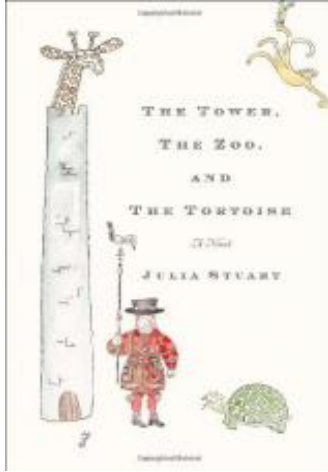


# The Tower, the Zoo, and the Tortoise

by Julia Stuart

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## About the Book

Brimming with charm and whimsy, this exquisite novel set in the Tower of London has the transportive qualities and delightful magic of the contemporary classics **Chocolat** and **Amélie**.

Balthazar Jones has lived in the Tower of London with his loving wife, Hebe, and his 120-year-old pet tortoise for the past eight years. That's right, he is a Beefeater (they really do live there). It's no easy job living and working in the tourist attraction in present-day London.

Among the eccentric characters who call the Tower's maze of ancient buildings and spiral staircases home are the Tower's Rack & Ruin barmaid, Ruby Dore, who just found out she's pregnant; portly Valerie Jennings, who is falling for ticket inspector Arthur Catnip; the lifelong bachelor Reverend Septimus Drew, who secretly pens a series of principled erot-ica; and the philandering Ravenmaster, aiming to avenge the death of one of his insufferable ravens.

When Balthazar is tasked with setting up an elaborate menagerie within the Tower walls to house the many exotic animals gifted to the Queen, life at the Tower gets all the more interest-ing. Penguins escape, giraffes are stolen, and the Komodo dragon sends innocent people running for their lives. Balthazar is in charge and things are not exactly running smoothly. Then Hebe decides to leave him and his beloved tortoise "runs" away.

Filled with the humor and heart that calls to mind the delight-ful novels of Alexander McCall Smith, and the charm and beauty of **The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society**, **The Tower, the Zoo, and the Tortoise** is a magical, wholly origi-nal novel whose irresistible characters will stay with you long after you turn the stunning last page.

## Discussion Guide

1. While filled with humour, **The Tower, the Zoo and the Tortoise** has an undercurrent of heartache. Why do you think

the author included the tragic element --- could the story have survived without it?

2. The novel is strewn with historical anecdotes. Which do you think are true, and which do you think the author made up, if any?
3. Much is made of British humour. Do you think that there is any difference between British and American humour? If so, how is it demonstrated in the book?
4. Explain the correlation between Balthazar's inability to cry about Milo's death and his obsession with collecting rain drops.
5. Hebe Jones sarcastically states that "It's every woman's dream to live in a castle." (p. 22) How is this statement not true for Hebe. What do you think is Hebe's dream?
6. What is the main attraction between Arthur Catnip and Valerie Jennings? How are they a well-suited match?
7. How is the lost safe significant to Hebe and Valerie? Is there any significance to the timing of when the lock is opened?
8. Reverend Septimus Drew seems to be a walking contradiction. Outside of his hidden hobby, what else is surprising/contradictory about his character?
9. All of the characters seem to be in search of something --- whether lost love, items, loved ones, or animals. Who do you think is the most fulfilled character in the book, if there is any? Why?
10. Sir Walter Raleigh and many other spirits claim to haunt the Tower. What element do these ghosts add to the book? Is it more spiritual or superstitious?
11. What is the significance of the urn that Hebe finds in London Underground's Lost Property Office? Why is she so resolved to find its owner?
12. Explain how infidelity affects various characters in the book.
13. How does working in the menagerie make Balthazar feel closer to Milo?
14. What role does Mrs. Cook play in the novel? She is in part responsible for Balthazar's job at the menagerie --- how else has she played an integral role in Hebe and Balthazar's lives?
15. What role does storytelling and letter writing play in the book? Balthazar won both Hebe and Milo's hearts with his grand storytelling. Who else from the Tower is a raconteur?

## Author Bio

Julia Stuart is an award-winning British journalist and the author of one previous novel, **The Matchmaker of Périgord**. She currently lives in Bahrain with her husband.

## Critical Praise

"[**The Tower, The Zoo, and The Tortoise**] is grounded by the moving central love story. This sweet romp will appeal to history buffs."

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### **The Tower, the Zoo, and the Tortoise**

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