



Penny Dreadful

Laurel Snyder , Abigail Halpin (Illustrator)

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The perfect book for girls and boys who look to find adventure and magic in surprising places!

What if you were really bored with your life? What would you wish for?

Penelope Grey wishes for something—anything!—interesting to happen, and here's what she gets:

- Her father quits his job.
- Her family runs out of money.
- Her home becomes a pit of despair.

So Penelope makes another wish, and this time the Greys inherit a ramshackle old house in the middle of nowhere. Off they go, leaving the city and their problems behind them. Their new home is full of artists, tiny lions, unusual feasts, and true friends. Almost immediately, their lives are transformed. Penelope's mother finds an unexpected job, her father discovers a hidden talent, and Penelope changes her name!

Penny's new life feels too magical to be real, too real to be magic. And it may be too good to last . . . unless she can find a way to make magic work just one more time—if it even *was* magic.

Any Which Wall author Laurel Snyder introduces a quirky cast of characters as pleasantly strange as they are deeply real. Abigail Halpin adds to the charm with her distinctive line drawings.

Fans of Polly Horvath's *My One Hundred Adventures*, Ingrid Law's *Savvy*, and Jeanne Birdsall's *The Penderwicks* will be enchanted by Laurel Snyder's alternatively humorous and poignant look at small-town life and what it really takes to become a happy family.

Penny Dreadful Details

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Author : Laurel Snyder , Abigail Halpin (Illustrator)

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Cheryl says

Just too implausible, though it does advice 'real people don't have lives like book characters' kind of thing. ? Charming, and as a child I would have loved it... but now I'm feeling a little cynical. And of course I'm concerned that the kids didn't take proper care when exploring a cave, and might inspire child readers to take real risks.

I did like the idea that, before Penelope had friends, she solved her boredom with books. When she got tired of just reading, she started *doing.* Taking a book from the shelf at random, letting it fall open, she then *did* what the children in the story were doing. I wish I'd thought of that when I was a lonely child.

Elizabeth says

What a fun book—I picked it up off the new book shelf for Maddie, started reading it while waiting for Bridget to finish story time, and was hooked immediately. The characters are smart and thoughtful, the plot follows a somewhat predictable line (rich family loses riches and must figure out what to do) but it still holds lots of sweet (and sometimes funny) surprises and misunderstandings, and an ending that is satisfying without being a pat happy ending. I loved all the references to books; the author got that yearning to live inside a favorite book just right. This is a great "girl" book—something fun and not watered down but still firmly in the world of a girl, not a girl trying to be a teenager.

Betsy says

I am clearly in the minority as far as my opinion of this book goes. It's cute, well written, and charming in most of the right ways. I love that Penny refers to all my favorite books (among them Unfortunate Events, Anne of Green Gables, Penderwicks...). What bugged me more and more as the book progressed, however, were two primary things:

1. the lack of any strong male character. Even Penny's dad, after he's brave enough to quit his major corporate job, still lets Penny's mom call the shots. C'mon, man, have some spunk! All other male characters are wimps, too, without a woman/girl prodding them along. I like to see both strong women/girls AND strong men/boys in books.

2. OK, people, didn't anyone else get annoyed by the "quirky" cast of characters? Charming though some of them are, still, it was a little over the top. I mean, EVERY SINGLE ONE of the Thrush Junction characters is "diverse." (for some reason, what really sealed the deal for me was the sudden awareness that the elderly lawyers in this small mountain town in East Tennessee were women--nothing against women lawyers, but what are the odds that two elderly women in the Appalachias are lawyers? This might have been okay if they weren't just another in a long line of eccentric characters.) Just was a little too much for me as far as buying into the realism.

I would have loved this book had the dad been a bit more of a man and had the characters been balanced out a bit--they seemed to be agenda driven a touch because no one would have collected that many different characters by accident.

Laurel says

I wrote this book.
I am a flack.
But now I cannot
take it back.

Five orange stars
I'll give my book,
in hopes you'll take
a little look.

Paul says

I would have given this three stars, but I polled my three children, and they gave it four, four and five stars, respectively, thus creating a four-reader average of four stars.

