

A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KLASSEN

What inspired you to write *The Secret of Pembroke Park*?

When I was young, I discovered an abandoned house in the woods near my home. It was missing its upper story, so the staircase lead to nowhere. A moldering piano slouched in the corner and a tattered blue dress hung on the wall. I would sit and stare at the place and wonder what happened to the people who lived there and why had they left so suddenly, leaving their possessions behind? I was inspired to weave a bit of that real-life mystery into this book.

Describe the research you undertook in writing it.

I researched village life and Anglican church services in the early 1800s (the hero is a clergyman) as well as historical secret rooms—both in books and in person. I traveled to England, attended services, and toured several English manors, one of which has a secret room of its own. On-location research is my favorite kind!

Did you encounter any challenges during the writing process?

The Secret of Pembroke Park is my longest book to date, written in less time than usual, so that was a challenge. Thankfully I had brainstorming help from fellow authors and support from a great editor and understanding family. Piecing together the clues to keep readers guessing was a challenge as well, but one I enjoyed.

What do you hope your readers take away from *The Secret of Pembroke Park*?

That our worth as people does not come from external things like wealth or looks. Life itself, faith, family, and friends are the truest treasures we can have.

How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer? Please share a little bit about your journey to becoming a published author.

I have always wanted to be a writer. (My mom saved a second grade report card that said, “Julie’s stories and poems show great potential.”) But

it wasn’t until I had worked in publishing for many years that I got serious about finishing my first novel. I learned a lot by working with other writers and editors, which no doubt helped me realize my lifelong dream of becoming a published author.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I don’t know that it does specifically, but I love living in a city and state that supports and values literature so highly. A recent study lists Minneapolis as the country’s “most literate city” with St. Paul close behind at #4. I’m living in the right place!

How do you most enjoy spending time when you’re not writing?

I enjoy watching BBC costume dramas, spending time with my family, and hiking in our many beautiful state parks when the weather allows.

Could you share a little about your current work or plans for a future project?

Happily. I will have two new books this year. *Lady Maybe* releases in July, and is about a woman whose startling secrets lead her into unexpected danger and romance. And in December comes *The Painter’s Daughter*, a Regency-era spin on the popular marriage-of-convenience storyline. Thanks for asking!

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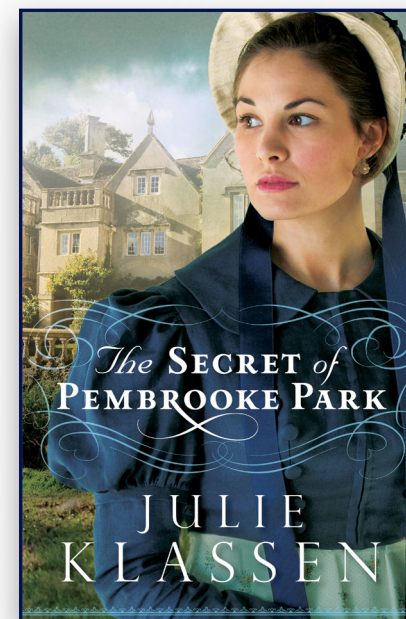
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27TH ANNUAL Minnesota Book Awards

GENRE FICTION WINNER

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The Secret of Pembroke Park

by Julie Klassen

BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS

A READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE PREPARED BY
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SUMMARY

Facing financial ruin and suffering a romantic disappointment, Abigail Foster is astounded when she and her father receive an offer from a strange solicitor—the use of a distant manor house abandoned for eighteen years. The Fosters find a host of mysterious things at Pembroke Park, including rumors of a secret room filled with treasure and a handsome local curate with dire warnings about the manor. Abigail searches for the treasure amid old friends and new foes; will she find it, and her heart's desire, or only danger?

Julie Klassen accepts her award at the 27th Annual Minnesota Book Awards Gala on April 18, 2015.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What secrets did you figure out early on in the book? Was there anything you guessed incorrectly?
2. Did your first impression of any character turn out to be wrong? Have you had a similar experience in real life?
3. When Abigail, and later William, saw the figure in the hooded green cloak, who did you think it was? The same person who wore it in the climactic scene, or someone else?
4. Did you ever think you were meant to marry one person, only to discover in hindsight he or she wasn't the person meant for you after all? What would you tell a young person pining for someone who doesn't return his or her affections?
5. Did you grow up feeling like a favored child or an overlooked child, or did your parents make a point of treating their offspring equally? What is your view of Mr. and Mrs. Foster's parenting style in this regard?

6. Do you think Abigail chose the right man? Did you vacillate or feel torn about which man was meant for her?
7. Did you feel any sympathy for Miles? Do you think he got the ending he deserved?
8. What about Harriet? What did you think about her desire to make restitution for the wrongdoings of her father?
9. Abigail is tempted to believe she needs a large dowry—a treasure—to make herself valuable and worthy of a man's love. In the end, Abigail learns "... she had never needed a treasure to make herself worthy. How thankful she was to be treasured by God, and the man who loved her." Can you relate?
10. Do you agree or disagree with this concluding line? "Ah, the weary wonder of this life. Of faith. And family. And friends. The truest treasures we can ever know or possess." Is there anything you would omit or add?

Questions adapted from publisher.

ABOUT JULIE KLASSEN



Julie Klassen is the author of nine novels, including three winners of the Christy Award for Historical Romance (*The Maid of Fairbourne Hall*, *The Girl in the Gatehouse*, and *The Silent Governess*). She has also won the Midwest Book Award and has been a finalist in the Romance Writers of America's RITA Awards. Visit www.julieklassen.com.



Julie Klassen at Meet the Finalists on March 20, 2015.

27TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

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