



Nancy and Plum

Betty MacDonald

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"Nancy and Plum" is a delightful old fashioned Christmas story about two sisters, Nancy, 10 and Plum, 8, whose parents died in an accident. Their only surviving relative is Uncle John, a wealthy bachelor with little patience or time for children. He puts the girls in Mrs. Monday's Boarding School in Heavenly Valley, persuaded by Mrs. Monday's promises and unctuous manner.

But Mrs. Monday is an ogre who pampers her niece, Maribelle, and persecutes the other girls in her custody.

Of the two sisters, Plum is the spunky one, leading Nancy on forays for food and initiating their running away.

There are lovely characters who are sympathetic and help the girls: Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, who find the girls on their farm and rescue them; Miss Waverly, the school teacher; Miss Appleby, the librarian, and Old Tom, the caretaker at the orphanage.

Nancy and Plum Details

Date : Published January 7th 1999 (first published 1952)

ISBN : 9780704102927

Author : Betty MacDonald

Format : Hardcover 160 pages

Genre : Holiday, Christmas, Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade

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From Reader Review *Nancy and Plum* for online ebook

Kirsty says

Betty MacDonald's *Nancy and Plum* has been republished as part of the Vintage Children's Classics series, which features such titles as Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle*, and *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. The novel includes an afterword by former children's laureate Jacqueline Wilson, who says that it is her favourite work for younger readers, and charming new illustrations by Catharina Baltas.

Nancy and Plum, which was first published in 1952, begins on Christmas Eve. MacDonald sets the scene immediately: 'Big snowflakes fluttered slowly through the air like white feathers and made all of Heavenly Valley smooth and white and quiet and beautiful. Tall fir trees stood up to their knees in the snow and their outstretched hands were heaped with it.' The book's young protagonists are 'locked up in rotten Mrs Monday's house, while all the other children have gone home'

Mrs Monday owns the 'big brick Boarding Home for Children', in which sisters Nancy and Pamela Remson – the latter who goes by the nickname of Plum – have been placed. The girls' parents were killed in a train crash when they were only small, and their guardian, bachelor Uncle John, had no idea what to do with children. MacDonald exemplifies the differences between the sisters immediately; Nancy is filled with a 'dreamy gentleness', and Plum is daring, with a 'quick humor'. Her young protagonists have been built so well that they seem to come to life, and one is soon immersed within their tale. Each child who meets Nancy and Plum is sure to fall in love with them.

The extra material in Vintage's reprint is thoughtful, and makes a lovely addition to the story. It includes a biography of American author Betty MacDonald, a quiz, a recipe for Nancy's dream meal, a glossary of words which may be unfamiliar to younger readers, and a recommended reading list with which to follow the book. *Nancy and Plum* is a heartwarming and entertaining novel, which is sure to delight children and parents alike. It is the perfect choice for a cosy festive read.

Latharia says

This is my absolute favorite childhood book. It deals with so many amazing issues, but the best part is having two very different protagonists who both find their own way in the world. Plus the whole bad-guys-get-it-in-the-end is extremely satisfying. :)

Miriam says

Pretty standard orphans-at-cruel-school fare, nothing too horrific. The introduction mentioned that originally Nancy and Plum represented the author and her sister in a series of adventurous stories she made up as a child. Here all the adventure is removed and a fairly realistic portrayal of rural school is left. I would have preferred some wilder action, personally, which is I guess why I prefer *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*.

Deyanne says

This is a nostalgic children's Christmas story by renown author Betty MacDonald of the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggles fame. Vividly, the clever magic of Mrs. Pigglewiggle is one of my earliest childhood memories of a book that I just loved. I have no idea how old I was when I read this and I wish I had been introduced to this Christmas story at that time. Nancy and Plum are two young orphans in a story very similar to Annie of the musical fame. They, too, are orphans and kept in an orphanage with a wicked and horrid caregiver. They are resilient and not influenced negatively by their surroundings. After finishing this book, I immediately sent it to a nine year old granddaughter. I will be interested in learning how she likes it.