Penelope is a bookish girl of 9 who is bored with her life and wishes for something interesting to happen. And that's where the trouble starts. This was a slow-burn kind of read, and was one of the first times in my years of reading kids' books out loud to my kids where I felt they were getting more out of the story than I was. There are some neat moments throughout, and Laurel Snyder has a knack for developing unique and likable characters; the last few chapters really speed along and reach a satisfying, if telegraphed, conclusion. Overall, an enjoyable read, though probably more so for kids than grown-ups.

Louisa says

All around just dee-lightful. But not enough to poke my own eye out with a knitting needle.

Elena Mills says

I have decided to change my review. It was short and didn't do the book justice. So here is a better one: I really liked this story. It was simple and sweet, and gives a short look into country life. It explains the concept of poverty in a level that younger persons can understand, and explains debt through sick llamas! There are all kinds of families pictured there, from Willa and Jenny, Twents two moms, to Luella and her mother and sister, to Duncan and his over-protective parents, to Penny and her less than perfect family.

Overall this book was perfect.

Colby Sharp says

Every day during the school year I call my 25+ fourth graders over to the carpet and do my best to help them become better writers. I model for them: leads, character development, revision, elaboration, and a slew of other lessons to push them along as writers. At times I feel that I am a pretty good writer. My lessons go well, and I see what I model in the writing of my fourth graders.

My head never gets too big as a writer, but by the time summer comes and I flip through my students writer's notebooks I feel pretty good about myself and my writers. Then I read a book like Penny Dreadful. Wow! From the title of the first chapter "Ever to Confess You're Bored", until the the final line I was blown away by the amazing writing of Laurel Snyder. Penny Dreadful hooked me and wouldn't let go. The thing is, I couldn't even figure out what Laurel was doing as a writer that hooked me, but whatever it was it worked.

Penny Dreadful is the story of Penelope Grey: a girl that has it all, yet is bored out of her mind. She has nearly everything in her life except excitement. One day she makes a wish for something interesting to happen in her life, and her life is never the same. Her father quits his lucrative job, they run out of money, and they inherited one of the craziest houses you could ever imagine.

Penny Dreadful is a story that pushes you thinking about what is important in life. It appears that Penny has it all, when in fact she doesn't have the things that make us truly happy in life. It takes losing everything for Penelope and her family to realize that they had nothing.

The characters in this book will draw you in and the adventures of Penelope will have you begging for more.

Linda says

What to read next Oh what to read next! sigh I have the ARC and all the comments say this is just the right thing! lol

I loved this book-it's exactly the kind of book that would have been one of my favorites when I was a little girl! I loved all the mentions of other books that were Penny's favorites(alot of them were my favorites too)I will definately be recommending this title to customers at my bookstore.

Penny Dreadful
by
Laurel Snyder

Penelope is bored-
So she makes a wish
for something, anything
to happen.

Then, her dad quits
his job, they run
out of money and
inherit a ramshackle
house in the middle
of nowhere.

Penny's new life
is too good to be
true or is it?

A wonderful story
of friends and
friendship that
made me smile!!

Roy says

I had never heard of this book or the author before deciding to give it a shot as bedtime reading for my six year old daughter. From the cover copy I saw it shared traits with books we've read to her so far such as Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Holes, Half Magic. These books each feature young protagonists and the element of magic. The twist in Penny Dreadful is that by the end we're not certain if magic ever really played a part in what took place or if certain critical events were instead the result of chance. Did Penny wish things into being or did they coincidentally take place shortly after she wished for them? With Penny being such a vague wisher, asking for improved circumstances rather than for something specific to change them with, we can't be 100% sure. The story takes a little while to get going in the eventful sort of manner that children enjoy. I thought my little one might grown impatient with the set-up and ask for another book. But she remained sufficiently intrigued so we kept reading. Once Penny and her parents leave The City and move to the interesting house they have inherited, the narrative picks up steam. In her new home the formerly rich and sheltered Penny learns the value of friendship and using her inner resources to get by in a world where everything is no longer handed to her on a silver platter. Her feisty best friend Luella is the character my daughter was most amused by and related to best. Her pivotal role is basically to introduce Penny to normalcy and childhood experienced the way it ought to be done, with joy and exuberance and curiosity and daring. Before meeting Luella, Penny knows of adventure through books. After, she finds that no adventure is greater than life itself.

