

ON DEVONSHIRE
SHORES + 2

*A Winter
By the Sea*



JULIE
KLASSEN

Books by Julie Klassen

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ON DEVONSHIRE SHORES

The Sisters of Sea View
A Winter by the Sea



*A Winter
by the Sea*



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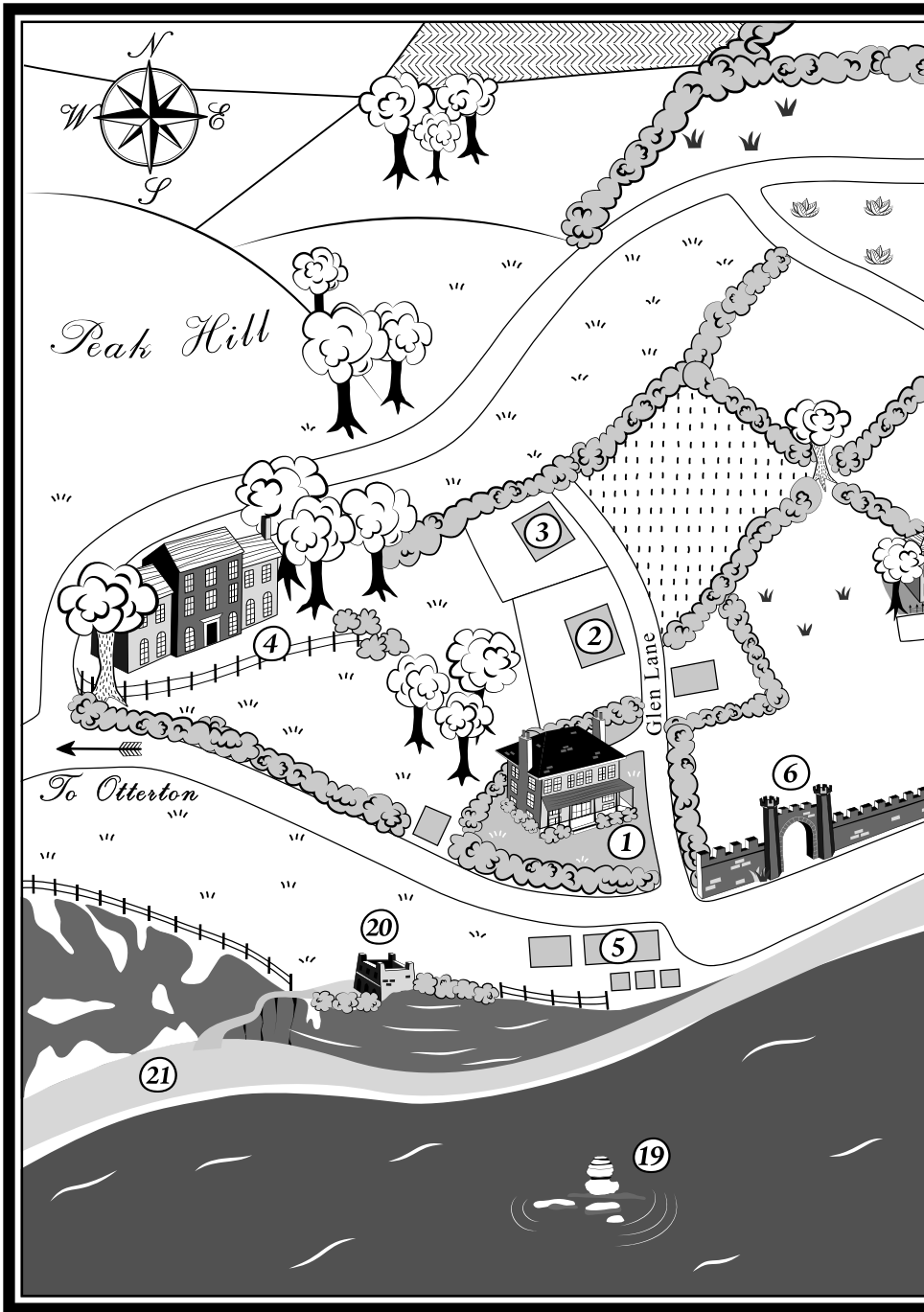
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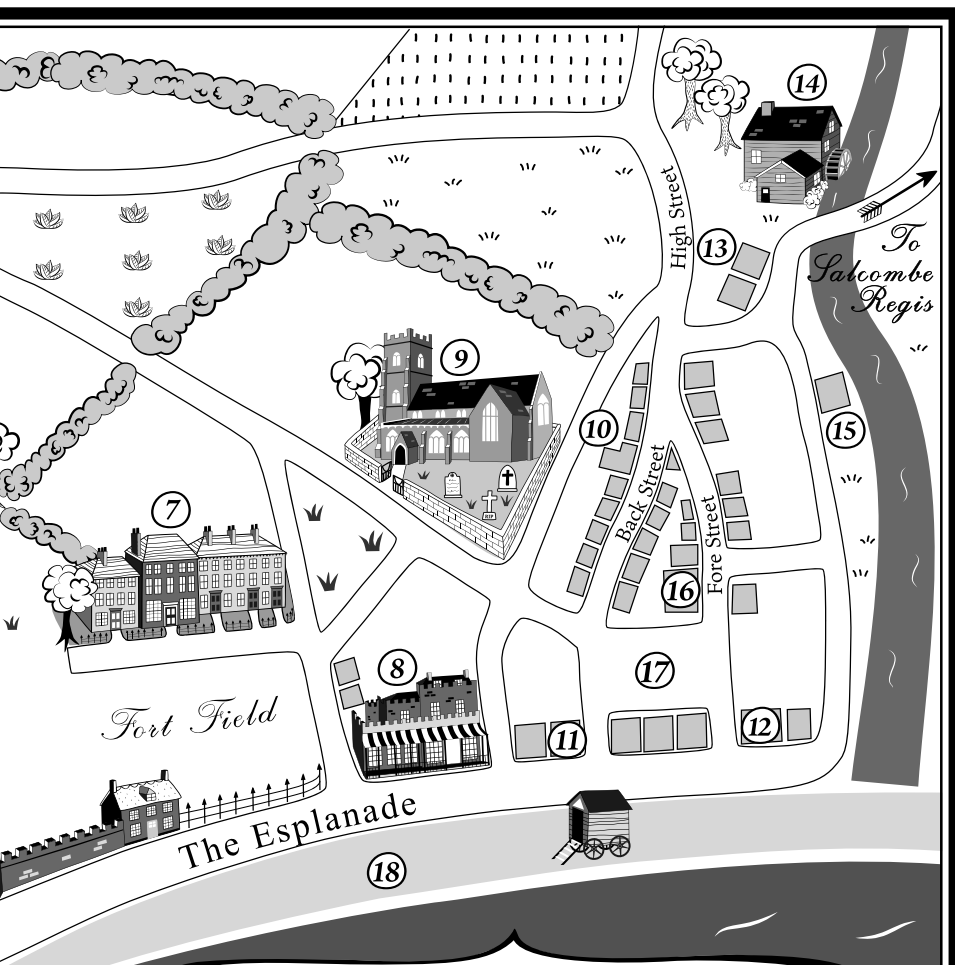
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To Nigel Hyman
and the staff and volunteers
of the Sidmouth Museum,
who have been so generous
and helpful in researching
and reviewing the books
in this series.







