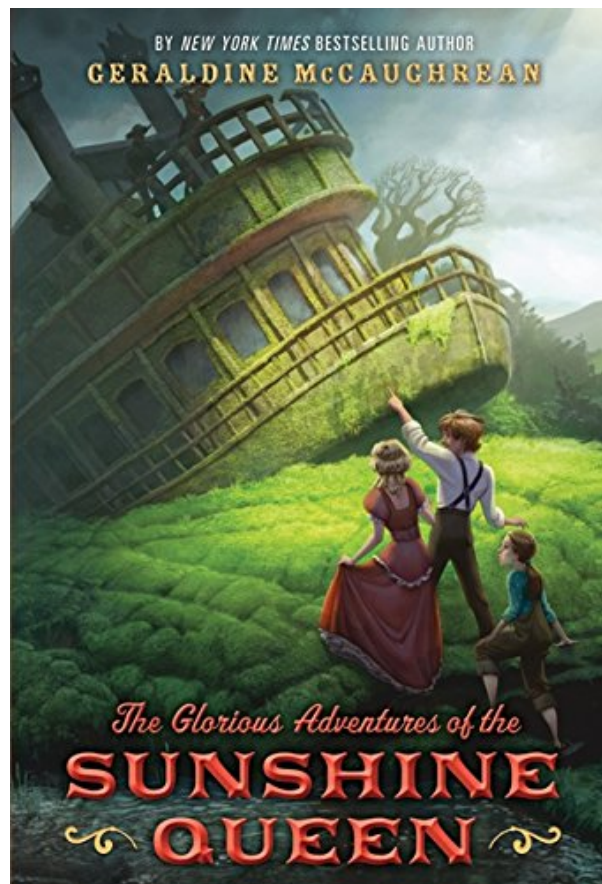
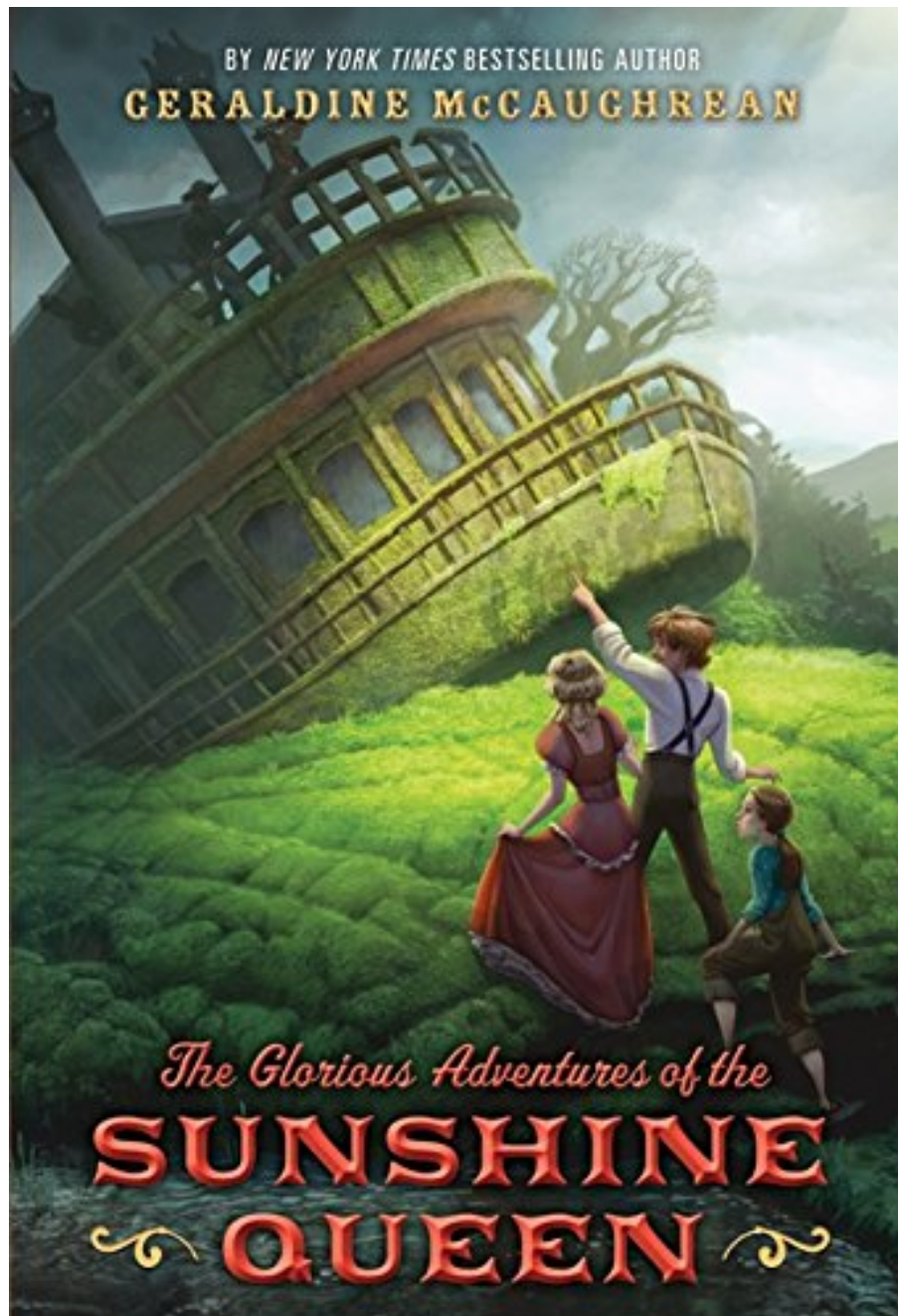


