

Theologian and writer Frederick Buchner wrote that a great story should do three things: Seek, treasure, and tell secrets. Laura DeNooyer has accomplished all three with singularity. Her characters are all seeking something that matters—a place of their own, belonging, family, love, and more. There are dozens of moments to treasure in this story that moves between eras, sprinkling literary references like confetti that will never need to be cleaned up later. As for secrets ... Janie and Carrie each have their own. Even L. Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz*, unveils a few. This mesmerizing saga is beautifully written, a treasure for all ages, an epic story you won't want to ever leave. I didn't.

— JANE KIRKPATRICK, AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF *ACROSS THE CRYING SANDS*

A tale of forgotten stories and hidden truths, where imagination holds the key to a past that shapes the future. Laura DeNooyer's *A Hundred Magical Reasons* is a journey through time and heart—a captivating blend of history, whimsy, and the enduring power of storytelling. An enchanting story that blurs the lines between past and present, reality and imagination. Laura DeNooyer has crafted a spellbinding tale that reminds us of the magic within our own lives.

— PATTI CALLAHAN HENRY, NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE SECRET BOOK
OF FLORA LEA*

This book is a reader's delight, a page-turner that keeps you guessing until the very end, a story that stays with you long after you read the last page.

— OLIVIA RAE, AUTHOR OF *A LIFE RECLAIMED* AND *SECRETS OF THE QUEENS SERIES*

You don't have to be a fan of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* to become fully engrossed in Laura DeNooyer's charming tale, but you might be one by the time you reach the last page. One of my favorite quotes from the book— "Coming here was like indulging in chocolate fudge after months of cold porridge"—perfectly describes my feelings as I turned pages filled with fascinating, well-developed characters and settings that transported me to each location. DeNooyer brings L. Frank Baum, author of the Oz books, to life with such whimsical detail, I found myself wishing I too could have become friends with him. This delightful story is a must-read.

— MICHELLE SHOCKLEE, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *APPALACHIAN SPRING* AND *COUNT THE NIGHTS BY STARS*

Impressively researched and beautifully told, *A Hundred Magical Reasons* paints a portrait of two true-to-life women who experience redemptive power in their lives. It's a story full of heart, brains, and courage!

— AMANDA WEN, CAROL AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE RHYTHM OF FRACTURED GRACE* AND *THE SONGS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN*

Ms. DeNooyer has painted a beautiful, fanciful picture of life with *Wizard of Oz* author Frank Baum with her new dual time novel. The dialog is rich and captivating and pulls the reader and the main historical character away from the harsh realities the little girl faces. Several generations later, another young woman is also looking for escape and freedom from her stringent parents. It's a wonderful story revealing the only source of true freedom. Ms. DeNooyer is a talented author and creates vivid pictures for her readers that will leave them mesmerized and pondering the message of the book long after they close the final satisfying page.

— LIZ TOLSMA, BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF *WHAT I PROMISE YOU*, *WHAT I WOULD
TELL YOU*, AND *A PICTURE OF HOPE*

Embark on an enchanting journey as a young woman and an older companion form an unexpected bond, their deep connection rooted in a love for books. Through the pages of L. Frank Baum's tales, they unravel surprising parallels in their childhoods, weaving a heartwarming narrative of friendship and shared aspirations.

— SUZANNE WOODS FISHER, BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF *THE MOONLIGHT SCHOOL*

Laura DeNooyer blends original characters with the real-life author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in a wonderful novel of her own. While the relationship DeNooyer's Janie has with L. Frank Baum is fiction, Baum's character rings true—her research accurately capturing the details of his life. But this isn't about him; his influence on a child becomes the catalyst in a family drama that unfolds across generations. I was pulled into the lives of Carrie and Janie, hoping each would find her fairytale ending. By the close of the book, I not only wanted a sequel, I also wanted a companion cookbook and a soundtrack!

— JANE ALBRIGHT, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WIZARD OF OZ CLUB

L. Frank Baum comes to life in the pages of *A Hundred Magical Reasons*. So does Janie, his young protege during his years at Macatawa Resort. Even Carrie, coming of age in the turbulent 1970s, falls under his spell. So, who am I to resist the lure of the Wizard of Words? The characters, the drama, and beautiful Lake Macatawa are all worth another visit.

