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At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England

By Walter Dean Myers



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Biography of the African princess saved from execution and taken to England where Queen Victoria oversaw her upbringing and where she lived for a time before marrying an African missionary.



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At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England By Walter Dean Myers Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Once there was a little girl--an orphaned African princess--who narrowly escaped death by human sacrifice in a West African village in 1850. A British sea captain named Frederick E. Forbes saved her life by talking King Gezo of Dahomey into giving the girl to Queen Victoria of England as a gift: "She would be a present from the King of the blacks to the Queen of the Whites." As impossible as this tale sounds, it is a true one. Award-winning author Walter Dean Myers--piecing together her story from letters he found in a rare book and ephemera shop in London--paints a hauntingly detached portrait of the small African princess whom the heroic captain named Sarah Forbes Bonetta.

We follow her charmed but unlucky life as the Queen's protégée through a succession of British middle-class households, beginning with the Forbes home. Because of her celebrated association and frequent visits with the Queen, Sarah grows up in an unusual position of privilege, education, and celebrity. On the flip side, she is keenly aware that her decisions are not her own, and as a rescued orphan under the Queen's protection, her life's path is dictated by those acting in what they perceive to be her best interests. It is hard not to feel that it was cruel of her protectors to wrench her (more than once in her life) from the adopted family she adores, and eventually to encourage her to marry a West African businessman whom she clearly stated she could never love, and who would take her away from her adopted country. As the epilogue states, "She was both unfortunate in her losses, and fortunate that those losses were not greater.... She seemed to find a measure of comfort wherever she was, but was destined to be apart from the world in which she lived." This story, rich with historic prints, photographs, newspaper clippings, excerpts from Queen Victoria's diary, and Sarah's letters, is both fascinating and tragic. We have Myers to thank for rescuing this fine woman again--this time from the forgotten shelf of a London bookstore. (Ages 11 and older)

From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 5⁺-8. Myers pieces together bits of history and letters to form a unique and dramatic mosaic: the life of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a seven-year-old African (Egbado) princess saved by an English naval officer from a rival tribe's ritual sacrifice in 1850. Sarah is brought to England, where Queen Victoria puts the girl under her protection until Sarah's marriage. The queen also acted as godmother to Sarah's first child and met and corresponded with Sarah throughout her life. Through Sarah's story, Myers offers insights into Victorian attitudes and society and examines the flow of people and ideas between England and Africa during the period. The inclusion of passages from Sarah's correspondence helps bring her to life, and Sarah's photo on the jacket brings readers face-to-face with this remarkable young woman. An intriguing biography as well as an unusual source for those interested in British or African history. To be illustrated with reproductions of photographs and documents. *Carolyn Phelan*

From Kirkus Reviews

Working from a packet of letters found in a London bookshop, Myers reconstructs the life of one Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a child of royal African descent who was rescued by a British sea captain from a sacrificial rite in Dahomey, became a goddaughter of Queen Victoria, and grew up in a succession of upper middle-class households. A celebrity in her day, Sarah, or Sally, as she was also known, visited the Queen regularly, traveled repeatedly between England and Africa, grew up to marry a West African businessman, named her first born Victoria, and died of tuberculosis in 1880, aged about 37. Filling in gaps with well-chosen passages from newspapers, memoirs, and the Queen's diary, plus occasional speculations--"Snow! What must she have thought of snow?" Myers (Angel to Angel, p. 498, etc.) creates a credible, perceptive picture of her

probable experiences, adding for flavor detailed accounts of her wedding, a royal wedding she attended, and a general glimpse of London street life. He suggests that, although she may have felt caught between two worlds, and fully comfortable in neither, she had a lively intelligence and a gracious, forgiving nature. A generous selection of contemporary prints and photographs includes both British and African scenes, as well as portraits of Sarah and both Victorias. This solidly researched biography will enthrall readers, and ranks among Myers's best writing. (bibliography) (Biography. 11-13) -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Norris Patterson:

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Rosa Reid:

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Felecia Holst:

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Evelyn Ross:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try thing that really

opposite from that. One activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition details. Even you love At Her Majesty's Request: An African Princess in Victorian England, you may enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still would like to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout men. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

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