



LITTLE SHOP OF FOUND THINGS

by Paula Brackston

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*A
Reading
Group Gold
Selection*

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Time and Place

When thinking about the first book in a new series I suppose it is only natural for a writer to be taken up with the idea of place quite a bit. My stories are always firmly rooted in real places, the landscape of the tale being very important to me. So much so that I often think of the setting as a character in itself. For a long time I had harboured a wish to explore more of the county of Wiltshire in England. It is perhaps one of the lesser known regions of the country to outsiders, that is until you start to list what can be found there: Stonehenge, Longleat, Salisbury Plain, Old Sarum, Avebury Stones, Salisbury Cathedral, and of course the fabulous chalk horses carved into the hillsides. I found the combination of such a rich history and such expansive, glorious countryside irresistible.

I chose the old market town of Marlborough as the central focus for *The Little Shop of Found Things*, as it is where Xanthe and Flora come to live and establish their antique shop. The surrounding areas, however, are equally important and provide a wealth of wonderful topography, architecture and social history.

The county also, then, gave me an abundance of that other aspect of setting that is so important - time. From Stonehenge to the beautiful period houses that are modern day homes in Marlborough itself, there is such a marvellous range of eras from which to choose. For my time travelling girl, this was a gift! I chose the early years of the seventeenth century for the first book because it gave us some of the most exquisite architecture in the country, and where better when another of my characters was to be an architect? This was also a time of great unrest and upheaval across the country, with the monarchy unpopular and in conflict with much



of the population, a simmering pot of dissent and resentment that would ultimately boil over into civil war and regicide a few years later.

My aim with this series was to transport readers to both time and place. To have them enjoy the beauty and richness of the area, and experience the atmosphere and thrill of its history.

I hope you enjoy joining Xanthe on her magical travels.

*Behind the
Novel*

Finding Things



One of the most enjoyable aspects of starting this new series has been stocking the shop for Flora and Xanthe! It has been a real pleasure scouring antique shops and vintage markets in search of curios and collectibles that would suit *The Little Shop of Found Things*. Although

I had an unlimited budget (not actually needing to spend any of it), I did try to find things that would have been affordable for them; things upon which they might turn a profit. I also kept in mind how Flora might improve or customise the finds, as well as imagining what items would appeal to Xanthe, who I like to think has an excellent eye for quality and beauty. I wanted to be able to clearly picture the shop full of these fascinating finds. I hope my readers can see them too.





At the heart of the story of *The Little Shop of Found Things* was a silver chatelaine. It is rare these days to find one with all its attachments still in place, and they are expensive, as Xanthe and Flora discovered. For anyone wanting to have a tiny piece of history worked into the intricate and delicate silver used for the best chatelaines, I recommend seeking some of those attachments that have come adrift at some point in their long journey through time. You can often find a pretty pair of needlework scissors, or a needle case, just like the ones that were so vital to Alice, and to Xanthe. They are often in excellent condition and reasonably priced. In Wiltshire there is an abundance of antique shops and sale rooms just waiting to be explored, so if you are ever in the area I recommend taking time out to go on a treasure hunt.

Behind the Novel



Discussion Questions

1. Xanthe's relationship with her mother is central to the story. Did it ring true for you? How did you feel about the lies Xanthe had to tell Flora?
2. The Little Shop of Found Things is both home and business to Xanthe and Flora. I really enjoy stocking it! What antiques would you choose to sell in the shop?
3. What do you think would be the most difficult things to deal with if you found yourself transported back to another time? How do you think you would cope?
4. Xanthe's relationship with Samuel is full of complications, not least the different ways men and women related to each other four hundred years ago. Could Xanthe have done things differently? How do you think she could have changed the way their relationship went? Given Mistress Merton's threats against Flora and her need to save Alice, did she have any real choices in the matter?
5. Flora's arthritis impacts on many aspects of not only her life but her daughter's too. How did you feel about Xanthe's role as a carer? What did you think about the way Flora's disability was portrayed in the book?
6. Xanthe is a singer. How easy was it for you to imagine—or even hear!—the songs that she sings in the story? Were you familiar with such early music before you read the book, or has it perhaps prompted you to seek some out?



7. Among the minor characters, in both time settings, who was your favourite and why?
8. If you could choose any era to travel back in time to, which would it be?
9. The story continues in *The Secrets of the Chocolate House!* What are you hoping to see in book two in the series?

*Keep on
Reading*