

The Reading Guide

Reading Group Questions

1. Should we read this as a magical story of love and legend, or as a heartbreaking tale of overcoming loss?
2. In this novel, Carolyn Turgeon combines fairytales with the real world. Why are people so intrigued by the idea of magic and “happily ever after”?
3. Does the end change your ideas about the book as a whole? Were you surprised by the ending?
4. Carolyn also delves deep into the world of old-fashioned folk and fairy tales like Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson, and has much more in common with them and their dark and sometimes scary side than with modern day sweet fantasy tales. Have we in today’s entertainment world over-Disneyfied what is an important part of heritage, story-telling and literature?

Further Reading

Wicked by Gregory Maguire

Son of a Witch by Gregory Maguire

The Tales of Beedle the Bard by J.K. Rowling

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman

The Bloody Chamber by Angela Carter

Classic Fairy Tales (Norton Critical Edition) by Maria M. Tatar

From Beast to Blonde: On Fairytales and their Tellers by Marina Warner

The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales by Bruno Bettelheim

About the Book

Open the door into magical New York, and be cast under the spell of this breathtaking story of love, loss and redemption. Carolyn Turgeon’s stunning novel is an enchanting new invention of that most beloved of fairytales, Cinderella.

What would you do if you could make dreams come true? If you could ensure that Cinderella met her Prince, that sparks flew, romance blossomed, and most of all, that everyone lived happily ever after?

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Be careful what you wish for – because fairy godmothers are as flawed as the rest of us, and temptation is a terrible thing. Meet sweet, well-meaning Lillian, who opens the quiet bookshop in Manhattan's West Village every morning, and whose dark past contains a desperate act, a dramatic banishment, and a guilty secret she has carried with her for centuries. Only one kind deed done for love will break the spell that has kept Lillian from home for so long – but can she succeed in making her own dreams come true at last?

About the Author

Carolyn Turgeon was born in Michigan and grew up in Illinois, Texas, Michigan and Pennsylvania. After graduating from Penn State, she earned a Master's in Comparative Literature from UCLA, and spent several years in New York working as a writer and editor. *GODMOTHER: THE SECRET CINDERELLA STORY* is her second novel. Her first, *RAIN VILLAGE*, was published in 2006 and she's currently working on her third, about a woman who is half mermaid. She now lives in Pennsylvania, where she bellydances and plays the accordion. She loves old movies, burlesque shows, and drinking pink cocktails at the Algonquin Hotel. Her website is www.carolynturgeon.com.

An Interview with the Author**Was your childhood ambition always to be a writer? If not, what inspired you to start writing?**

I wanted to be a writer as far back as I can remember. I loved books and stories, I loved words, I spent hours daydreaming alone in my room. And going to the library was just about the most exciting thing I could imagine. I loved a lot of books as a kid but my favorites were probably the Betsy-Tacy books by Maud Hart Lovelace. I remember Betsy lounging about in trees, wearing long lacy dresses and scribbling in her notebook and dreaming of being a writer. I LOVED BETSY. Writing books was the most romantic thing I could think of.

What do you enjoy most about writing?

For the most part I think actually writing is a tiresome, draining, and tedious process. You spend hours at a desk clacking away and living in some imaginary world that makes you half insane when there are so many other delightful things you could be doing: watching *Law and Order*, playing the accordion, climbing a tree, dreaming about writing... And until you're published and have had some success, nobody knows or cares whether you've done any writing or not, so forcing yourself to do it takes a lot of discipline. In general, I'm not astonishingly disciplined.

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But there's a part of writing that really is just pure magic. Creating characters, a whole word, the feeling when the words come out just right, the weird disorienting feeling (for me part awful, part wonderful) of having images and scenes and voices come out of you and having no idea where they came from... And of course, the end result: when people open your book and experience this thing you've created as a living, breathing thing, when what you've created becomes part of them and what they've experienced in this world. That is pretty amazing.

How does the writing process work for you and how has it changed over the years?

I am constantly aspiring to write in a disciplined, methodical manner. I love (and hate) those stories about writers who get up every morning and write for 5 hours straight before taking a long walk through the woods, having people over for tea, whatever... I have always been much, much more scattered. For RAIN VILLAGE and GODMOTHER, I wrote occasionally and in spurts, I procrastinated intensely, I wrote reams of material before even figuring out what the books were about, and I ended up needing to revise for months and months and cutting plenty of good scenes that didn't fit into the final books. I also wrote both books while living in New York and working at full-time jobs. I'd write on the bus on the way to work, sometimes I'd write at work, I'd take an occasional weekend and force myself to make no plans at all—though sometimes I'd end up sequestered and just watching movies. I was also in a workshop with the novelist Jennifer Belle for several years, and that forced me to produce 7 pages by Thursday evening. Often I would write those pages Thursday afternoon, but it does all add up.

With my third book, which I'm working on now, I'm in an entirely new situation. I sold this book before writing it, I spent weeks coming up with a synopsis and chapter-by-chapter outline, I had an agent and editors who were invested in this process, I no longer have a full-time job, and I have deadlines. I still don't get up and write for five hours a day, but I'm closer now than before, and hope the whole figuring-out-the-book-before-I-write-it thing makes the process a whole lot smoother. We shall see!

What are some of your favourite books and authors?

I'm a huge fan of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is to my mind the perfect storyteller, and ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE is my favorite book. I mean really: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Auerliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." Ice!

I love other lush, magical writers like Isabel Allende and Italo Calvino and Alice Hoffman and Joanne Harris. I also love Patricia Highsmith and Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain—I'm a big fan of mounting dread and secrets hidden under perfect-seeming surfaces.

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What the last really good book that you read?

A friend recently directed me to *SOMEDAY THIS PAIN WILL BE USEFUL TO YOU* by Peter Cameron, which is simple and perfect and will break your heart. It's the kind of book that can be funny and sad at the same moment. That's something I admire a lot, a writer who can do that.

Have any films influenced your writing?

Oh absolutely. Films (and music) have influenced me as much as books have. The film I'd say is at the root of both my novels is *Wings of Desire*. The glittery girl with white-feathered wings swinging back and forth on the trapeze, an image as sad as it is beautiful since any minute now she's going to have to take off the wings and the glitter and come back to earth. It's why I wrote my first book about an aerialist and why, in *GODMOTHER*, Lil has big white-feathered wings. Some images and feelings just get their claws into you. When I was told by an early reader that fairies don't have white-feathered wings, they have wings like insects, I knew Lil had to have them anyway. So I added a line explaining that fairy godmothers have white-feathered wings; regular fairies don't.

Can you tell us a little about what you're working on next?

Right now I'm working on a retelling of the original Hans Christian Andersen little mermaid story. I'm telling the story of the princess—the one the prince falls in love with and marries instead of the mermaid, and who only appears briefly in the original story—as well as the mermaid. It's in the vein of *GODMOTHER*, though in this case the original story is already very dark. I like the idea that the princess and mermaid might have their own relationship. The novel opens with the princess witnessing the mermaid pulling the prince to shore after rescuing him from shipwreck. It's a moment that will change her life forever.

What advice would you give a writer just starting out in his /career?

To develop an incredibly healthy attitude toward rejection and criticism. To develop the ability to graciously take good criticism and graciously reject bad criticism, and to know the difference. To have an unshakeable belief that your book is worth writing, worth finishing, and worth perfecting. I've seen too many writers start something brilliant and never finish it, for about 5000000 reasons. It's a battle, and you can't underestimate how hard it is, and how wily the enemy (usually yourself) is, too. In my opinion it takes a crazy kind of confidence to finish a book, and that's just as important as having talent.