because of her actions. This is all well and good and definitely a good message to impart. But I wished that the book had been a little bit clearer about the fact that being beautiful does not necessarily translate into being evil either.

Finally, the biggest flaw of Iron Hearted Violet stems from the very thing that the story is criticising and how its illustrations failure to conform with the story that this book is telling. The illustrations here are important and a part of the storytelling and yet....all of its illustrations of Violet as well as its cover do NOT show her as she is described. The fact that the entire book is illustrated with Violet as a beautiful girl basically undermines the very thematic core of the book. It drove me to distraction to be honest and made me so mad that this book is being sold with these illustrations that do not match the character. This to me, despite its strengths, effectively derailed the story.

Thea's Take:

I'm of a very similar mind when it comes to Iron Heated Violet. On the one hand, as Ana says, I love the idea and core conceit behind this book. I mean, you have a princess that is loved no matter WHAT she looks like, who discovers that being a true princess has nothing to do with her appearance and everything to do with her heart and strength and character! That is an amazing message! There's also a cool (in theory) fantasy element with multiple universes, multiple gods, dragons without hearts, and mischief aplenty. All of this (again, in theory) is fantastic.

BUT.

There is a big BUT. There are a number of issues with regard to execution. I agree with basically everything Ana has outlined above, and won't rehash anything (except when it comes to the illustrations, but more on that in a bit). From a pure story and writing perspective, there were a couple of significant stumbling blocks, from the awkward narration to the stunted pacing, and some of the writing and stylistic choices.

Let's start with the narration, shall we? Iron Hearted Violet is narrated by the court storyteller, who frequently interjects with his opinions, with some foreshadowing (as he's telling the story after the fact), and his own touches at wit and humor. Unfortunately, the result is a bit strange and uneven, as the storyteller's actual importance and presence in the story wavers. There were times in the book where the storyteller would disappear and I would forget altogether that we had a character narrator – only to be jarred out of that experience when the storyteller would appear again suddenly, breaking the fourth wall. (This is to say nothing of the fact that the storyteller cannot possibly have seen/known everything that he did, so there's an authenticity problem, too.)

Compounding this narrative shakiness is the problem of pacing, the actual writing style and execution. From a pacing perspective, while the majority of the story is told in longer direct chapters, the middle portion of the book was filled with shorter, choppiest chapters often ending with different characters muttering ominously about signs before vanishing or dramatically leaving. For example:

"Come, Moth," she said briskly. "We have work to do." And they turned their faces into the sighing wind and vanished in the gloom.

"Demetrius? Where are you going?" But it was too late. Demetrius ran past the stables and disappeared from sight.

Help me, Cassian, mouthed her lips. And Violet vanished from sight.

"THREE!" Moth shouted, and with the three small creatures clinging to his clothing, Demetrius launched into the darkness and fell into the pit.

Meanwhile, at the end of other chapters, some characters grin evilly in the dark:

And in the darkness, a single eye – bright and hot like an ember – blinked once, twice, and glowed open.

And from its prison, the Nybbas grinned its yellow grin. NOW, it crowed. NOW, NOW, NOW.

Needless to say, when every chapter ends this way for chapters on end, these dramatic gestures kind of lose their impact.

Stylistically (and perhaps this is a nitpick but it was confusing and jarring for me so I think worth mentioning), a subset of special characters were defined by their speech reflected in ALL CAPS. The frustrating thing about this choice is that these are all very different characters – one is The Nybbas, one is a Dragon, and one is another God. Perhaps a different font choice would have been a better way to differentiate between these varied characters? Your mileage may vary.

Finally, I cannot, cannot end this review without reiterating everything Ana has already said regarding the illustrations. Violet is very pointedly, very importantly NOT a perfect, pretty princess. She, in fact, is repeatedly described as being very unattractive and growing uglier by the day, with mismatched and mis-sized eyes, coarse and unruly hair, with freckles and moles, a chipped tooth, and a pug nose. Her appearance and her obsession with becoming a beautiful "real" princess is a huge, central point of this book.

You see the problem? What kind of bizarre, contradictory message is this sending by drawing Violet as a perky, pretty princess?! It baffles the mind as to why anyone would allow this representation of Violet in the final book as it is so blatantly contrary to one of the core themes of the story (essentially saying, to me, maybe we can WRITE about ugly princesses but no one really wants to SEE anyone that isn't beautiful in the accompanying illustrations.).I should add that Kelly Barnhill is not the illustrator of this book (that would be Iacopo Bruno). We should also say that we have no idea as to whether or not Kelly Barnhill had any input regarding the book's illustrations.

Needless to say, it was incredibly distracting, disappointing, and deeply disheartening.
