

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



SOME STORIES insist upon being written. This is one of them. When I first started writing this book, I was nineteen. My intent was to tell a story about a Victorian girl who unexpectedly falls in love while visiting a Gothic estate. It didn't take me long to realize the true story was happening behind the scenes—and it was far more sinister. I liked what I had written, but I didn't see how *that* story fit into a Christian worldview. So I set it aside.

Yet the story haunted me. Over the next decade, each time I sat down to write, no matter what I intended to put on paper, I always ended up sketching a quick vignette about that girl, or the estate, or about the other characters. In my late twenties, I realized if I was ever going to write anything else, I needed to get this story out of my system, so I began in earnest. This time, I incorporated God into the picture and began to see spiritual themes developing too. As I wrote, I shared my work with my sister-in-law and my best friend. They grew so interested that they encouraged me to get it published. Little did we know it would take still another decade to learn the craft, the industry, and the necessary marketing skills.

During these years, the story has gone through several transitions. At times, the faith element has been too strong, while

at other times it's been buried except through symbolism. It's always been Gothic. After many years of working on this story and these characters, I'm thrilled that this book is now finally in your hands.

Please feel free to contact me via my website,
www.jessicadotta.com.

Blessings,
Jessica

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



I AM INCREDIBLY BLESSED by and grateful for the people who have poured their wisdom and time into this novel.

Kelli and Lynn—can you believe Julia’s story is now an actual book? How can I thank you enough for taking such interest in the growing story? Without your encouragement, I never would have undertaken the publishing journey.

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Lastly, to my beautiful daughter: your amazing love and support is such a wonderful gift. I thank God every day for you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Much of the story line depends on people thinking they know what is best for other people. For example, Henry and Elizabeth think it best to keep the news of Edward's ordination from Julia, and Lord Pierson conceals his identity from her—both as her guardian and as her real father—until Macy forces his hand. In what ways have you seen people withhold information or make decisions for others? What are some of the reasons people do this? Do you find yourself doing it—or tempted to? Is it ever justified, and if so, when?
2. Edward struggles with competing values of spiritual integrity—being true to his faith and what he believes God requires of him—and seeking his own personal happiness. His challenge is further complicated by his sense of responsibility for Julia. Do you approve of the way Edward prioritizes his values in the book? Why or why not? What competing values do you face in your own life or relationships? When faced with grey areas or complex choices, how do you determine which value or guideline takes priority?

3. Julia's circumstances make it difficult for her to attain what she considers happiness: independence, an appealing marriage, a comfortable income. Have you ever felt like you were dealt an unfair hand in life, or do you know someone who feels that way? How did you respond to the feeling, or what would you say to someone in that situation?
4. Do you agree with Julia that Edward's joining the church is a personal betrayal of her and their relationship? How much consideration do life partners owe each other when making major decisions? Does that dynamic change when it comes to matters of faith? Give some examples and explain your thinking.
5. Discuss the relationship between Mr. Macy and Lady Foxmore. Are they more friends or enemies? What makes you think so? In what ways is their relationship based on their own self-interests? Do you have—or have you ever had—a relationship like this? What are the benefits? What are the drawbacks?
6. Much of the writing describing Lady Foxmore uses bird terminology. What symbolism do you think the author is hoping to convey?
7. What do you make of Mrs. Windham's character? Ultimately, do you believe she has Julia's best interests at heart? Why or why not?
8. Consider the different ways Lady Foxmore and Mrs. Windham view themselves. Lady Foxmore appears to be self-aware, while Mrs. Windham considers herself to be nobler than she actually is. To what degree do you struggle with self-awareness? Are you more likely to view yourself as better or worse than you actually are? How can we know when our self-image is distorted in either direction?

9. At one point, Mr. Greenham admits to murdering Julia's mother. Yet Julia doesn't seem to struggle with a lot of fear or anger toward him. Why is that? How should we treat people who are guilty of wrongdoing yet seem repentant? How has this played out in your life or the life of someone you know?
10. What is your final opinion of Mr. Macy? Do you share Edward's conviction that he is an evil man, or is there still reasonable doubt? If we judge a tree by its fruit, how much circumstantial evidence do we need before discerning someone's character?
11. Some elements of this story can be seen as an allegory of the Christian life. Which character, if any, reminds you of God the Father? Of Christ? Of Satan? Of fallen man? Do you enjoy reading stories that have an underlying message? Why or why not?
12. Does the ending of the story live up to your expectations? Why or why not? What do you think lies in store for Julia, Edward, and Mr. Macy?