



But Who Will Bell the Cats?

Cynthia von Buhler

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Finally, the solution to Aesop's age-old question: But who will bell the cats?

Mouse and his friend Brown Bat are tired of watching the princess's cats enjoy the life of luxury in the banquet hall of the castle, while they languish on crumbs and sleep in smelly socks.

They are determined to get out of the basement and join the fun and frolicking. But how to get past those spoiled cats who block their every effort?

It will take ingenuity, teamwork, and quite a bit of cunning for Mouse and Bat to succeed. If they can only figure out how to bell the cats . . .

Award-winning artist Cynthia von Buhler takes the reader on a whimsical journey in this visually stunning and innovative book. *But Who Will Bell the Cats?* (Houghton Mifflin Books for Children; September 2009) is an enchanting tale of determination, bravery, and creativity—and beautifully illustrates the rewards of the uncomplicated power of kindness.

Visit the book's website at <http://www.butwhowillbellthecats.com> for crafts, games, a behind-the-scenes look at the construction of the book, downloadable posters, lesson plans, and much more!

"Young readers will pore over this one again and again." - Kirkus

"this story of an indefatigable mouse should find a welcome place on the shelves of any castle...or library." - Horn Book

"Children will find a lot to discover in the details, even after repeated readings". - School Library Journal

In addition to having written this story, Cynthia von Buhler was also the painter, sculptor, interior decorator, mason, gardener, and plumber of the sets. The rooms were built by hand from wood. The stone walls were formed from plaster. The floors are handmade from inlaid wood, mother-of-pearl, and plaster. The characters were painted in oils on gessoed paper, then cut out and placed in the sets. The scenes were photographed by Cynthia with a Nikon D300. You can view photos of the sets and see the creation of the book from the beginning stages by visiting the book's blog, <http://butwhowillbellthecats.blogspot.com> which Cynthia used to communicate with her editor and Web designer as she was creating the final product.

Cynthia von Buhler's work has been compared to a trip down an ornate rabbit hole. Her award-winning art has been displayed in galleries and museums around the world, as well as in books, magazines, and newspapers. She lives in Staten Island and Connecticut with her husband, eight cats, one dog, seven doves,

and an unknown number of mice below the floorboards. The MiniArtMuseum at The Nassau County Museum of Art in New York will be featuring the miniature sets and characters from But Who Will Bell the Cats? and The Cat Who Wouldn't Come Inside in a solo exhibition from September 20, 2009 through January 3, 2010. Visit <http://nassaumuseum.org/teeridder> for more information.

Visit <http://www.butwhowillbellthecats.com/>... to buy the book.

Also by Cynthia von Buhler

The Cat Who Wouldn't Come Inside <http://www.comeinsidekitty.com>

ISBN-10: 0-618-56314-8

"The cat's meow."—Time Out New York Kids

"A sheer delight."—Kirkus

"[A] package that should please everyone from cat lovers to miniature enthusiasts."—School Library Journal

"...a unique, quirky and delightful book."—BookPage

"[A] poignant charmer. . . Do not ask to borrow this one, get your own copy."

—The Courier-Gazette

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But Who Will Bell the Cats? Details

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Author : Cynthia von Buhler

Format : Hardcover 32 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Animals, Cats, Fiction, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Storytime, Princesses

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From Reader Review But Who Will Bell the Cats? for online ebook

Kathryn says

OMG!!!! I actually won this in the GoodReads "First Reads" giveaway!!! I can't believe it!!! :-D AND, it's my birthday today. Woo hoo!

This is an absolutely marvelous, exquisite, fascinating and fun book! The artwork is amazing! I love all the little model rooms and "real life" miniature objects that von Buhler included for backdrops, and the real stars of the story are the fantastic "paper doll" cut-outs of the cats, the mouse, the bat and the princess. Their expressions are priceless! (I even love that the princess who owns the cats has a crown that makes it look like she has cat ears herself.) As if the sumptuous illustrations were not enough, the story itself is extremely cute and satisfying and I really enjoyed the thoughtful resolution of "Who Will Bell the Cats?" Highly recommended!!!

Thank you SO much, Ms. von Buhler, for selecting me to receive the lovely signed hardcover of your book. I absolutely adore this book and I'm so happy that I felt compelled to give it such a glowing review! I look forward to more of your work.