Susann says

Re-read for May, 2014 VSC discussion. Really want to read more Snyder.

"She danced and danced, and when she was done, she lay panting in the dirt. It felt very good, like she'd let out all her worries."

11-12-2010:

Wendy was right. I am loving this and am very glad that I went completely out of my way to pick it up from the library.

Update: sweet and real and substantial. It's hard to imagine the bookish young girl (or the bookish formerly young girl) who wouldn't enjoy this. The literary references jibe and - although I am suspicious of any chapter book illustrator working after 1984 - these illustrations enhance the text and grow more and more appealing. Thrush Junction might be too good to be true, but I'm happy to bask in its possibilities and warm up to the neighbors, right alongside Penny.

As a New Yorker who believes in the value of kvetching, I liked this line:

"*Actually, she thought, it feels good to complain.* It was a little like stretching."

And how's this for a Randy Melendy moment?:

"Gazing at the mountains beyond the house, she wanted to ramble, to *do* - in a hungry, wandering, *real* way."

Tripp says

Ten-year-old Penelope Grey lives in a mansion in the city with her parents but is bored. Two wishes made in the family wishing well seem to move the plot along by changing the Greys' circumstances, though this connection isn't explicitly made. At other points in the novel, Penny will search for similar signs and guidance and will find what she needs, though Snyder keeps it ambiguous so that it doesn't seem as if Penny is being handed easy answers by plot conventions.

The similarity and differences between stories and life is a theme of the book. This is most obvious toward the end, long after the Greys have had to move from the city to a ramshackle collection of houses in the mountains of Tennessee, inherited by Penny's mom, Delia Dewberry Grey, when the Greys need more money than they have in order to pay off the house's debts and avoid losing both it and the quirky tenants who lived in the connected buildings with Delia's great-great-aunt. Penny believes she can find the long-lost gold of local legend, Briscoe Blackrabbit. She and her friends explore the nearby caverns and actually find an abandoned miner's post deep underground, bringing up and lugging home a heavy wooden box. However, when they open the box, it holds only empty bottles. In a certain kind of story, the box would contain the gold and the money problem would be solved, but, Snyder is saying, this is not that kind of story. Instead, she goes for an *It's A Wonderful Life* ending, with the tenants pitching in enough money to keep the bank from foreclosing.

Unusual for its use of omniscience, if only taking full advantage of it in places. Most of the time, the story stays with Penny, though maintaining a great deal of psychic distance, constantly referring to her as "Penny" and her parents by their names rather than "mom" and "dad," as you'd find in 3rd person close.

Kaethe says

A childrens book lovers paradise. Snyder name checks old favorites as well as new ones. She plays with conventions and expectations. She provides a diverse cast of characters naturally, without making age, color, sexual orientation, or disability as issue. It's totally enchanting, and filled with adventure and novelty, and if I could move into a book, this is my first choice.

Ryan says

The ending is wonderful, the story is great...so much fun. It is a story about discovery - Penelope discovers Penny, her dad discovers cooking, her mother discovers garbage, and they all discover their magical inner resources. I am a wisher - sometimes its prayer, sometimes its just wishing - and know the power of wishing (so you have to be super careful), so I appreciated Penny's wishes, appreciated her faith and also her realization that it isn't enough to wish - you have to DO something too. There is a silliness to the story too - Up-Betty and Down-Betty, Twent and Duncan's allergies - again, very fun. I would have read this to my kids, but read ahead when they were asleep.

Melody says

Sweet and fun. It's the kind of book I would have loved when I was a child, full of references to other books, with a bit of trouble and a lot of humor. The characters are quirky without being scary, there's enough backstory but not too much, and it's, well, wholesome. Sweet is the proper word, I think- but the sweet of raspberries, not the sweet of candy bars.