— ANITA KLUMPERS, AUTHOR OF *WINTER
WATCH, A MURDER OF CROWS, AND THE LADY
WITH THE ALLIGATOR CASE*

Laura DeNooyer crafts a superb story where generations of characters discover their passions with the encouragement of L. Frank Baum's words and friendship. As imagination leaps from the page, DeNooyer draws wisdom and whimsy from fairytales and allegories to help her characters find their happily-ever-after. Creativity and charm will steal your heart and keep you turning pages in this fresh, inspiring story of remaining true to yourself in the Slough of Despond.

— BARBARA M. BRITTON, AMAZON
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE TRIBES OF
ISRAEL SERIES



Laura DeNooyer



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To my dear friend Rita Trickel, who makes room for fun and fairies every day. You epitomize a life well lived with both faith and imagination.

“Stunt, dwarf, or destroy the imagination of a child and you have taken away its chances of success in life. Imagination transforms the commonplace into the great and creates the new out of the old ... Man’s familiarity with the objects around him reduces him to the commonplace. Imagination and faith alone can keep him above it ... Our success, our progress and achievements depend upon that.”

—L. Frank Baum, The Advance magazine, 1909

“Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of a bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of a bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon. Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear.”

—G. K. Chesterton, Tremendous Trifles, 1909

“Every man’s life is a fairy tale, written by God’s fingers.”

—Hans Christian Anderson

ONE

PART ONE: LEAVING HOME

Once upon a time, there lived a girl who didn't know she was a princess, or that three dragons pursued her ...

May 28, 1980

Two weeks after college graduation with no diploma to show for it, Carrie Kruisselbrink stormed from her house like a prairie gale. Mom handed her an overnight bag, but Carrie left with an overstuffed suitcase. She wasn't going back.

The storm started brewing in childhood, but this morning the temperature spiked as she emptied the dishwasher, her mother barking orders. As if Carrie hadn't been responsible while away four years at college.

Mom chose that moment to pounce. She thrust a paper under Carrie's chin. Skimming the list of elementary teacher positions, Carrie resisted the urge to rip it up and cast it to the wind. She had her own career goals.

She trudged upstairs to her bedroom and found respite

among her overflowing bookshelves. But not for long. The room shrank, the headboard rattled as Mother barged in. Gusting at ninety miles per hour, she tidied Carrie's desk. "Most teachers have contracts already." In the updraft, Mother rearranged pens. "When will you mail more résumés?"

Never. Carrie winced, thoughts spiraling. "Later." Though she'd walked at graduation, she had no diploma, no teaching certificate, and no intention of retaking Philosophy of Education. She fanned her face and opened the window. Three thousand square feet in this house, yet claustrophobia suffocated like pre-storm humidity.

Her mother slammed the window shut. "Your sister had three teaching offers by graduation. What's your plan?"

Swinging open the closet door, Carrie inhaled. Plan B, in effect: *Take charge of my life. Now.* "I'm going to Oma and Opa's." Two hours northwest on Lake Michigan should be far enough away. She'd planned to visit her grandparents anyhow. Why not the whole summer?

"Fine." Mother left and returned with an overnight bag. "Don't forget résumés, envelopes, and postage."

Carrie plopped her suitcase on the bed. She tossed in sundresses and sandals. Home decorator magazines. Colored pencils, sketch pads. Books from Children's Lit class: *Mary Poppins*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Chronicles of Narnia*.

"Why the kids' books?"

"I like them." Angry retorts galloped through her like gathering winds, but she bit her lip. As usual. She tucked *The Princess and Curdie* in sideways. Too bad her entire classics book collection wouldn't fit.

"What about your date with Brian on Saturday?"

"I'll call him." According to her parents, dating Brian was her crowning achievement. They'd dated six years, now anticipating a summer packed with fancy restaurants and Brian's baseball games. Like Cinderella, she might finally get to the "palace ball." A wedding and a move to Wolcott.

Then, the deluge. “When’re you going to do something worthwhile? For two weeks, you’ve moped around, cluttered my kitchen baking ...” Words whirled and lashed, twisting into a column of anger.

Carrie rummaged through the bookshelf. “Where’s *The Tasha Tudor Book of Fairy Tales*?”

“In the garbage downstairs. It’s falling apart.”

Panic surged like a thunderclap in a squall. Carrie dashed down the steps and dug through trash. She retrieved the book—ripped binding, pages dangling, egg yolk dripping, coffee grounds stuck. In a torrent of tears, she wrapped it in a clean garbage bag and whisked upstairs to her bulging suitcase. Now topped with résumés.

Carrie scattered the papers and replaced them with bagged book remains.

Mother rolled her eyes. “Figures you’d value dilapidated fairy tales over anything practical.” She stalked off.