And for those who enjoy this sort of art, be sure to check out Lauren Child's
The Princess and the Pea

Meanwhile, check out the delightful website for "But Who Will Bell the Cats?"
<http://www.butwhowillbellthecats.com/>

Marie Bossio says

My children and I thoroughly enjoyed this story. It's a cute story about a mouse residing in the basement of a castle in squalor while the cats up stairs are living the opulent life with their princess. Until he devises a plan to be able to enjoy life upstairs without the cats bothering him by being warned of their presence. The illustrations in this book are gorgeous, and it was such a fun read.

H. says

I learned how to bell the cats. This is a fantastic story with incredible illustrations. The book website is a real treat. It features animations, lesson plans, games, posters: <http://butwhowillbellthecats.com> Don't miss the blog which outlines how this unique book was created: <http://butwhowillbellthecats.blogspot...> Cynthia von Buhler is one talented lady.

Luann says

This was my first time winning a Goodreads First Reads giveaway! And what a great book for my first win!

The illustrations are gorgeous and interesting. I wouldn't be surprised to see this as a Caldecott contender. I found new and interesting details every time I looked through the book.

The story is also very fun! It's an answer to a question posed in one of Aesop's fables. A group of mice have an idea to minimize the danger of the cat, which is to tie a ribbon with a bell around the cat's neck. The flaw in the plan is brought out by an old mouse: "But who is to bell the cat?" In this book, a mouse and his friend, Brown Bat, live in a castle with a princess and eight cats. Mouse decides that in order to have the run of the castle, he needs to bell the cats. He must then use his wits, determination, and creativity to figure out how to bell the cats.

This would work great as part of a lesson on fables or as an idea for a writing prompt. Students could be asked to write their own answer to the question: "But who will bell the cats?"

Adele Griffin says

If you know a young reader -- or even an older reader -- who loves mice, cats, and dollhouses, plus wants to find something new and charming on every read, this book is for you. Delightful and unusually inventive.

Sarah says

Aesop has been abridged, adapted and updated but now he has been answered! Reading von Buhler's book is nearly a theatrical experience. Sets are composed of walls, floors, and the appropriate miniature furnishings which are then photographed. The princess and her cats live in warm opulence upstairs while the bat and mouse exist in the dank cellar below. The omniscient reader/audience takes in both views at once.

Children and adults alike are apt to pour over the illustrations, not wanting to miss a single detail. But who will bell the cats? Will bat and mouse ever enjoy the elegant banquets, feasting and dancing? Will they ever know how it is to have a bubble bath and sleep on perfumed pillows? This reader is satisfied with von Buhler's creative solution.

Jamaie says

Anyone with young children(5 to 10), I highly recommend this book. Not only is the story interesting, the illustrations throughout the book are amazing. I could love the book from illustrations alone...the words add to that.

Rebecca says

Stunning illustrations -- painted paper dolls photographed in handmade sets. It's really the lighting that completes their fantasticness. I love the upstairs/downstairs world in this expansion upon the Aesop story -- the contrast is even shown via different fonts, as poor Mouse is made to make do with the basement world below the spoiled cats. Great book for kids who like fables, seek-and-find books, or anything frilly and

detailed. Look closely for the applicable Aesop morals on the back, and check out the book's web site for more tie-ins, especially the "making-of" info on the blog: <http://www.butwhowillbellthecats.blog...>

A. says

this is one of the books I wish I had when I was little.

I remember reading the old version of "Who will bell the cat" when I was little...and I was curious to find out what can be new about it?

...and I was very impressed. The illustrations coupled with collage are neatly designed. I love how there was a comparison between the cats' life and the mouse's life. At the end the smart mouse found the best person to bell the cats.

...and I kept wondering about Aesop who wrote the first version of this story; what was he thinking? Obviously he was the mouse, but who was the cat?

Elise Crawford says

Looking for that perfect picture storybook to give this holiday season? I just the perfect one;

But Who Will Bell the Cats? by Cynthia von Buhler immediately captures the imagination with the magical, true-to-life, settings she singlehandedly created on every page. von Buhler also captures your heart as you experience the defeats and yet final triumph of her main character, Mouse. Even more fun is the website von Buhler created for her book, <http://butwhowillbellthecats.com/>. von Buhler's story will delight readers of all ages and should be on the top of everyone's wish list for any occasion.

–Elise Crawford, A Promise Kept

Joy says

This gem of a book couldn't be more perfect. The gorgeous, thoughtful, detailed illustrations are amazing. The story is sweet and a delightful resolution to the fable. And if the book itself isn't enchanting enough, you can find more information and activities at the charming web site: <http://www.butwhowillbellthecats.com/> My son will be getting this for Christmas!

Sarah says

I completely and totally adore this book. The story is great and the illustrations are unbelievable. Read it! Now!

