

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Rebecca Serle is an author and television writer who lives in New York and Los Angeles. She is the author of six novels and codeveloped the hit TV adaptation of her YA series *Famous in Love*. She received her MFA from the New School in NYC. She loves Nancy Meyers films, bathrobes, and giving unsolicited relationship advice.

- Author's website

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From the very beginning of the book, we learn that Dannie has rules and plans laid out for everything in her life. Do you believe this helps or hinders her? How does her philosophy regarding keeping everything in its place change over the course of the novel?
2. To Dannie, the law is “like poetry, but poetry with outcome, poetry with concrete meaning --- with actionable power” (page 10). Later she describes the law by saying that “everything is there in black and white” (page 142). How does the law empower Dannie? To what extent do you think the law shapes how rigidly she sees the world? As the book goes on, power is often taken out of Dannie’s hands. Do you think her background makes this lack of control harder for her than it might be for others?
3. While Bella is a tragic character, she is not painted simply in an angelic light. Early on in the story, Dannie describes her as being “spoiled, mercurial, and more than a little bit magical” (page 6). Is Bella’s portrayal as a complicated, sometimes flawed character unique given the ending of the book and the typical depiction of the tragic heroine?
4. The scene between Dannie and Aaron in Chapter 3 is mirrored by the same scene in Chapter 41. How did your impressions of the two characters change over the course of the book? Why do you think the author chose to frame the story with two identical scenes that will mean different things to the reader at different

points in the story?

5. Bella gifts Dannie a print by the artist Allen Grubescic that reads: I WAS YOUNG I NEEDED THE MONEY. All the characters in the book are well-off financially by the time we meet them. What do you think the print's message means in the context of the story?
6. Dannie believes that "Bella lives in a world I do not understand, populated by phrases and philosophies that apply only to people like her. People, maybe, who do not yet know tragedy" (pages 44–45). How do you think the death of Dannie's brother at such a young age affects her outlook? Do you think she envies Bella for not carrying a similar burden, or does she look up to her for it? How do you think the fact that Dannie has already lost someone close to her affects her when Bella's diagnosis is revealed?
7. Bella introduces her new boyfriend as Greg, but, of course, Dannie already knows him as Aaron and has a hard time referring to him as anything other than Aaron. Why do you think he is introduced to us with two different names? Is Bella's version of him different from Dannie's version of him?
8. Dannie visits a therapist, Dr. Christine, once after her dream and once after she meets Aaron in real life. Why do you think she sees Dr. Christine only twice? What decisions does Dannie make after leaving these appointments?
9. How does Dannie and Bella's relationship change after Bella's diagnosis? How does it affect the other relationships in Dannie's and Bella's lives? Why do you think it's easier for Bella to be around Aaron than it is for her to be around Dannie?
10. Were you surprised that Dannie and Aaron kissed when he reveals that the apartment is a gift from Bella? Do you think it amounts to a betrayal of Bella's trust? How does Dannie and Aaron's connection to Bella intensify their own relationship?
11. Fate is a concept that is played with often throughout the novel. Dannie fights to change the fate she saw laid out in her vision. Aaron told Bella he was fated to end up with her. How do fate and free will interact in the novel? Do you think the book comes down on the side of one over the other?
12. Near the end of the book, Bella tells Dannie that she is meant to have love beyond her wildest dreams because "that's the way you love me" (page 205). How does the book portray the roles of romantic and platonic love? How did the book subvert the idea that the great love of Dannie's life would be one of the two men we were introduced to at the beginning of the novel?
13. Were you surprised that Dannie and Aaron did not end up together? What do you think this means for Dannie's journey and her future relationships?
14. Magical realism is an element of the story but only when it comes to Dannie's ability to see one evening five years in her future. Why do you think there's a magical component in this one instance but nowhere else? Did the book's hyperrealistic premise affect your expectations for how it would end?

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Dannie has her entire life planned out—always has. So when she’s asked about where she sees herself in five years during a big interview at a New York law firm, she knows exactly what to say: she’ll be a senior associate at the firm, and she’ll be married to her boyfriend (who does, indeed, propose that very night). And, then, after returning from her engagement dinner, Dannie has an experience that flips her carefully laid plan on its head: she spends an hour in her life five years in the future. And in that life, she’s in a different apartment and with a different man. Rocked by her experience, Dannie spends the next four and a half years trying her best to stick to the plan, until the moment when the man she saw in her future appears in her life, courtesy of her best friend. Serle takes a fairly generic rom-com setup and turns it into something much deeper in this captivating exploration of friendship, loss, and love. -- Bridget Thoreson (Reviewed 2/1/2020) (Booklist, vol 116, number 11, p23).

