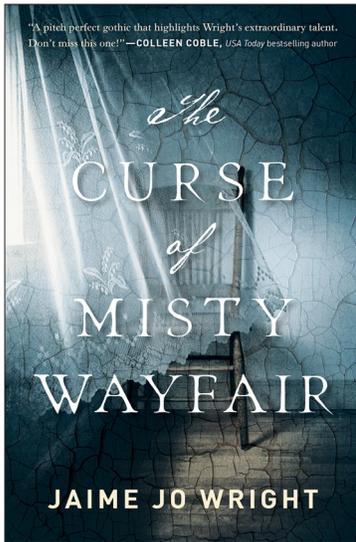




**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH JAIME JO WRIGHT**



**The Curse of Misty Wayfair**

by Jaime Jo Wright

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**1. What is the overarching theme in *The Curse of Misty Wayfair*?**

The story woven throughout Misty’s legend is one of identity. In our own ways, we all are searching for the best in ourselves, or what we were meant to be, or how we define ourselves. Amid those questions, we often go on random journeys where we wind up back where we started, still wondering. All the characters in *Misty Wayfair* share a connection with this search for identity—a search for definition that is lasting and foundational. That is the journey I hope to take the reader on as well.

**2. You were not afraid to “go there” when it comes to writing about mental illness, depression, and special needs. What made you want to incorporate such difficult topics into your novel?**

A couple of reasons. One being that I firmly believe these are topics that need to be welcomed in the Christian community and not shrouded in shame or secrecy. The struggles of mental illness are all too often compounded by external doubts about the individual’s strength of faith. Awareness and understanding are critical for those touched by these challenges, and while I tread carefully, as everyone’s experiences are different, I also want to bring the reality of this to light. Another reason I wanted to explore these issues was that I find often a person’s special need or health struggle becomes their identity. Yet no one wants to be defined by their health or measured against a common misperception of what is “normal.” So being able to show the valuable contributions these individuals are making in our communities was important to me.

**3. What was your inspiration for writing about a postmortem photographer in turn-of-the-century 1900s?**

The history surrounding Victorian and early Edwardian deaths is fascinating. The ritualistic traditions they fostered had to do with preserving their memories of those they had lost. Today we have videos, thousands of digital photographs, and all sorts of scrapbook odds and ends to remember loved ones by. Back then, sometimes the *only* photograph they had of their loved one was a photo taken while they were on their deathbeds. Sometimes the photography mimicked the person’s life, and they were posed as though they were still breathing. All in all, my inspiration for this form of photography was relating to and empathizing with that last desperate grasp to a lost loved one. We all can relate in one way or another.

**4. When you researched asylums and mental institutions for *The Curse of Misty Wayfair*, what did you find that was especially interesting, and what surprised you the most?**

I think what surprised me the most were the *reasons* a person might be institutionalized. Many of the medical conditions we can now diagnose with certainty were complete mysteries in this earlier era, and suspicion, fear, and ignorance created pariahs out of those individuals who were ill or living with disabilities. For example, epilepsy was a popularly misunderstood medical condition interpreted at the time as someone who was “emotionally unstable” or even “possessed.” These were the only explanations they had at the time for anyone suffering with seizures.

**5. Why did you set the novel in the northern woods of Wisconsin?**

Plain and simple? Because I love the “Northwoods,” as we native Wisconsinites call them. It’s a place of rugged beauty, forests, gently flowing rivers, and also eerie elements that totally suited the fictional and haunted town of Pleasant Valley, Wisconsin.