



The Grimoire of Kensington Market

Lauren B. Davis

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The downtown core of Toronto is being consumed by Elysium, a drug that allows its users to slip through the permeable edges of this world and then consumes them utterly. Peddled by the icy Srebrenka, few have managed to escape the drug and its dealer. But Maggie has.

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen," *The Grimoire of Kensington Market* is the story of Maggie, guardian of The Grimoire bookstore, which expands and contracts as stories are born . . . or die. Only those who are destined to find The Grimoire enter through its front door. But one day a messenger arrives with a mysterious note that reads, "follow me." The next day, another note arrives and then another. The messages, Maggie realizes, are from her brother, Kyle, who has fallen under the influence of the Elysium. Kyle has gone too far into the Silver World and needs his sister, a recovering addict herself, to rescue him.

Driven by guilt and love in equal measure, Maggie sets off on a quest where bands of robbers stalk the woods, tavern keepers weave clouds to hide mountains and caribou fly on the Northern Lights. A journey where dreams and the dead both come to life.

The Grimoire of Kensington Market Details

Date : Published November 6th 2018 by Wolsak and Wynn Publishers Ltd (first published October 9th 2018)

ISBN : 9781928088707

Author : Lauren B. Davis

Format : Paperback 350 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Fairy Tales, Science Fiction Fantasy

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From Reader Review The Grimoire of Kensington Market for online ebook

Janieh says

Having read and greatly enjoyed several previous novels by Lauren B. Davis I decided to step outside my comfort zone and read The Grimoire of Kensington Market. I primarily read contemporary fiction (with some historical fiction for good measure) and whenever I delve in to a novel that could be classified in the magical realism or fantasy genres there is a high risk that I will not finish it or even it like it all. This, however, was not the case with this novel ... in fact, quite the opposite. I was utterly enchanted from the first page until the last.

I grew up visiting the famed Kensington Market whenever we traveled to Toronto to visit my relatives. It is a place that holds fond memories for me and I do think that added to the overall appeal for me. Also, the fact that a book store and reading are central to the plot appealed to me. However, it is the characters and ever-changing plot with unexpected twists and turns that really kept me reading.

I loved that the inspiration for this book was Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen," and that elements of several other northern folk tales can be found within the story line. Despite the whimsy of having folk tales woven throughout, this is not a light read at all. At the center of the story is a tale of a city being consumed by the ravages of a highly addictive drug called elysium and Maggie, the owner of the bookstore in Kensington Market, sets off on a journey to save her brother from its clutches and bring him home to safety.

Having heard the author speak at a recent event, I know that this is a book that took her 10 years to write and several attempts at format in order to be able to tell the story. I am so glad that she kept at it through many versions and rewrites as she has told the story perfectly in this format.

Andrea says

The Globe 100: Our favourite books of 2018

Cynthia Hail says

Wow. That was amazing. What a story. What an imagination, and she writes beautifully, too.

Lauren Davis says

First, my tagline for this book is "The dog doesn't die." Just in case you're worried.

So, okay, I wrote the book. And it's inspired by the addiction and death by suicide of my brother, Ronnie. Fun, right? Well, it's also inspired by THE SNOW QUEEN by Hans Christian Andersen, which means it's an

adventure tale and a fable. Plus, there are flying caribou and magickal bookshops and roads that roll up behind you and a drug called Elysium, and a city made of clouds.... and, oh, heck, I have to love it after spending nearly 10 years writing it, don't you think? Snort.

And... I'm delighted to say THE TORONTO STAR gave the book a rave review:

Imagine downtown Toronto transformed into a fairytale world, a city where streets contract at will and charmless laneways contain portals into magic underworlds. Now picture a tiny bookshop hidden on a side street in Kensington Market, crammed with books that glow like neon. You'll get a feel for the kind of shape-shifting landscape Lauren B. Davis conjures in her latest novel, *The Grimoire of Kensington Market*.

Maggie is a recovering addict, one of the few surviving “pipers” ravaged by the mind-altering drug elysium. Her brother Kyle is less fortunate. He's in thrall to Srebrenka, the evil and powerful ice queen who controls the local drug trade. When Maggie — now living a quiet life as the proprietor of the magical bookshop — receives a call for help from her missing brother, she must make an agonizing decision. Should she descend through the dark underworld to confront Srebrenka and rescue Kyle, even at the risk of sliding back into the grips of elysium herself?

