

Readers' Guide
For
Bewitching Season
By
Marissa Doyle
A Debut Young Adult Novel

About the Book

Twins Persephone (Persy) and Penelope (Pen) Leland are facing the prospect of their first London season with mixed feelings...sort of. Pen can't wait for the dozens of balls and parties and handsome suitors, but Persy would far rather stay home with their governess, Ally, and continue her magic studies. The only thing drawing her to London in this spring of 1837 is the prospect of seeing Princess Victoria, her and Pen's idol.

But then Ally disappears from a busy London street and the twins are drawn into searching for her...and find that her disappearance is linked to a dastardly plot to enchant the soon-to-be Queen. Persy also discovers that a good lady's maid is hard to find, that one should never cast a love spell on anyone after drinking too much punch at a party, that pesky little brothers can sometimes come in handy, and that even boys who were terrible teases when they were twelve can mysteriously turn into the most perfect young men...

About the Author

Marissa Doyle originally planned to be an archaeologist and somehow ended up as a writer. But both reflect her love of history and the richness of human experience that can be found if you're just willing to dig a little. She lives in Massachusetts with her family and loves antiques and books, which probably isn't surprising.

Discussion Questions

1. Writers of historical fiction face the challenge of developing characters that are true to their historical period but also appealing to and understandable by modern-day readers. Do you think the author accomplishes this in *Bewitching Season*? Why or why not?
2. *Bewitching Season* takes its plot from real events in history (Sir John Conroy's attempts to force Victoria to take him as her Private Secretary), and gives them a twist (using magic to accomplish it). What other historical facts or events can you think of that would make a starting place for a great story?
3. 1837 England was a very different place from today's world in many ways. What details in *Bewitching Season* make you feel that difference? What differences between then and now are the most interesting to you?
4. Persy longed to further her education in a time when girls couldn't attend university, and Pen looked forward to the Season; by the end of the book, Persy is marrying and Pen planning to continue her magical studies with Ally and her new husband in Ireland. Do

you think this sort of total change in personal goals to something very different often happens in real life? Can you see it happening to you?

5. If you possessed Persy's magical powers, how would you use them...especially if you had to keep them secret from most people, as she did?

Activity

In the 19th century, girls of good social standing went to London to be presented to the queen, just as Persy and Pen did...and usually practiced walking, curtsying, and so on for months beforehand. To get an idea of why (and just for fun), get a long scarf or two and a twin-sized bedsheet. Wrap your middle with the scarf (to simulate a tightly laced corset) and pin the sheet to the back of your waistband to simulate a train. Try curtsying (deeply—this is the queen you're being presented to!). Now have a friend try to lift your "train" with a long stick (a yardstick will do) and toss it to you...catch it over your arm, and walk backwards, curtsying three times as you go. I think you'll find you have a lot of respect for those long-ago girls who managed this without looking totally silly!

If you're interested in learning more about people and life in 19th century England, I recommend the following books and websites: *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* by Daniel Pool, *Her Little Majesty* by Carolly Erickson, or *To Marry an English Lord* by Gail McColl and Carol McD. Wallace. All of these are extremely readable and lots of fun. For websites, try www.pemberley.com, www.nineteenteen.blogspot.com, and www.historicalnovelsociety.org