Surely Mother would regret her words in August when Carrie revealed her intentions—one that included fairy tales. Meanwhile, she slipped a manila envelope with her covert business plan into the suitcase and called Rita at the café to say she’d miss work this summer.

Wolcott, Population 945, the sign announced.

A mile later, on the front porch, Carrie’s ginger-haired Dutch oma greeted her with a breathless hug that infused life.

All sweat and axle grease, Opa stepped from the garage and grinned, then noted the suitcase. “How long’re you staying, Carrie Bell?”

Carrie plopped onto the porch swing. “I’ll never measure up to their expectations.”

Oma sat beside her. “They’re just eager for you to follow

the family footsteps into your first elementary classroom. We're proud of you, *liefje*."

Carrie grimaced and blew her nose. "Any job openings in Wolcott?"

"Burger Flipper's hiring," Opa said.

"Ed, that's ridiculous." Oma swatted the air. "Arlene would throw a fit."

Carrie sniffed. "Maybe that's *exactly* what I want." Even her grandparents didn't know her alternate career plans, though she'd spent spring break here scouting out the perfect location for her future book café—booths flanked by shelves of books, savored with pastries or tea. After six summers of restaurant work in Barrowdale and making a fifteen-page business plan with her mentor Rita, she was ready to obtain financing. Then she'd tell her parents. They'd watch her succeed following her own dream instead of theirs.

After lunch, Carrie called the bank's loan officer to make an appointment—the culmination of Phase One.

She walked McKinley Street, a stroll through yesteryear: Victorian homes with turrets, wraparound porches, gingerbread trim, and perfectly placed pansies as dainty as ruffles on a lady's dress. But the disastrous year of midnight studies and student teaching still trailed her. Critiques and comparisons. Rough, ineffective classroom management skills. Fighting nausea every time she entered the classroom. Carrie couldn't measure up. Just like at home.

Shaking off memories, she meandered through a park and circled back to a shady street. One dark green house with white shutters and plum-striped awnings sported a picket fence. An invitation rather than a boundary, the fence drew her to peek at the yard's secrets.

Four triangles of spring blooms surrounded a winding brick pathway. Similar colors clumped together. Lilac bushes hovered over purple pansies and early irises. Yellow daffodils

and primroses cheered in unison. Rosebushes huddled with fading tulips. Blue splashed over violets and late hyacinths.

“I need help.”

Carrie jumped at the unexpected sharp voice.

Wearing a large-brimmed hat and sunglasses, an old woman rocked in the porch’s stark shadows. “Would you please water the sunflower seedlings along the fence?”

Curious, Carrie stepped through the gate. Was she arthritic? Or even lucid? “Such a lovely garden.”

“I’d expect nothing less. The watering can’s full.”

Carrie picked up the can and spilled. “You weren’t kidding.”

“I never kid.” She drew out *never* like pulling yarn from a skein, teasing Carrie’s memory.

Wincing under the woman’s stare, Carrie began watering. “Sunflowers are my favorite, the epitome of summer.”

“Ah, Sunflower, weary of time ...” The woman recited eight lines of poetry.

Amazing! “William Blake,” Carrie said.

“You know something that counts. Did Mr. Blake inspire your love of sunflowers?”

“No.” Carrie squinted toward the sun. “No matter where the sun or how weak the light, the sunflower faces it.”

“Mature sunflowers always face east,” the woman snapped. “But in this poem, a girl rooted to the ground is scorned, doomed to face the sun, far from reach. No optimism here.”

Carrie tensed. If she wanted criticism, she’d have stayed in Barrowdale. “Maybe it’s about being trapped on earth while yearning for the divine.”

“Hardly. Preoccupation with the divine interferes with worthwhile aspirations.”

What was this lady’s problem? Anger at God? “Or it’s a slighted lover.”

“Or any unfulfilled desire. Surely you’ve heard William

Blake was well acquainted with fairies living near his cottage. Muses for his poetry and art. Alas, logic and reason kills them.” She quoted:

“The good are attracted by men’s perceptions,
And think not for themselves;
Til experience teaches them to catch
And to cage fairies and elves.”

“The end of imagination,” Carrie murmured.

“Each flower whimpers when it’s picked, he says. The loss hovers like a cloud of incense.”

“I love that image.”

“Do you now? Quite admirable. Especially considering my flowers’ demise in 1969. Remember, Miss Caroline?”

Carrie jolted at her name.

“Kids these days. Off to college and—poof! The elderly are forgotten. Come here.” She hobbled into the house as Carrie climbed two daunting porch steps. The woman returned, shaking a sheet of paper.