Old Sidmouth

1 - Sea View	8 - Wallis's Library	15 - Marsh Chapel
2 - Westmount	9 - Parish Church	16 - London Inn
3 - Woolbrook	10 - Old Ship Inn	17 - Marketplace
4 - Peak House	11 - Baths	18 - Beach
5 - Heffer's Row	12 - York Hotel	19 - Chit Rock
6 - Old Fort	13 - Poor House	20 - Lime Kiln
7 - Fortfield Terr.	14 - Water Mill	21 - Western Beach

I still continue [sea] bathing notwithstanding the severity of the Weather & Frost & Snow which is I think somewhat courageous.

—Eliza de Feuillide (Jane Austen's cousin)



You should have a clever secretary to write your dispatches in case you should not be so well qualified yourself. This gentleman may also serve to get you out of a scrape.

—Francis Grose, *Advice to the Officers of the British Army*



Go on doing with your pen what in other times was done with the sword.

—Thomas Jefferson, letter to Thomas Paine

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Many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

OCTOBER 1819

If a quill pen was truly more powerful than a rapier, as Shakespeare suggested, then a pen must also be more powerful than a needle.

Emily Summers mused on this as she sat in the parlour, writing in a notebook. Around her, her mother and sisters sewed together over tea and pleasant conversation. Even Viola, her recently married twin, had come over from Westmount with her needlework bag to join them. Only their oldest sister, Claire, was absent.

Emily was not fond of sewing and, except for one childish sampler completed years before, avoided the task. The only one of her family less skilled with a needle was the youngest, sixteen-year-old Georgiana, who sat bent over a wad of fabric and knotted embroidery floss that was supposed to become her sampler. Mamma required each of her girls to finish one, insisting all young ladies should be skilled in needlework.