THE GLORIOUS ADVENTURES OF THE SUNSHINE QUEEN BY GERALDINE MCCAUGHREAN



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Ever since the magnificent Miss Loucien gave up teaching to join the Bright Lights Theater Company, school days have lacked a certain . . . drama . . . especially for Cissy, who longs for a life in show business, and Kookie, who craves adventure. But when a diphtheria outbreak interrupts the dull routine, Cissy and Kookie are evacuated to the doubtful safety of the Bright Lights' summer home—a shipwrecked paddle steamer on the flooded Missouri River.

Thus begins a wild and unpredictable journey downstream serving up grand performances, aggrieved river gamblers, irate lawmen, and perilous races. And when at long last Cissy steps into the limelight, the stakes are higher than she ever imagined.

Renowned storyteller Geraldine McCaughrean weaves a rip-roaring adventure in this funny tale that's chock-full of humor and heart.

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Most helpful customer reviews

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Spackfacious!

By Dienne

Whoo-whee, this is one humdinger of a book. Twelve-year-old Cecelia "Cissy" Sissney survives her days in Class Three under the strict tutelage of Miss May March by awaiting letters from her former teacher who ran away with a traveling theatre company (the Bright Lights Theatre Company) which has played in places like "Toosson" and "Nuorleens". So when diphtheria closes the school and a runaway grain silo flattens her parents' grocery store, it is only natural that Cissy wants to run away to join Miss Loucien and her new husband, Everett Crew. And somehow, in the company of the redoubtable Miss March, Cissy, her friend Habbakuk "Kookie" Warboys, their classmate Tibbie Boden and the unfortunate inventor Chad Powers (whose plan for moving the grain silo was blamed for the tragedy), end up doing just that. These are among the first signs that perhaps we ought to take this book with a grain of salt. Or perhaps the whole darn tub.

The Bright Lights Theatre Company, on the verge of destitution as usual, has found themselves holed up on a foundered steamship moored in the middle of a prairie while waiting for one of their number to get out of jail for profanity for quoting Shakespeare in the town of Salvation, Missouri. Miss March takes care of the jail and the six of them join the Crews (and discover that Loucien is hugely pregnant) and the other actors aboard what they believe to be the "Calliope". As the seasonal floods rise, the "Calliope" is once again swept onto the river, a giant tree stump still plugging the hole it impaled in the boat's hull. An "alligator man" (Elijah) who happened to be living in the boiler room and who seems to have an odd, but unremembered affinity for the boat, finds that he's able to steer the thing by sitting on the roof of the pilot house and using his feet.

This entirely impossible cast of characters then decide to start a traveling show on the boat itself, so they moor up in a likely place, put up handbills, and advertise for acts. They end up with a dog woman with an unintelligible Boston accent, a barber-surgeon who's skilled in phrenology, a hell-fire preacher, Medora and her Photopia, Max whose English is limited to Polish who performs with a flexible plank, and a black quartet. Later they take on-board Chip, the rather dim carpenter to help with repairs.

It seems the "Calliope" is always running into a spot of trouble. For instance, there's the gambler who holds the marker for the boat (from whom they learn her real name: the Sunshine Queen). There was that unfortunate misunderstanding about which boat was to be stripped for usable lumber and the sheriff who owned the other boat. The encounter with the pirate "Sugar Cain". And the time Kookie ended up in the water with the gator during a show and everyone thought it was an excellent act.

I read much of this book on my commute to and from work, so the entire ridership of the southwest branch of the Chicago CTA Blue Line thinks I'm plum outen my mind (not that that's an entirely incorrect assessment). This book is laugh out loud funny.