Carrie read the childish handwriting: “I, Caroline Kruisselbrink, age eleven, being of sound mind, do solemnly swear to never kick, hit, bat, or roll a ball into Mrs. Gordon’s flowerbed or step foot onto said sacred place, as long as I live, so help me God. June 1969.’ Oh, my.” Carrie looked up as the woman removed her sunglasses.

Mrs. Charlotte Rose Gordon. Nothing like her beautiful name, except for the thorns. Images washed over her: Carrie with Oma’s next-door neighbor Jodi kicking to each other down the sidewalk, the ball rolling into the garden, flattening tulips, then old Mrs. Gordon, who’d always been old, shouting from the house. The fence appeared a week later.

That mishap would have brought their childhoods to a screeching halt, if not for the advocacy of Carrie’s grandparents. Carrie deemed Mrs. Gordon a witch of the

Hansel and Gretel variety, the Victorian home of stained glass and gingerbread trim enticing like candy. Carrie never walked that way again. Fortunately, it was blocks away from her grandparents' house, easy to avoid. Until today.

Here, eleven years later, sat a hunched shadow of the woman who'd stomped around the garden, smacking their ball with a broom. "Mrs. Gordon." Carrie smoothed her rattling voice. "Good to see you."

"Is it now?" Mrs. Gordon slipped her sunglasses back on, peering at her over the top.

"I'm sorry for the trouble." Under Mrs. Gordon's gaze, Carrie shrank to age six.

"I'd appreciate compensation beyond new bulbs. Finish reading."

Carrie clutched the paper. "P.S. If I fail to keep this oath, I'll make it up to Mrs. Gordon as she sees fit."

The woman pointed to Carrie's feet. "You've failed your vow miserably. Today, you stood in my garden."

"You invited me."

"No such stipulations in this contract."

"I was eleven when I wrote that!"

"No statute of limitations, either."

Carrie flicked the paper. "I can't believe you saved this all these years."

"I heard about graduation and figured you'd visit your grandparents soon."

Had she perched on the porch for two weeks watching? Crazy lady. "Shall I plant more perennials? Read poetry?"

Belying her witching powers, the woman patted the wicker settee. "Come."

Carrie gingerly stepped up, the creak in each step like a squeal of derision. She sat.

Mrs. Gordon removed her sunglasses. Bags under her eyes stood out where a map of wrinkles had long ago settled in. "You'll help me clear my husband's name, God rest his soul."

“How?”

“In 1918, he was doomed to prison for a crime he didn’t commit. He died of cancer before his trial.”

Why was she revealing this? And why’d it matter now? “I don’t see how to help.”

“I need a scribe, good at research. You just graduated, so perfect timing. My eyes aren’t what they used to be.”

Oh, yes, they are. Just as beady as before. “Mrs. Gordon, I’m applying for summer jobs.”

“I’m saving you from a summer of *fast food*.” With one tongue cluck, she relegated all fast food to the abyss.

“I accidentally trample your flowers, then owe you my entire summer?”

“You’re a feisty one.”

Carrie crossed her arms. “*I’m* the feisty one?”

“I’ll pay you what you’re worth.”

Carrie shifted forward. “What am I worth to you, Mrs. Gordon?”

“What you don’t realize” —her eyes bore into Carrie’s— “is what *I’m* worth to *you*.”

“Meaning what?”

“Never mind. It’s money that concerns you graduates.” The woman sighed, as if the old days were nothing but cherub children, apple pies, and sunflowers. “I’ll pay double minimum wage every Friday for a forty-hour week. *If* I’m satisfied with your efforts.”

“How’ll you measure that?”

The woman resumed rocking. “One criterion you already meet. Spunk. You don’t roll over upon meeting an obstacle.”

That obstacle being Mrs. Gordon? She’d surely change her mind if witnessing Carrie’s usual demeanor at home.

“Miss Caroline, you’re in the right place at the right time.”

“That’s debatable.”

“See? You have spunk. Like me. The only reason the Broderick Resort was so successful.”

“That tearoom by the lake?”

“Yes, I take full credit. For what it *used* to be.”

No wonder the woman disdained the notion of fast food. Such a fine piece of serendipity! Carrie could pick the woman’s brain about best restaurant practices.

“Come at nine tomorrow with notebook and pen.”

“I never said yes.”

The woman slipped her sunglasses back on, eyes disappearing. “But you cannot say no.” Not a command. She spoke as if it were destiny.