Glancing at Georgie's bird's nest of tangled thread, Emily

doubted her mother's aspirations would come to fruition. Emily's own sampler had not been much better. Mamma had not even bothered to frame it as she had the others. Viola's and Sarah's hung in Mamma's room even now. She had no idea where Claire's had ended up.

Despite the warm chatter around her and the warm tea inside her, Emily felt a cold knot of emptiness in her chest. An awareness that something or someone was missing—or more accurately, two someones.

She paused to consider the feeling. She had long desired three things in life: to be reunited with her eldest sister, to return to May Hill and marry Charles Parker, and to become a published author. She had little confidence any of these would ever happen. Claire was living in exile in Scotland after a failed elopement, and Charles, the neighbor Emily had always loved, had broken her heart by cutting ties with their family at that threat of scandal.

Despite all that, however, her last goal seemed the most unlikely.

With a sigh, Emily scratched out a few more lines in the novel she was attempting to write. It felt as tangled and patternless as Georgiana's sampler.

Giving up, she placed the quill back in its holder, set the notebook aside, and picked up a book instead. She had begun reading a new work Mr. Wallis had lately published called *Scenery on the Southern Coast of Devonshire; Comprising Picturesque Views, at or near the Fashionable Watering Places: Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth, Dawlish, Teignmouth, and Torquay*. Why authors insisted on such long titles, she did not know.

Emily had not been to all the featured towns. Her interest was piqued by their descriptions, and she hoped she might one day visit them.

At the thought of travel, she caught her twin sister's eye. "Any progress in convincing the major to take a wedding trip?"

Viola lifted one shoulder in an unconcerned shrug, her focus returning to the new shirt she was stitching for her husband. "Jack is not keen to travel. Not yet, at any rate. Had his fill sailing to and from India." She turned toward their older sister. "Would you please pass the scissors?"

Sarah paused in her embroidery to oblige her.

Viola snipped a thread, then shifted her gaze to the volume in Emily's lap. "How is Mr. Wallis's new book?"

"Interesting. Although it would have been improved by skillful editing. I have noticed several repetitions and missing words."

Viola nodded. "I know I've said it before, but you should offer to edit for him."

"I doubt he would appreciate my interference," Emily replied. "Not everyone admires my ability to point out the mistakes of others." She winked at Viola, who had been a regular recipient of Emily's criticisms in the past. Thankfully their relationship had improved over the last year.

"Perhaps if he learns of your talents, he would also be willing to publish your novel—that is, if you ever finish it."

Emily tilted her head to study her sister's face. "Why are you so eager to find employment for me? I am hardly idle."

Georgiana spoke up. "It's only fair. After all, you found employment for Vi, placing that advertisement without her knowledge."

"It worked out rather well, you must admit," Emily defended.

Her twin looked up from her needle with a barely suppressed smile and a hint of a blush. "It certainly did."

Viola had been born with a cleft lip. Although it had been repaired after several surgeries, she still bore a vertical scar

from nostril to mouth and a shortening of her upper lip, both of which were barely noticeable. Even so, Viola had always avoided people outside the family, living like a recluse. Begrudgingly, she had begun reading to invalids after that advertisement appeared in print. Through it, she met her future husband, along with a dear friend who lived in the poor house, and Viola's life had changed for the better.

Might Emily's own life be changed by taking on some new employment as well?

"I can talk to him for you, if you'd like," Viola said. "Just to return the favor."

"No, thank you. I can talk to Mr. Wallis myself . . . should I decide to. I don't know that I'd have time to edit for him with my responsibilities here."

Nearby, Mamma grumbled as she struggled to rethread the small eye of her needle, then glanced up over her half-moon spectacles. "Actually, this might be a good time. Things are quieter now that autumn has arrived. Some people overwinter here, but it's unlikely we shall be busy during the colder months, especially over Christmas."

"I shall think about it," Emily said and returned to her book.

After a few minutes of comfortable silence, the front-door knocker sounded. Georgiana eagerly tossed aside her needlework to answer it, even though their housemaid, Jessie, would have done so, given the chance.

A moment later, their friend and former lady's maid bustled in, all aflutter, Georgiana on her heels.

"Astounding news, ladies!" Fran Stirling proclaimed. "I could not wait to tell you. You will never guess. You are to have royal neighbors!"

"Royal neighbors? Besides Viola, do you mean?" Emily teased.

“Yes, even more royal, if you can imagine.”

Mamma sat forward. “Not the Prince Regent—not when he has the Brighton Pavilion?”

“No.” Fran’s cheeks rounded with an eager, pursed-lip smile. “One of his brothers. The Duke of Kent, his wife, and their baby daughter. Not to mention a whole suite of servants.”

