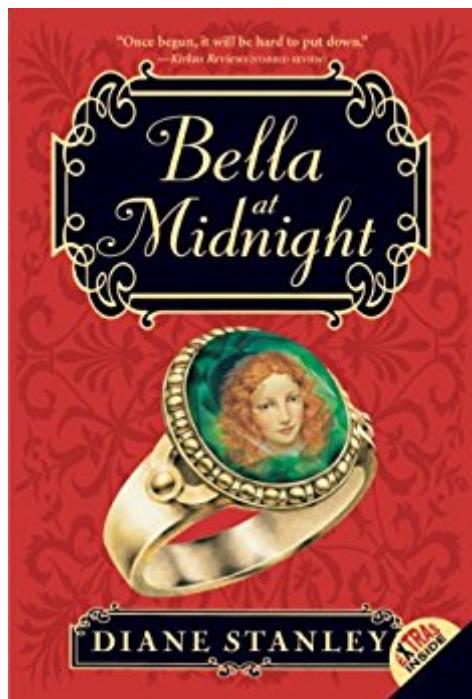


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Bella At Midnight



Synopsis

In the little village of Castle Down, in a kingdom plagued by war, lives a peasant girl called Bella. Blessed with a kind family and a loving friend, she manages to create her own small patch of sunlight in a dark and dangerous world. Bella is a blacksmith's daughter; her friend Julian is a prince -- yet neither seems to notice the great gulf that divides his world from hers. Suddenly Bella's world collapses. First Julian betrays her. Then it is revealed that she is not the peasant she believed herself to be: She is Isabel, the daughter of a knight who abandoned her in infancy. Now he wants her back, so Bella is torn from her beloved foster family and sent to live with her deranged father and his resentful new wife. Soon Bella is caught up in a terrible plot that will change her life -- and the kingdom -- forever. With the help of her godmother and three enchanted gifts, she sets out on a journey in disguise that will lead her to a destiny far greater than any she could have imagined.

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Customer Reviews

Isabel (Bella) is an unlucky girl. At the time of her birth her mother died and her father, having loved her mother passionately, abandoned Isabel to her Aunt Maud for care. Maud placed her in a foster

home, that of the Lady Beatrice (former wet nurse of the crown Prince of Moranmoor) and her husband, Martin, and son Will, and later a daughter named Margaret. Bella grew up in relative peace and comfort, never knowing that she owed her birth to a heartless knight. As she aged she grew friendly with the Prince of Moranmoor, Julian, who always called her a Princess despite her station and once gave her a thimble in a game of the faerie castle that he and Will invented for her. Despite her pleasant upbringing there is still unhappiness brewing in the land of Moranmoor. Moranmoor has been at war with the neighboring kingdom, Brutanna, for years. Bella sees much strife in her quaint life. But suddenly peace has come to pass with the signing of a treaty between the two rivals. Unfortunately Prince Julian, as the king's youngest son, must go in to the palace of Brutanna as an amicable hostage so that peace might be ensured for the nations, but not before he mistreats Bella in a rather upsetting manor. Shortly after Isabel's Aunt comes to fetch her. Her father has asked for her, and as such Bella has to be returned to a household she has never known. Her father has remarried a woman named Matilda who has two daughters, snobbish Marianne and mute Alice, who is still grieving the death of their father at sea. Not knowing what to do with a girl raised by peasants Bella is placed in the kitchens for lack of finesse as Marianne is placed at court. Every visit she brings a bit of gossip back home with her and one day Bella learns that Julian's life is in danger.

Hello, Diane Stanley. You're looking well today. Could it be the result of a new haircut? A new shirt? Or could it be the fact that you've just written a work of fiction that is getting resounding, unending, and universal applause? I think that might be the case. You look at "Bella At Midnight" and you don't exactly know what to think. It's a nice cover and all, but is it any good? Well, there's a starred review of it in Kirkus, a starred review of it in Booklist, and a starred review of it in School Library Journal. So, yes, it is indeed good. More importantly, it does something that I would have seriously doubted possible until this time. It takes that old chestnut of a Cinderella myth, pumps it full of new life and vitality, and sends it spinning off into the ether like some kind of newfangled original tale. I still had qualms with some aspects of the storytelling, but for three-dimensional characters, magnificent plotting, and a great bit of writing through and through, "Bella At Midnight" is near impossible to beat. The child was unwanted. Her mother had died in childbirth and her father wanted nothing to do with her, so unbalanced was he by his wife's death. So it was that Isabel (nicknamed Bella) was taken from her father's home and tended to by a peasant wetnurse by the name of Beatrice who had lately tended to the prince himself. Prince Julian, the third son in his family, often comes back to visit this wetnurse of his, and over the years it becomes clear that the person he seeks most often

on his visits is Bella. But it isn't until Bella is a teenager that she is told the truth about herself. The peasant family who has loved her all these years? Not her family.

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