In this compelling novel, Davis manages several feats at once. At heart, it's the sort of dark fairytale inspired by Hans Christian Andersen. In Davis' altered world, we meet a crone named Mother Ratigan, a pair of cloaked ravens, and a family of castaway thieves living in the gloom of a decrepit manor house. Time and again, Maggie is left to her own devices, with only a few magical aids at her disposal. By relying on her own wisdom and intuition, Maggie's quest is a deeply moral tale. At pivotal moments in the narrative, she is forced to name and confront her past, unpacking her childhood backstory of trauma and neglect. Davis does a fine job balancing these fraught moments of tension with lighter, magical scenes, such as her various luxurious sleepovers at mystical hotels and loving monologues with her canine sidekick Badger.

Beneath the fairytale lies a probing exploration of the current opioid crisis. Davis highlights how the collapse of social supports and the marginalization of addicts creates the perfect storm, hollowing out inner-city Toronto and leaving wounded orphans and ruined lives in its wake. When Maggie reaches her final destination to confront Srebrenka, the author spins the kinds of pyrotechnics appropriate to the climax of such a dramatic quest.

Davis takes creative risks here and Maggie is a likable and familiar character. But it's her deft handling of the ravages of addiction that makes *The Grimoire of Kensington Market* such a timely and important read. --

- Trevor Corkum Oct. 26, 2018

Rachel says

Excellent dark but whimsical fantasy quest novel, with the added bonus of wonderful writing about Toronto. Recommended.

Stephanie says

It could not have been easy to create this dark and dangerous fairy tale fueled by love: a young woman who

has just shaken off drug addiction plunges into strange, shifting, dangerous worlds to rescue her younger addicted brother Kyle. But this is just what the prodigiously gifted Lauren B. Davis has done. Maggie's devotion to the missing Kyle bursts through the pages as she leaves her small bookstore to find him, accompanied by her beloved dog. Houses grow, paths change to frozen mountains, encountered strangers are unpredictable and dangerous...one indeed would kill to keep both brother and sister in her malevolent world. The writing sings on the page. "I am incandescent with anger." "The night was thick as a boiled wool cloak around them." "Each of us has our own path, our own destiny, and the road is longer for some than others." By the last chapters, you want to stand up and cheer for Maggie to find her brother, "thin as a birch tree, brittle as spun glass." What beautiful writing! What a gifted author!

Catherine Mauro says

Excellent! Like a fairytale for grownups. The ending was a tad rushed and awkward but besides that it was great.

Nicola Davison says

A wonderful dark fairy tale for adults. Wander into the Grimoire and get lost between worlds.

Cindy says

Pure magic!! I loved it :).

Maia Caron says

Five stars for so many reasons. This story strikes soul deep.

First of all, no other author does dialogue like Lauren B. Davis. It's always a joy to read the exchanges between her characters. And her gift for description—the worlds in this novel are rich and detailed. Not only can you smell them and feel them, you are IN them.

The author has told a story in the old ways—to nurture the reader's spirit and guide her/him to a new way of being. The story reveals much about our society and our planet. I enjoyed how the author riffed on symbols in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* and other fairy tales. The shards of broken mirror are metaphors for how the heart of the human race has been pierced. And a metaphor for how we too, have pierced the earth, our mother, who nurtures us. She is sick and dying, and our world is more entrenched in fantasy than ever before in history.

Fairy tales are meant to take one on a deeply symbolic journey within, and that is what the author succeeds at so brilliantly here. You might very well realize that you too have been devastated by childhood trauma and strayed from your true path, medicating sorrow through various addictions that keep you lulled and bewitched by the empty dreams they offer, removed from reality and far from love. All good magic brings healing, and that is what this story offers as a gift. Read it!

Tina says

Just finished reading this today. Absolutely loved it. Kept me reading late into the night and could not wait to see what happened with Maggie and her brother Kyle. Loved the fairytale structure and the writing was superb.

Look forward to reading more from Lauren B. Davis.

Penn Kemp says

In *The Grimoire of Kensington Market*, Lauren B. Davis captures the terror of addiction in a most imaginative, mythopoeic manner that is as engaging as it is all too realistic in the age of opioids. The Grimoire weaves in myth, dreams, adventure and an addict's illusions of 'reality' in this shape-shifting, endearing marvel of a book. Addiction is embodied as a sly, silver enchantress who tempts with false promise. Toronto will never look the same: Beware, this book will invade your dream life and have you looking over your shoulder in Kensington Market! Perfect pre- and post-holiday reading!

Krista says

At that moment, downstairs in the shop, a small golden light flashes and a book appears on the desk. The book is blue, the colour of the centre of an iceberg. On the cover are the words The Grimoire of Kensington Market.