“Where are they to stay?” Sarah asked. She patted a nearby chair, and Fran sat.

“Woolbrook Cottage.”

“No!” Viola exclaimed. “That’s just beyond our house.”

Fran nodded, eyes alight. “General Baynes has leased it to them for the winter, although the arrangement is supposed to be a secret.”

“Then how did you learn of it?” Sarah asked, not truly surprised, for Miss Stirling seemed to be acquainted with everyone in town and heard the latest news well before they did.

“The general hired Mr. Farrant to carry out a few repairs on the place before Their Royal Highnesses’ arrival.”

“Ah.” Sarah smiled. “Leave it to you to know the very person.”

Mamma thoughtfully shook her head. “And here we anticipated an uneventful winter.”



The following day, as Sarah and Emily tidied the dining room after luncheon, a sharp triple knock rattled the front door.

Sarah and her sister shared a look and then made their way into the drawing room to receive the unexpected callers. Mamma and Georgiana joined them as Jessie led two tall strangers into the room.

The young maid, her eyes wide and fearful, squeaked, “Captain something and . . . oh, I forget.” She turned and fled the room.

The older of the pair, who looked to be in his midthirties, frowned after her. “Is the girl feeble-minded?”

Sarah’s face heated in both embarrassment and indignation, yet she managed a calm reply. “Not at all. Only easily intimidated.”

“Ah.” The older man seemed to take the words as a compliment, his broad shoulders straightening yet more. He wore civilian dress but possessed an officious military bearing and a severe expression.

He looked to his companion, who was nearly as tall, although younger.

The younger man obeyed the silent command and completed the introductions in a low, eloquent voice. “This is Captain John Conroy, equerry to the Duke of Kent and Strathearn. And I am James Thomson, private secretary.”

Both men bowed smartly.

Mamma nodded, while Emily curtsied, her gaze fixed on the younger man’s handsome face. Belatedly, Georgiana lumbered to her feet and followed Emily’s example, although with far less grace.

Sarah clasped her hands to conceal their nervous tremble. “I am Miss Sarah Summers. This is my mother, Mrs. Summers, and these are my sisters. How may we help you, gentlemen?”

With a brisk nod, the captain replied, “The Duchess of Kent requires a milder climate for her health. Therefore, His Royal Highness and I have selected Sidmouth as an ideal winter residence.”

Georgie blurted, “We know.”

The man scowled, leveling a suspicious glare at her. “Who told you? The news is not yet public.”

“I . . . That is, our . . .”

Sarah squeezed Georgie’s hand to forestall her, not wanting to cause any trouble for Miss Stirling.

“It is only natural that such good news should travel quickly through town,” the secretary said, clearly trying to smooth things over. “General Baynes, or the property agent, or the tradespeople we’ve contacted might have mentioned it.”

“Very true,” Sarah said. “It is an exciting prospect.”

Mamma added, “An honor for us all.”

The captain huffed before continuing. “Their Royal Highnesses shall reside in Woolbrook Cottage with as many attendants as the house can accommodate, which unfortunately is not all. The duke travels with a large suite of servants, advisers, et cetera. We have also rented a house in Fortfield Terrace for the upper staff, but we need accommodation for a few others. We understand you run a sort of boarding house here.”

“Yes,” Mamma agreed. “Although we prefer the term *guest house*.”

He ignored that. “How many rooms have you available?”

They all looked to Sarah.

“We have six guest rooms,” she said. “Seven if we include a small adjoining chamber. Three rooms are now occupied, but all save one shall be available come the end of the month.”

Their current guests included a Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, who shared one room, while their twin sons slept in the adjoining chamber. The family planned to stay with them through October. Mr. Hornbeam was their other guest, and as far as Sarah knew, he had no plans to leave.

“How soon would you need accommodation?” she asked the men.

“Not until December.”

“Would you like to see the rooms?”

Captain Conroy waved a dismissive hand. “No need. I am

sure they will suffice for lower staff. Proximity to Woolbrook is key. I estimate we shall need an additional three or four rooms.”

“And the specific dates?”

“Yet to be determined. Mr. Thomson here will write and apprise you of all pertinent details once arrangements are finalized.”

Sarah hesitated. They were to hold in reserve four rooms with no specified arrival date? She was tempted to protest, to say they could not promise to keep rooms available without guaranteed dates, but Captain Conroy’s fierce expression dampened her courage.

Besides, as Mamma had said, things had been quiet and guests few. The prospect of three or four rooms occupied for the entire winter was an opportunity they could ill afford to jeopardize.

“Very well,” Sarah said. “We shall await your instructions.”

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