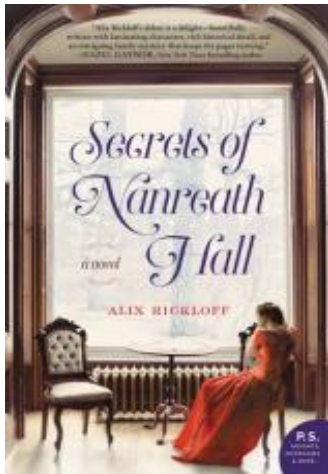


Secrets of Nanreath Hall

by Alix Rickloff



About the Book

This incredible debut historical novel --- in the tradition of Beatriz Williams and Jennifer Robson --- tells the fascinating story of a young mother who flees her home on the rocky cliffs of Cornwall and the daughter who finds her way back, seeking answers.

Cornwall, 1940. Back in England after the harrowing evacuation at Dunkirk, WWII Red Cross nurse Anna Trenowyth is shocked to learn her adoptive parents Graham and Prue Handley have been killed in an air raid. She desperately needs their advice as she's been assigned to the military hospital that has set up camp inside her biological mother's childhood home --- Nanreath Hall. Anna was just six-years-old when her mother, Lady Katherine Trenowyth, died. All she has left are vague memories that tease her with clues she can't unravel. Anna's assignment to Nanreath Hall could be the chance for her to finally become acquainted with the family she's never known --- and to unbury the truth and secrets surrounding her past.

Cornwall, 1913. In the luxury of pre-WWI England, Lady Katherine Trenowyth is expected to do nothing more than make a smart marriage and have a respectable life. When Simon Halliday, a bohemian painter, enters her world, Katherine begins to question the future that was so carefully laid out for her. Her choices begin to lead her away from the stability of her home and family toward a wild existence of life, art, and love. But as everything begins to fall apart, Katherine finds herself destitute and alone.

As Anna is drawn into her newfound family's lives and their tangled loyalties, she discovers herself at the center of old heartbreaks and unbearable tragedies, leaving her to decide if the secrets of the past are too dangerous to unearth and if the family she's discovered is one she can keep.

Discussion Guide

1. The book opens with Kitty looking back on her life and her choices. Did your knowledge of how her story ultimately ends affect how you felt as you read?
2. Anna's story begins in late 1940 when England stood alone against Germany and an attempted invasion seemed inevitable. Despite this threat, citizens never panicked. How would you have felt under a similar situation? Would you have assisted in the defense of your country? In what way?
3. From the VADs to the WVS, the Land Girls to the WAAF, there are references throughout the book to the full-scale mobilization of England's civilian female population. After the war's end, most of these women returned to their homes and families. Do you think it was difficult for them to go back to the way things were after such valuable contributions? Do you think the war was a factor in the rise of feminism that came in later decades?
4. The Hungarian-born artist Balázs was interned during World War I along with thousands of other enemy nationals, including many British citizens of German descent. This same hysteria struck again during World War II when thousands of Italian, German, and, in the United States, Japanese citizens were interned. Do you believe these governments were justified in their actions? Do you see it ever happening again?
5. Lady Boxley tells Anna, "A father is the man who makes you the person you are, not the man who simply makes you" (p. 298). Do you think she was referring to Anna's situation or Hugh's? Or both?
6. Anna thinks she should tell Hugh the truth about his paternity. Tony and Lady Boxley disagree. What would you do if faced with that decision? Why?
7. Secrets are at the heart of both stories, from Anna's white lie when she first meets Hugh to the heartbreaking betrayals that end up tainting the lives of two generations. Have you ever kept a secret? Have you ever had someone keep a secret from you?
8. William followed the rules while Kitty followed her heart. Neither ended with what they wanted. Who made the better choice? Why?
9. Do you feel Simon's deception was justified since he acted out of love for Kitty or do his actions make him a villain?
10. Anna wears a locket with her parents' pictures in it. Do you have a favorite memento you carry all the time? What is it? What does it mean to you?
11. Sister Murphy is rarely seen and speaks only a few times, yet she is one of the most vivid characters in the book. How is her personality conveyed when she is so rarely part of the main action? Would you have liked to have seen more or less of her?
12. Both Anna and Hugh are affected by their wartime battle experiences. How does each of them cope with the trauma? In what ways are their strategies similar? In what ways are they different?

13. Do you know anyone who served during World War II, either in the military or as a civilian volunteer? How did the war affect them?

14. Do you believe the Lady Boxley of Kitty's story acts out of love for Hugh or self-interest? What about the Lady Boxley of Anna's story? What are some examples in both cases that further your argument?

15. Which character did you most identify with? Which time period drew you in more deeply? What will you most remember about this story?

Author Bio

Award-winning historical fiction author Alix Rickloff's family tree includes a knight who fought during the Wars of the Roses and a soldier who sided with Charles I during the English Civil War. With inspiration like that, what else could she do but write her own stories? She lives in Maryland in a house that's seen its own share of history so when she's not writing, she can usually be found trying to keep it from falling down.

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Publication Date: August 2, 2016

Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks

ISBN-10: 0062433180

ISBN-13: 9780062433183