Louisiana's Way Home

Kate DiCamillo



WALKER
BOOKS

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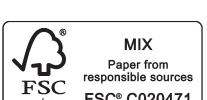
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One

I am going to write it all down, so that what happened to me will be known, so that if someone were to stand at their window at night and look up at the stars and think, *My goodness, whatever happened to Louisiana Elefante? Where did she go?* they will have an answer. They will know.

This is what happened.

I will begin at the beginning.

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The beginning is that my great-grandfather was a magician, and long, long ago he set into motion a most terrible curse.

But right now you do not need to know the details of the terrible curse. You only need to know that it exists and that it is a curse that has been passed down from generation to generation.

It is, as I said, a terrible curse.

And now it has landed upon my head.

Keep that in mind.

We left in the middle of the night.

Granny woke me up. She said, "The day of reckoning has arrived. The hour is close at hand. We must leave immediately."

It was 3 a.m.

We went out to the car and the night was very dark, but the stars were shining brightly.

Oh, there were so many stars!

And I noticed that some of the stars had

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arranged themselves into a shape that looked very much like someone with a long nose telling a lie – the Pinocchio constellation!

I pointed out the starry Pinocchio to Granny, but she was not at all interested. "Hurry, hurry," said Granny. "There is no time for stargazing. We have a date with destiny."

So I got in the car and we drove away.

I did not think to look behind me.

How could I have known that I was leaving for good?

I thought that I was caught up in some middle-of-the-night idea of Granny's and that when the sun came up, she would think better of the whole thing.

This has happened before.

Granny has many middle-of-the-night ideas.

I fell asleep, and when I woke up, we were still driving. The sun was coming up, and I saw a sign that said GEORGIA: 20 MILES.

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Georgia!

We were about to change states, and Granny was still driving as fast as she could, leaning close to the windscreen because her eyesight is not very good and she is too vain to wear glasses, and also because she is very short (shorter, almost, than I am) and she has to lean close to reach the accelerator.

In any case, the sun was bright. It was lighting up the splotches and stains on the windscreen and making them look like glow-in-the-dark stars that someone had pasted there as a surprise for me.

I love stars.

Oh, how I wish that someone had pasted glow-in-the-dark stars on our windscreen!

However, that was not the case.

I said, "Granny, when are we going to turn around and go back home?"

Granny said, "We are never going to turn around, my darling. The time for turning around has ended."

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"Why?" I said.

"Because the hour of reckoning has arrived," said Granny in a serious voice, "and the curse at last must be confronted."

"But what about Archie?"

At this point in my account of what became of me, it is necessary for you to know that Archie is my cat and that Granny had taken him from me before.

Yes, taken! It is truly a tragic tale. But never mind about that.

"Provisions have been made," said Granny.

"What sort of provisions?"

"The cat is in good hands," said Granny.

Well, this was what Granny had said to me the last time she took Archie, and I did not like the sound of her words one bit.

Also, I did not believe her.

It is a dark day when you do not believe your granny.

It is a day for tears.

I started to cry.

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I cried until we crossed over the Florida–Georgia state line.

But then something about the state line woke me up. State lines can do that. Maybe you understand what I am talking about and maybe you don't. All I can say is that I had a sudden feeling of irrevocableness and I thought, *I have to get out of this car. I have to go back.*

So I said, "Granny, stop the car."

And Granny said, "I will do no such thing."

Granny has never listened to other people's instructions. She has never heeded anyone's commands. She is the type of person who tells other people what to do, not vice versa.

But in the end, it didn't matter that Granny refused to stop the car, because fate intervened.

And by that I mean to say that we ran out of gas.

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If you have not left your home in the middle of the night without even giving it a backward glance; if you have not left your cat and your friends and also a one-eyed dog called Buddy without getting to tell any of them goodbye; if you have not stood on the side of the road in Georgia, somewhere just past the irrevocable state line, and waited for someone to come along and give you a ride; well, then you cannot understand the desperation that was in my heart that day.

Which is exactly why I am writing all of this down.

So that you will understand the desperation – the utter devastation – in my heart.

And also, as I said at the beginning, I am writing it down for somewhat more practical matters.

And those more practical matters are so that you will know what happened to me – Louisiana Elefante.

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