Kelly says

This was my first time reading "Nancy and Plum" since my third grade teacher read it aloud to us after recess each day in 1994. I loved it then, and now I can understand why: there are detailed descriptions of EVERYTHING and the simplistic story lines are filled with adventure and exaggerated characters, most of whom are either good or evil. Perfect fodder for a child's imagination.

Brittany says

One of my favorite young patrons gave this such an enthusiastic, glowing recommendation, I just had to read it for myself. I am so glad that I did because it's absolutely something I also would have loved and stayed up too late reading as a kid.

Susan Dunn says

This is a great story for those conservative parents who don't want their kids to be reading books with sex and drugs and violence. Also for girls who loved Sara Crewe. After their parents are killed, two little girls are sent to live at a horrible boarding school run by the cruel and abusive Miss Monday. How they manage to rescue themselves makes a quick but sweet read.

Kate Audsley says

First finished read aloud of 2018!! Which is exciting! Even more exciting than the book was unfortunately. This book held the kids attention well enough I suppose but never got all that interesting.

Meghan says

One of my very favorite books as a kid. Orphans at a boarding home run by the cruel Mrs. Monday, Nancy and Plum have to dress in worn clothes and eat oatmeal and prunes. They dream of escaping the boarding

home and are helped by their teacher and the town librarian when they run away.

Great descriptions of baking potatoes in a fire, sleeping in a haystack, eating apples, and the joys of having a china doll with real hair, many dresses, a fur coat, and little white gloves.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

We've all had days when we felt like abandoned, unloved orphans. When we wished someone would swoop down and take us away from it all--or that we could run away from our lives into a new, wonderful world. For days like that, this is the ultimate comfort-read. The author must have read and loved *A Little Princess* as much as I did. And do. It all feels very Victorian until you run into references to cars and airplanes. *I had to chuckle when the librarian says she has read "over a thousand books." I've done that, just since I joined GR, and that wasn't so very long ago. But then she's probably meant to be younger than I am.*

Delicious.

Michael Fitzgerald says

A wonderful story that is still fresh after more than half a century. Glad to see it reprinted, although the additions (new illustrations and introduction) do not improve it.

Here are the titles mentioned over the course of the book:

Robinson Crusoe (1719)
Oliver Twist (1838)
David Copperfield (1850)
The Water Babies (1863)
Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates (1865)
Tom Sawyer (1876)
Black Beauty (1877)
Heidi (1881)
Toby Tyler (1881)
Pinocchio (1883)
The Adventures of Robin Hood [The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood] (1883)
Treasure Island (1883)
Huckleberry Finn (1884)
Little Lord Fauntleroy (1886)
Timothy's Quest (1890)
The Jungle Book (1894)
The Live Dolls [The Story of Live Dolls] (1901)
King Arthur [The Story of King Arthur and His Knights] (1903)
Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1903)
Dandelion Cottage (1904)
Sara Crewe [A Little Princess] (1905)
Anne of Green Gables (1908)
The Secret Garden (1911)

and, of course, all of the fairy tales

Jenni Moeller says

This is such a great book! I highly recommend it. I read it aloud to my 5 & 7 year old boys and soon enough my 9 & 10 year old boys were listening too. Now my 10 year old is reading it on his own because he missed the first half of the book. The characters are funny, smart, kind, and full of joy despite their circumstances.

Laysee says

“It was Christmas Eve. Big snowflakes fluttered slowly through the air like white feathers and made all of the Heavenly Valley smooth and white and quiet and beautiful.”

This was how young Betty MacDonald began the bedtime stories she shared with her sister about two orphans, Nancy (age 10) and Plum (age 8), who spent Christmas Eve in a barn (much like the baby Jesus). MacDonald never forgot those stories, and many years and books later, she wrote a version that is a delightful classic for children called **Nancy and Plum**.

