

The Silver Sea



AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

'You don't understand how dangerous this is. Anyone you see could be a spy. You cannot trust anyone.'

Sophie returns to the magical land of Tuscia and is instantly thrown into danger—Nanna and Caterina Rossellana have been kidnapped.

To save them, Sophie and Nicco must team up with a theatre troupe who are performing for the Mago, in the city across the Silver Sea.

Can Sophie unravel the political intrigues of Venetto and save the grandmothers? Or will she fall foul of the evil mago and be thrown into the dungeons to be eaten by the Mostro of the Dark Waters?

The adventures continue for Sophie and her friends in this thrilling sequel to *The Golden Tower*!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At about the age of eight, Belinda Murrell began writing stirring tales of adventure, mystery and magic in hand-illustrated exercise books. As an adult, she combined two of her great loves—writing and travelling the world—and worked as a travel writer, journalist and public relations consultant. Now, inspired by her own three children, Belinda is an award-winning, internationally published children's author with a history of writing in her family that spans over 200 years. She has written more than 35 books including *The Sun Sword* trilogy and her time-slip adventures, *The Locket of Dreams*, *The Ruby Talisman*, *The Ivory Rose*, *The Forgotten Pearl*, *The River Charm*, *The Sequin Star* and *The Lost Sapphire*. For younger readers Belinda has her popular Lulu Bell and Pippa's Island series. Her latest books are *The Silver Sea* and *The Golden Tower*, time-slip/fantasy adventures set in a magical Italian Renaissance inspired world.

Belinda lives in Manly in a gorgeous old house overlooking the sea with her husband, her three beautiful children and her dog Rosie. She is an Author Ambassador for Room to Read and Books in Homes. Find out more about Belinda at her website: belindamurrell.com.au.

THEMES

- Making a difference: one person can make a difference to their lives and the lives of others, as Sophie does when she risks her own life and dives under the palazzo to rescue Nonna and Nanna.
- Teamwork and friendship: Sophie and Nicco have to work together to save their grandmothers. In turn they have to

work with Viola and her theatre company. By having to work together friendships are formed and strengthened.

- Courage: Sophie and Nicco must draw on their courage to find the grandmothers and rescue them.
- Kindness and generosity vs intolerance.
- Wealth and power: the wealth and power of the aristocracy vs the lives of common folk and servants.
- Equality and justice: rich and poor, men and women, right and wrong.
- History: the Italian Renaissance; the lives of rich and poor and the changing role of women in society; preserving the relics and architecture of the past; the art, history, society and culture of Renaissance Italy.
- Magic and wonder.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Looking at the cover, what do you think the book will be about?
- How has the designer created a sense of mystery and wonder? Do you think it would be different if we could see the figure's face? Why or why not?
- Research the cover of *The Golden Tower*—Belinda Murrell's other book set in the same world. How can you tell, from looking at the covers, that these two books are connected? What elements are the same? What elements are different?
- Analyse elements of the book cover design by Christa Moffitt and comment on what makes them effective. Consider colour, font and images in your discussion. Why were these elements chosen? What would you have done differently if you were designing this book cover?

AFTER READING

- Write a newspaper report or a blog post about what it would be like living in the Floating City of Venetto. (Research the real city of Venice to get inspiration for your article.) Give different perspectives about what it would be like if you were from a wealthy family like Viola's and also if you were from a working family like Nezetta. Consider food, work, clothes, lifestyle, education and entertainment. Include quotes from fictional characters to give differing points of view.
- Draw a map or floorplan of your own palazzo or castle, labelling all the elements. Does it have towers? Fortifications? Gardens? Open outdoor areas?
- The theatre troupe Sophie and Nicco join perform commedia dell'arte. This was a very popular form of theatre in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. Why do you think the commedia dell'arte was so popular?
- Do you think you could say commedia dell'arte was the social media of its time? Why or why not?
- Research the main characters of commedia dell'arte. Choose one of these (eg. Pantalone, Il Dottore, the Masters) and write a short scene with them as the main characters. Choose a simple setting so you can showcase the personality of your chosen character. For example: a bus stop, the grocery shop, a library.
- Discuss the main characters of the commedia dell'arte using the description of them in Chapter Eight. Why do you think the same characters are used over and over? What does this allow you to do regarding plot and settings?
- Write your own short play in the commedia dell'arte style. Think of common tropes you could include (like forbidden love or grumpy parents).
- Choose two of your favourite characters from the story and write a scene in the commedia dell'arte style. Perform this scene with a friend for the rest of the class.
- Write a short story about travelling back in time. Where would you go? How would you get there? (For example, Sophie travels to Tuscia through a portal in the Roman ruins). Who would you meet? What do you see? What happens? How do you get back home? How do you feel when you are safely home (relieved, happy, sad the adventure is over, angry)?
- Have there been times in your life where you've drawn strength from your friends? Have you ever had to support them? Find evidence in the story of moments when Sophie found comfort and support from her friends.
- Giovanni, the Stable Master, betrays the Rossellanas to the mago. He sounds quite convincing in the scene on p 29

when he talks of there being an 'inside spy'. Write a scene where he meets the mago's men in secret and agrees to betray Caterina and her family. Don't forget to include motivation for his actions and how he might be feeling at the time.

- The Mago of Venetto has established a system where his subjects police themselves by using the bocche dei leone. What are some other ways that the mago controls his subjects?
 - This is based on a real system from historical Venice. Research this and list the similarities and differences between the real spy system and the fictionalised bocche dei leone in *The Silver Sea*.
- 'Sophie took a deep breath. This time she thought of her courage, like a tiny flickering firefly, buried deep inside her. She concentrated on the image, making it grow stronger and bigger, until it was a flaming golden orb. She pretended she was holding the orb in her hand in front of her, to show her the way in the darkness.' (p 179) This is the way Sophie gives herself courage. Have there been times where you've had to use a similar method? Do you think there are different ways to reassure and strengthen your self-esteem and courage?
- Referring to the descriptions in the book, draw a cross-section of the mago's palazzo. Start at the top (the Piombi cells), and include everything below—kitchens, antechambers, central courtyard, etc—right down to the mostro's lair (under the Pozzi cells). Add as much detail as you can.
- Research the real Doge's Palace in Venice. What can you find in your research that matches up with Belinda's descriptions of the Mago of Venetto's palazzo in *The Silver Sea*?
- There are some very interesting dishes being prepared for the Midsummer Feast. (See pp 184–185). Create a menu for a feast—or a party—and be as creative as you can. Design and draw up a physical menu for your potential guests.
- Belinda mentions the winged lion as a magical creature in her world, but it is based on real statues of winged lions in Venice. Choose a magical or mythical creature and write a story in which it saves the day or brings a message to the characters.