Carrie says

I have a huge collection of picture books, but this one is the most incredibly gorgeous one ever! The detail is extraordinary: You can feel both the chill as a rusty drainpipe drips onto the shivering mouse for his shower, and the contrasting luxury as the cat above him bathes in a golden tub by the fireplace, her cozy slippers waiting for her by the tub, the whole room awash in warm candlelight. The skill and artistry of this book is exceptional, and children and adults alike will enjoy poring over these incredible pictures. (Personally, I am desperate to move into Princess Gabrielle's castle high upon the hill.) And the story is fun too!

Roseann says

What a truly lovely children's book. Perfect for bedtime reading, and really well-illustrated with cut-outs & diorama styling, reminiscent of Lauren Child's Charlie & Lola books or her Princess & Pea book.

Christian McKay says

I've been wanting to use the word specious for a while now. Ms. Buhler has given me the perfect opportunity. This book has stunning art and an intriguing title, but it just doesn't follow through.

The tale is beautifully set up with a question posed in Aesop's Fables. One mouse has the brilliant idea of putting bells on the pesky cat so all the mice will know when the giant feline is hunting after them. Then one old mouse says, "Yes, but who will be the one to bell the cat?"

Exciting stuff, right? Unfortunately, no. The book ends up being about the difference between upper and lower classes. The mouse is sick of his life in beneath the floorboards and wants to be up with the cats, living the good life. So he and his friend Brown Bat - super cute, kinda pointless - try to get some bells on the cats. The problem is, the cats don't seem to pose any sort of threat. Every time one of the mouse's efforts to "bell the cats" is foiled, he leaves humiliated. Not terrified, or tailless or almost eaten. Humiliated. The cats just bat him around a bit and then he goes back to the basement (where the cats do not follow) to plot again. This is not the story I was set up for. Nor is it what Aesop intended.

I would like to see more work from Buhler. Her art is perfect, her craft quite admirable. I think she needs to work on her storytelling a bit.

Betsy says

What's wrong with a little gilt? A little jewelry, fanciness, lace, velvet, and champagne? Nothing, really. It just depends on how it's done. I get these little girls in my library all the time requesting "princess" stories, and truth be told what they really want is something gorgeous to the eye. They're the kinds of gals who drool

over the Fancy Nancy books and sit hypnotized by the work of Kinuko Y Craft. Sometimes it's enough to drive a good old-fashioned feminist up the wall. Not like I was any different when I was a tot, but wouldn't it be nice to give a princess-obsessed child something gorgeous to the eye with a truly original concept, story, and look, but without the standard pretty pretty princess conceit? Is it wrong that I sometimes want to blow a four-year-old's mind? I've come to the decision that Cynthia von Buhler's *But Who Will Bell the Cats?* is going to be my library's secret weapon from here on in. I've already got my explanation at the ready. "Oh! You want a princess story? Have you read the one about the princess who owns eight beautiful cats and the little mouse who lives in the basement below?" It's the old one-two punch. Lure 'em in with promises of princesses and kitties, then hit 'em with good storytelling and stunning visuals. They'll never see it coming.

The book begins with a quickie two-page recap of the old Aesop fable in which the mice decide to bell the cat. A couple pages later we read the real story. For you see there once was a princess who owned eight beautiful cats and doted on them all. Down below in her cellar there lived a mouse and a brown bat. While the cats lived in luxury the mouse and bat dwelled in the dank. The mouse then determines that his only course of action is to bell the cats and live in the prettier parts of the castle with them. The first time he tries it he wears armor. He fails. The second time he dresses up like a dog. He fails. The third time he puts on a fashion show for the cats and almost ends up in a pie before the princess walks in and saves both him and the bat. Finally, the mouse determines the best way to bell the cats. One that will allow him to attend the princess's birthday party and live in the lap of luxury once and for all. And it's all thanks to his crown-wearing partner in crime.

From the title, a person might assume that this book was just going to be a longer interpretation of the old Aesop fable. After all, 2009 has seen several Aesop fables expanded into full-length picture books (The Lion and the Mouse, Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes, etc.). It actually came as a bit of a relief to find that von Buhler had gone a different route and just used the fable as a jumping off point. The story is original and suits the visual format quite well. As for the writing itself, the words play with descriptions nicely. The mouse inhabits a world filled with terms like "dark, dingy den" or "chilly chamber" or "drafty" or "damp". The cats, in a nice contrast, bandy about with words like "elegant" or "perfumed". If you were to read this book aloud to a room full of kids without showing them the pictures, they would have little difficulty envisioning where it takes place. I doubt that they'd imagine anything quite as visually stimulating as what von Buhler has conjured up here, though.