The story has the right ingredients that make for a pleasing tale. There is a pair of orphaned sisters rejected by their only relative, a wealthy uncle who would not suffer children. They are starved and ill-treated by an evil matron (Mrs. Monday) of a Boarding House (ironically) in Happy Valley where they lodged. (The standard horrors reminiscent of those doled out by a wicked stepmother include: prunes and burnt oatmeal for food; clothes and shoes long outworn; no supper for imagined wrongdoing; no picnic or school program to guarantee a childhood as joyless as possible; a favored niece of Mrs. Monday who is a spiteful tattletale). However, Nancy and Plum are spunky and resourceful children who make the best of their appalling living conditions. They are subjected to gross injustice and unfairness, and our hearts bleed for them. Fortunately, kindly teachers (Miss Waverly and Miss Appleby) and compassionate neighbors (the Campbell couple and old Tom) root for the oppressed children. Of course, parts of Nancy and Plum’s flight from Happy Valley strain credulity. Yet this is a story where the implausible is permissible because there must be a brighter Christmas Eve for two children who deserve better. The story closes with the same lines that open this book but with a Christmas Eve for Nancy and Plum that will make your heart sing.

First published in 1952, **Nancy and Plum** is a comic, light-hearted and nostalgic children’s book. I love it that the girls found comfort, courage and hope in the books read to them on library visits. That they gained “wisdom, understanding and humor way beyond their years” from literature will endear this book to the Goodreads community.

Jane says

Before there was Lemony Snicket and his Series of Unfortunate Events, there was Betty McDonald's Nancy and Plum. A gem of comic storytelling, this is one of those books you show down on reading as you pass the halfway mark, because you just don't want it to end. A thorough delight!

Jessica says

Absolutely loved this. It was recommended to me last January by a friend who knew I was looking for more Christmas books, so I put off reading it until now, and I'm both sad and glad. Sad that I'm just discovering it, and glad that I'm reading it at the start of the Christmas season.

The book covers a whole year in the lives of orphaned sisters Nancy and Plum, but it starts and ends with Christmas and has a sort of Christmassy spirit throughout. It's based on the stories about two plucky sisters that MacDonald used to tell her own sister when they were growing up, and was originally published in 1952. This edition has wonderful illustrations by Mary GrandPré which really made it special.

But it's still a very old-fashioned book, and that's a good thing.

I kept thinking about how this book couldn't be written today. I mean, the beginning, where you find out how two little girls came to live at the almost cartoonishly awful Mrs. Monday's Boarding House, that would work. But from there things would probably get more and more hyperbolically awful until the day was saved by the girls discovering magic powers or that everyone is a robot or that they are the heiresses to some Roald Dahl-esque candy factory. All the adults would be awful, and the kids would save themselves. But this book is very real. Sometimes the kids are hungry or dirty or have had to do awful chores all day. Sometimes grownups are mean, sometimes kind, sometimes ambiguous. You know, like real people. The girls are able to come up with some schemes and adventures on their own, and other times they are helped by adults. There's no magical elements, and yet the adventures the girls have are still exciting or funny or scary, and there is a magical quality to some of it. When you are hungry and lonely, being fed a delicious hot meal (described in glorious detail!) by a kindly farmwife does feel like magic, even if the farmwife doesn't turn out to be a good witch.

When I talk at schools, I talk about how I didn't really enjoy reading until I was in fifth grade, because there were no good books to read, but that's not 100% true. (It sure holds the kids' attention, though!) I think really the problem was that I didn't like the books that were being written for kids at the time. I have very fond memories of books like *A LITTLE PRINCESS* and *THE SECRET GARDEN*, *THE ALL-OF-A-KIND FAMILY*, and the works of Noel Streatfeild. I loved books that talked about Life. I liked descriptions of old-fashioned clothes, and how to build a fire, scrub a potato, and cook it in the coals. That was all very interesting to me, and still is. *NANCY AND PLUM* is that kind of book, the kind of book I would have been obsessed with as a child. So while I'm sad I'm just finding out about it now, the good news is: now I've read it, I've loved it, and I own a copy!