In both her Acknowledgements at the end of this book and in her own review here on Goodreads, author Lauren B. Davis explains that *The Grimoire of Kensington Market* was inspired by both Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen* and the addiction and suicide of her own brother. The first thing I did after finishing this book was to revisit *The Snow Queen*, and I thought that the concept was so fitting: Anderson starts his classic tale with a hobgoblin, "a real demon", who had invented a mirror "which had the power of making everything good or beautiful that was reflected in it almost shrink to nothing, while everything that was worthless and bad increased in size and worse than ever"; and doesn't that just sound like the despair of an addict? When that mirror breaks and shards pierce a boy's eye and heart – blinding him to goodness, numbing him to love – he is easily led astray by false glamour, starting the sister who loves him on a quest of rescue. By updating this story to the present, with both magical mirror shards and a powerful new drug transforming the landscape and people of Toronto, Davis brings a really interesting concept to life. The narrative feels like a fairytale, and is itself filled with shorter dreams and fables, but it also addresses the addiction crisis that is currently transforming the landscape and people of so many communities. Interesting and timely isn't quite enough though: I wish this book was twice as long and went deeper than it does (but if I tell myself that it's only meant to be a modern fairytale, I do find it more satisfying). I'll put the rest of my review under spoiler tags – I agree with the author that I wouldn't want to ruin anyone else's fun of

discovery.

(view spoiler)

Elysium is the newest street drug plaguing Toronto, drawing addicts to pipe dens (even if that means parents leaving their children to fend for themselves on the streets) and transforming the Regent Park neighbourhood into a dangerous wildzone nicknamed “The Forest”. Once it gets its hooks in (usually literally with a shard of an enchanted mirror), elysium can transport a user to an enchanted “Silver World”; a dreamlike state in which the pain and ugliness of our own world has been wiped away. What people don't realise is that the Silver World is a real place, and the more people from our world visit it, the thinner the boundary between worlds become. As familiar Toronto streets begin to move and morph around her, Maggie – the proprietor of the enchanted bookstore of the title and the only addict to have ever kicked elysium – receives a message from her elysium-addicted brother Kyle: he needs rescue from this other plane, and it might require Maggie picking up the pipe again to follow his trail.

A pang of longing gripped her. The Silver World. The Forest. Borderlands. The Below World. The Bright World. Her head hurt. And Kyle was bait.

The bulk of the narrative follows Maggie on her quest, and after rereading *The Snow Queen*, I can say that Davis cleverly followed in Anderson's footsteps; placing Maggie in much the same settings and situations as Anderson's Gerta, but without being too literal or derivative. I also really enjoyed the organic ways that Davis inserted Maggie's backstory and relationship with Kyle; *really* enjoyed the way that the siblings seemed to dream in competing fairytales. But here's where my complaint of this not going deep enough comes in: in a lot of ways, *The Grimoire of Kensington Market* reads like a sequel; like as though I missed a previous book about Maggie's addict years, a book that had gone into much more depth about the magical bookshop and how it functions, and one that showed Maggie's relationship with Mr. Mustby and how he groomed her to become his heir. I didn't much like that Maggie is handed three magical items before she leaves on her quest which are then used in obvious and uninteresting ways, and ultimately, the final confrontation was a bit of a letdown. Also, why mention that there are a multitude of other worlds, but not go there? Ultimately, if I think of this as a novel, these complaints are failings. But if I think of it as a fairytale, then that's how those work; you trick the witch with a chicken bone and then shove her in the oven. Simple. I'm left of two minds here, but I found much to like in this read. (hide spoiler)]

Lori Ellis says

I was looking forward to read this new novel from Lauren B. Davis and it was delightful. The setting of The Grimoire bookstore swept me away, I'd love to hang out in that kind of bookstore. Maggie is the lead character and she is a well developed person with all the normal doubts and family issues many of us have. I loved seeing a woman taking on this magical adventure, too often these kinds of roles are given to male characters. Maggie had me rooting for her and her dog Badger right from the beginning. Superbly written with great pacing, I finished it in 2 days, and it had a terrific and very satisfying ending.

Kees Kapteyn says

The Grimoire of Kensington Market is full of the stuff that I love. A Canadian setting, flights of whimsy (as well as caribou), and real loveable characters. The Grimoire holds a childlike sense of wonder with fantastic creatures and marvelous settings, while dealing with some deep adult issues such as addiction, psychological trauma and carnal desires, without ever becoming melodramatic or preachy. Lauren's protagonist Maggie is a flawed, uncertain but innately strong woman, full of love in a world full of avarice and vice, and you find yourself at her side, faithfully rooting her on, urging her to succeed and save her embattled brother, Kyle. I also love the fact that the backdrop is my much beloved Kensington Market, which in the workaday world is already an amazing and fantastic place full of exotic discoveries at every turn. I burned through this book, always wanting to know where Maggie ends up next on her mystical and dangerous journey. 5 stars, no hesitation.