It does, eventually, as I feared, take a more serious turn, but there's still a sense that we shouldn't get too mournful. Poor Kookie, drunk (literally and figuratively) from the incident with the pirate, takes to a saloon and loses a chunk of money to a card sharp - the "Black Hand" Cole Blacker. He ends up so far in the hole that Cole comes to claim the Sunshine Queen in payment. Over the violent objections from his wife, Everett agrees to what appears to be a hopeless boat race to reclaim the Sunshine Queen. We sense that this isn't going to work out so well for the Bright Lights, but this here's where I stop giving away the plot, except to say that every element in the story has its purpose, and they all fall neatly into place.

Throughout the story, the tone is pitch-perfect. Ms. McCaughrean has a way with words that just draws the reader in, whether to the humor of the early story, the drama and excitement later on, or the sweet sentimental parts along the way. The characters are, of course, caricatures and parodies, but they nevertheless are real human beings and you can't help but love them all (well, with the exceptions of the ones you're not supposed to like). They are larger than life and in many ways more human than any real human can be.

Ms. McCaughrean does not merely expect us to suspend our disbelief. The Golden Gate Bridge is not strong enough to suspend that much disbelief. Rather, she expects us to pretend we have never heard the word "disbelief" and that we are utterly unfamiliar with its meaning. So don't bother asking yourself how a waterlogged, derelict boat with a tree-stump plugged hole piloted by a half-crazy old man can stay afloat. Don't ask yourself how such a motley crew could survive weeks at a time with nothing but the clothes on their backs or how decent people could allow young children to get mixed up in such unseemly goings-on. You'll only give yourself indigestion. Just find yourself a good spot with a view and enjoy the show.

This is probably one of the best books I have read. Ever. Not to sound trite, but I laughed and cried, and laughed until I cried. I don't care what types of books you like or don't like, if you're between the ages of 10 and 110, do yourself a favor and read this book. Unfortunately, Amazon only allows me five stars. But I give it ten stars anyway.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Truly a Glorious Adventure!

By DeeDee Fox

Geraldine McCaughrean possesses rare and exceptional talent. Like that of a master chef, her skillfully blended words create gourmet sentences that must be savored with each delectable bite. Visual pictures seem to fly off the pages of this book as the reader is swept into a fantastic journey of the imagination. The

Glorious

Adventures of the Sunshine Queen is a fabulous book and will not disappoint kids who have a firm grasp on reading skills.

On occasion the story-line may be a bit challenging to follow, but the effort is entirely worthwhile and the reward great. Witty, poignant, and downright spackfacious, this book will most certainly enthrall young readers.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Highly Entertaining and Funny Adventure Story

By J. Wiles Parker

Geraldine McCaughrean has shown tremendous range in her writing as well as the ability to turn research into entertaining and gripping stories. The Glorious Adventures of the Sunshine Queen is no different. Cissy, Kookie, and Tibbie must leave their little town in Oklahoma when Diptheria hits. Along with their often stern school teacher Miss May March, they set out on the train to find their former teacher, Loucien Shades Crew and her husband Everett who, along with a host of other interesting characters, live aboard a showboat and are The Bright Lights Theater Company. The Sunshine Queen, temporarily run ashore, finds its way back into the waters of the Numchuck River in Missouri and then the adventure really starts. The Bright Lights Theater Company picks up a crazy cast of performers and set off to try and make their own fortune on the river. Along the way they have to deal with a pirate, some angry townsfolk, and a particularly nasty swindler who tries to take the Sunshine Queen from them.

At first the cast of characters is a bit hard to keep track of since they have names like Cissy and Kookie and Boisenberry (which is where the handy cast of characters page comes in), but once the story is in motion, keeping track of the characters becomes easier. Each one has a distinct set of circumstances and their own personality. Thankfully, each personality is so individual and unique that you quickly forgive the sheer wackiness that abounds in the book. The book is laugh out loud funny at times as Cissy and Kookie often find themselves in situations they shouldn't and Everett has to talk his way out of problem after problem. The final situation near the end of the book seems too good to be true for a group of roving actors and musicians and McCaughrean seems to write with relish as Cissy really comes into her own to solve the problem head on.

Like many books for younger readers, there are lessons to be learned. Kookie finds out first hand what greed can do to a person and those around him and only gets out of it thanks to a quick thinking Everett and company. Cissy learns to find the strength to deal with her own problems and stand up for herself in hilarious fashion at times and even the often faint Tibbie gets some happiness in learning something new. Of course, there are other lessons to be learned as well, but I wouldn't want to go into too much detail and ruin the fun of discovery.

The Glorious Adventures of the Sunshine Queen is a heck of an entertaining read from start to finish. You know you're in for it when the book begins with an awfully spelled letter from a former teacher, but that's what makes the book so fun - the unpredictability of it all. A very enjoyable book from a very talented author; I highly recommend it.

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