Publisher’s Weekly

Serle’s bewitching story of love and friendship (after *The Dinner List*) centers on a young woman who plans her life down to the minute until fate gets in the way. At 28, Dannie Kohan lives happily with her boyfriend, David, in a Manhattan apartment and is poised to land her dream job as a lawyer at a top firm. Dannie expects to get married by the time she’s 30; right on track, David proposes, giving Dannie a ring picked out by her best friend Bella. After accepting the proposal, Dannie slips into a deep sleep and dreams of an alternate future, where everything is off-kilter. In her dream, it’s the year 2025 and she lives with a man named Aaron Gregory. Upon waking, Dannie begins to second-guess her regimented course, and as the years pass, she puts off the marriage. On a rainy day in June 2025, she meets up with Bella, now a successful art dealer, and is stunned to find her accompanied by Aaron, the man from her dream. She senses a mutual recognition, and, after Bella receives devastating news, Dannie and Aaron grow closer. While the plot hinges on well-worn tropes, the deadpan prose highlights the author’s keen sense of irony. Serle’s whimsical tale is book club catnip. (Mar.) This review has been updated to remove a spoiler. --Staff (Reviewed 12/23/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 52, p).

Library Journal

Searle's second novel (*The Dinner List*) ponders the question: Where do you see yourself in five years? Dannie Kohan is a corporate lawyer with an orderly life. She knows the right time to focus on work, get engaged, or buy a condo. But one night she wakes up five years into the future, glimpsing a life completely altered. She meets the man in her vision four years later—he's her best friend's boyfriend—and desperately tries to shift the trajectory of what she thinks is about to happen. But the author throws in a big twist: The story is about life, love, friendship, fate, and free will, and what Dannie experienced five years earlier isn't as clear as she'd thought. The turmoil of Dannie's love life and, more important, her friendship with best friend Bella, shape this tale of a driven, logical woman faced with emotions she's never felt before. VERDICT The story has a strong New York setting and sympathetic characters. Emotional hooks alongside moments of humor and self-awareness will remind readers of Jojo Moyes's *Me Before*

You or Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Maybe in Another Life*. [See Prepub Alert, 9/16/19.] --Melanie Kindrachuk (Reviewed 12/01/2019) (Library Journal, vol 144, issue 11, p84).

Kirkus Reviews

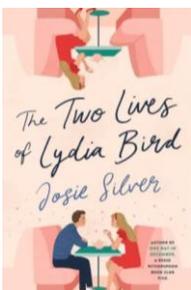
After acing a job interview and accepting a marriage proposal, Dannie Kohan has had the perfect day. That is, until she awakens to find herself five years in the future with a completely different man. Just one hour in that alternate reality shakes Dannie to her core. After all, highly ambitious Dannie and her boyfriend, David, have plotted out their lives in minute detail, and the sexy man in her dream—was it a dream?—is most certainly not in the script. Serle (*The Dinner List*, 2018) deftly spins these magical threads into Dannie's perfectly structured life, leaving not only Dannie, but also the reader wondering whether Dannie time traveled or hallucinated. Her best friend, Bella, would delight in the story given that she thinks Dannie is much too straight-laced, and some spicy dreaming might push Dannie to find someone more passionate than David. Unfortunately, glamorous Bella is in Europe with her latest lover. Ever pragmatic, Dannie consults her therapist, who almost concurs that it was likely a dream, and throws herself into her work. Pleased to have landed the job at a prestigious law firm, Dannie easily loses her worries in litigation. Soon four and a half years have passed with no wedding date set, and Bella is back in the U.S. with a new man in her life. A man who turns out to be literally the man of Dannie's dream. The sheer fact of Aaron Gregory's existence forces Dannie to reevaluate her trust in the laws of physics as well as her decision to marry David, a decision that seems less believable with each passing day. And as the architecture of Dannie's over planned life disintegrates, Serle twists and twines the remnants of her dream into a surprising future. A heartwarming portrait of a broken heart finding a little healing magic. (Kirkus Reviews, January 1, 2020).

READALIKES



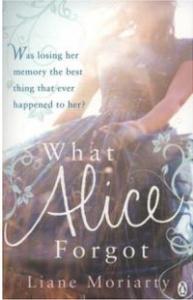
***One True Loves* by Taylor Jenkins Reid**

Years after losing her husband in a helicopter accident, Emma Blair gradually puts her life back together and finds healing and love through her engagement to an old friend before her husband is found alive, forcing her to choose between her first and second loves.



***The Two Lives of Lydia Bird* by Josie Silver**

A woman grieving the loss of her fiancé finds herself swapping back and forth between parallel lives, including one in which her first love has survived and another involving a new person who is asking her to move on



***What Alice Forgot* by Liane Moriarty**

Suffering an accident that causes her to forget the last ten years of her life, Alice is astonished to discover that she is thirty-nine years old, a mother of three children, and in the midst of an acrimonious divorce from a man she dearly loves.