



THE GARDEN OF PROMISES AND LIES

by Paula Brackston

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About the Book



Xanthe's journey through time takes her back to the early eighteen hundreds in this next installment of the story. Anyone who loves the novels of Jane Austen (as I do!) will be familiar

with the iconic fashions of the day, the grand, classically proportioned houses, and the formal manners of the time. I have to confess I absolutely loved writing in this setting. The biggest challenge was the speech of the day, as to overuse it would result in dialogue that would be hard to read and slow for the modern reader. I aimed for balance between authenticity and a more palatable style. I wanted to capture the rhythms of speech, the phrasing and lexicon, without falling into a pastiche. Of course, Xanthe would already be challenged by attempting to speak in the same way as the people she found herself among, and I think it would have been even harder in this era than it was in the seventeenth century. Although the earlier time had its own particularities of speech, for the most part the language was less sophisticated and less formal, the difference between that of the lower and upper classes less pronounced.

Returning to Bradford-on-Avon and having a grand house nearby as one of the main settings for the story was an easy choice. There are many beautiful Georgian and Regency streets, homes, and municipal buildings in the region, and plenty of contemporary gardens too. It was fun creating Petronella's walled garden. Again, research compelled me to spend hard days visiting stately homes, exquisite gardens, and stunning country estates... for you, dear readers, just for you! Corsham Hall (unlike Great Chalfield and Laybrook Abbey) was not based on a real house. This one I conjured up as what I believed to be a

good example of the style and scale of the typical family home of those with wealth and position, though perhaps without title.



The wedding dress in *The Garden of Promises and Lies* occupied my mind greatly while I was writing the book. If the one Xanthe bought at the sale was an original Regency gown it would

have been extremely rare and prohibitively expensive. I spent ages studying photographs of wedding dresses from the later part of the nineteenth century, as well as the early part of the twentieth. It was in the late Edwardian era that I found the greatest similarities of style. This was a surprise to me, as most of the fashion between 1900 and 1920 show (in my opinion) the rather ghastly leg-of-mutton sleeves and yards of fabric in the skirts. However, when you look at the wedding dresses, they are often simpler, with a more slender silhouette, much more like the Regency dresses. By the way, although King Edward reigned only until 1910, the term is commonly used to refer to the period up to the end of the First World War. If you are familiar with the dresses at the beginning of the TV series *Downton Abbey*, you will recall how slender and simple the silhouettes of those dresses are (the first episode was set in 1912).



About the Book

Discussion Questions

1. In this book Xanthe travels back to 1815, the Regency era. There are new challenges for her to face in trying to pass herself off as the type of young woman Jane Austen would have written about. What did you like about this historical period? What would you have found most difficult to manage if you were there as a time traveller?
2. In this book we meet the Wilcox family of Corsham Hall and their friends and servants. Which new character did you like best?
3. Petronella's garden is very important to her. When you pictured it in your mind's eye, what sort of flowers did you see there? Have you ever visited a garden like this?
4. Liam was challenged with passing himself off as a Corinthian: the sort of young man who enjoyed hunting, shooting, fishing, gambling, and generally living an exciting life of leisure. What did you think of how he handled this, and how do you think the men you know would have managed it?
5. Now Xanthe has a team of people back home who know that she is a Spinner. She no longer has to lie to her mother or Liam. How do you think this changes what she does and the choices she makes?
6. I really enjoyed writing about Pie the Whippet in this book! If you could create a pet for the main characters, what would you choose and why?





7. Corsham Hall is a Georgian mansion, and very different from the earlier manor house that was Great Charlfield in book one in the series. Which style of architecture do you prefer? Which house would you rather have lived in?
8. The Regency fashions are famous for their Empire line dresses. They give the illusion of loose flowing lines and comfort, but to achieve the desired shape women still wore corsets and tight stays. What do you think of the fashions of the time?
9. In *The Garden of Promises and Lies* Xanthe really begins to develop her gifts as a Spinner, taking increasing risks and using the Spinners book to help her control what she does. What did you think of this aspect of the story? Where do you think these new skills might lead her next? What did you think of the snatches of Erasmus's story that she saw in the book?
10. What parts do you think Erasmus and Mistress Flyte might play in the continuing narrative? What would you like to see happen in book four in the series?

I love hearing from my readers! Feel free to contact me on my Facebook page or through my website:
www.paulabrackston.com



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