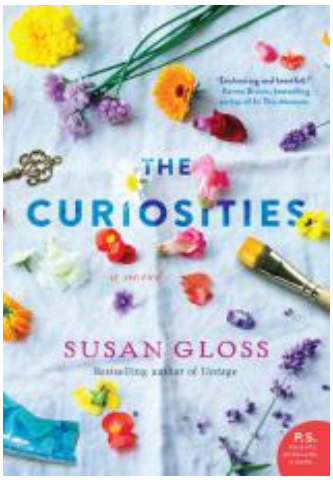
The Curiosities

by Susan Gloss



About the Book

The follow-up to Susan Gloss' successful debut, VINTAGE, is a charming midwestern story of artists, inspiration, and how to reinvent your life with purpose and flair.

Nell Parker has a PhD in Art History, a loving husband named Josh, and a Craftsman bungalow in Madison, WI. But her last pregnancy ended later in the second trimester, and rather than pausing to grieve, she pushes harder for testing and fertility treatments. Urging Nell to apply for jobs, Josh believes his wife needs something else to focus on other than a baby that may never be.

Finding a job turns out to be difficult for an art historian...until Nell sees the ad seeking a director for a new nonprofit called the Mansion Hill Artists' Colony. The colony is the brainchild of the late, unconventional society dame Betsy Barrett, who left behind her vast fortune and a killer collection of modern art to establish an artist-in-residency program to be run out of her lakeside mansion. The executor of Betsy's estate simply hands Nell a set of house keys and wishes her luck, leaving her to manage the mansion and the eccentric personalities of the artists who live there on her own.

Soon one of the artists, a young metal sculptor named Odin, is keeping the other residents awake with his late-night welding projects. Nell is pretty sure that Annie, a dreadlocked granny known for her avant-garde performance pieces, is dealing drugs out of the basement "studio." Meanwhile, Paige, an art student from the university, takes up residence in the third-floor turret, experimenting with new printing and design techniques, as well as leading a string of bad boyfriends upstairs when she stumbles home late at night.

Despite all the drama, Nell finds something akin to a family among the members of the creative community that she?s brought together. And when her attraction to Odin begins to heat up, Nell is forced to decide what will bring her greater joy --- the creative, inspired world she's created, or the familiar but increasingly fragile one of her marriage.

Discussion Guide

1. The loss of a child, and longing for a child, threaten to overwhelm Nell?s life. Why do you think having a child is so important to Nell? Is it as important to Josh?

2. When Josh starts using the nursery for an office Nell feels as though Josh has moved on from the loss of their daughter: ?She knew for the first times, then, that Josh had moved on from their loss, leaving her behind, still in the midst of mourning.? Do you think Josh had really moved on from the loss of their daughter? Why was his grief different than Nell?s, and how did he process it?

3. Betsey established The Elizabeth Barret Trust for the Fine Arts to allow artist from all over the country to focus on their art and bring attention to the Madison art scene. Does the artists colony live up to her vision? Does it fulfill other needs besides what Betsey might have envisioned?

4. ?Inside there are plenty of pieces by artists from all over the country, even the world, but Betsy said she felt strongly that if she was going to put artwork outside the house, where everyone would see it, she wanted it to be ?native,? just like the flowers she had planted.? Discuss the role Wisconsin plays in the novel. Is there a similar art/cultural scene where you live?

5. When each artist arrives they almost instinctively gravitate toward different spaces. Paige the attic, Annie the basement, and Odin the garage. Why do you think they choose those parts of the house to work in? What do their choices say about each character?

6. Nell racks up credit card debt in secret for fertility treatments she hides from Josh. Would you have done the same? What would you have advised Nell to do in that situation if you were her best friend?

7. Paige, Annie and Odin were accepted to the colony because of they hadn?t yet reached their full potential. Did the colony help them achieve that? If not, in what ways do they still need to grow as artists? How did they grow as people apart from their artistic endeavors?

8. How does Nell?s time working at the colony change her as a person? How does it change her relationship with Josh?

9. What do you think Nell and Josh?s lives are like 10 years after the novel? What about Paige, Annie and Odin?

Author Bio

Susan Gloss is an attorney and a novelist who has a love for vintage art and clothing. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her family.

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