Combining illustration and models to tell folk and fairytales isn't a new concept (Lauren Child's *The Princess and the Pea* being but one example) but von Buhler clearly takes the notion to a whole other level. Characters in each scene are illustrated two-dimensional figures placed in a three-dimensional world of models and objects. Shooting each scene with her Nikon D300, von Buhler manages to persuade the eyes of her readers that these creatures really have a kind of depth to them. Her choice of layouts also reveals the thought taken for each spread. Where folks like Child will fill entire pages in a book with a single scene, von Buhler likes to shake things up a little. In comparing the cats' lives to the mouse's, pages are split into two parts with the cats at the top and the mouse squished into the lower third. Views of individual scenes are sometimes shot from the front and sometimes from above (as when the bat has to distract some Ping-Pong playing cats with a straw hat and cane accessorized song and dance). And the lighting both above and below is remarkable. There's a tangible warmth to the palace scenes, while you can practically smell the cold stone and musty wet walls where the mouse and bat are forced to reside.

The attention to detail goes beyond the sets, of course. Clothing also plays a surprising role in the story. The very first two-page spread is a quickie encapsulation of the old Aesop tale this book takes its title from. In the scene, the mice are depicted as wearing clothing reminiscent of ancient Greece (albeit with fancy pearls). Then you fast forward in time and see the outfits of the mouse and the cats. Since the felines are living off

the fat of the land they're prone to sporting everything from top hats and crowns to preppy hockey wear. The mouse, on the other hand, tends to be garbed in drabber utilitarian fare. Patched sweaters and thick green scarves. And then there are the fonts. Nobody ever pays enough attention to fonts in picture books, but von Buhler sure does. When the text is in the light and airy castle it's set in the extravagant and fancy Salmiak. Down below where the mouse and bat dwell, though, it suddenly becomes the almost handwritten First Grade.

Scale is a little difficult to determine here. The princess appears to be approximately the same size as the cats while the mouse and bat aren't much shorter, though supposedly they should be small enough to be used as hockey pucks and ping pong balls by the cats. So that was a bit confusing. More sense could be made of the shadows in individual scenes. As a general rule, von Buhler pays close attention to the source of the light in any given scene. For example, when the mouse and bat are discussing various plans in the basement, their light comes from a single candle on a nearby workbench. In these scenes, shadows appear sharply on the dank stone walls. When scenes take place in the slightly more ambient light above in the palace, however, then the shadows dissipate with more frequency.

Once in a while a consumer needs a kick in the pants to remind them that picture books aren't something "easy" than any old celebrity with a pen can write. Some of them take a backbreakingly long time to create and use up more blood, sweat, and tears than anyone might conceivably imagine. It's only through true dedication on the part of the artist that you get something as visually inspiring as *But Who Will Bell the Cats?* Beautiful and haunting with the kinds of images kids will pore over, there ain't nothing like it out there today. A new fable in an all-new style.

Ages 4-8.

Hoover Public Library Kids and Teens says

This story is based on a question posed in Aesop's Fables about who would put the bells on the cats so the mice could hear them coming. The illustrations in this book are a unique and beautiful blend of mixed media. This is a wonderful fairy tale story for children to share with their parents. PreS-2nd grade.

Manny says

This book was soooooo cute, very vintage looking and the artist was amazing in creating the sets for each scene :) I like to think that I'm like the princess with her eight cats ;)

Kristin says

Well reviewed, if criticized for its "haunting" illustrations. (www.denverlibrary.org)

In this retelling of a classic fable, the underdogs (in this case, mice) triumph again. With startling illustrations the tale unfolds with mice scurrying desperately beneath a family of very spoiled cats. In the end, the Princess emerges from her stiff, pompous setting to play the critical role in enable the mice to reach their goal.

Perfect fit for an art lesson mimicking this cut-out style; also excellent for any unit/series focused on fables and/or fairy tales. Also great when linking books to technology: www.butwillbellthecats.com)

Gwen the Librarian says

This modern re-telling of an Aesop fable features a clever mouse and bat who are trying to outsmart some spoiled cats so they can enjoy the comforts of the castle. What make this re-telling so spectacular are the richly detailed and slightly creepy "illustrations". They're like little theatre sets with cut-out characters enacting the scenes. It was obviously a fun book to create, and the simple story paired with all the details will make this one to read over and over with a child on your lap.
