



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH ELIZABETH CAMDEN



Beyond All Dreams

by Elizabeth Camden

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1. Tell us a little about *Beyond all Dreams*.

The novel is about a librarian who stumbles across a baffling mystery of a ship that disappeared at sea. The ship and the entire crew were never heard from again, but Anna begins to suspect the government knows what actually happened to the ship. The setting is at the Library of Congress in 1898, and when the government stonewalls her attempt to learn more about the missing ship, Anna turns to a charismatic congressman for help. As the two of them begin piecing the mystery together, they become embroiled in secrets much bigger than they ever imagined.

2. What made you want to pair up a congressman and a librarian for a love story?

Who doesn't love a good Cinderella-type story? The dynamic of a gregarious, outgoing congressman who falls hard for a studious librarian has great romantic appeal. Although Luke and Anna appear to be total opposites on the outside, they have complementary strengths that work to make each of them stronger as they unite in a common goal of discovering the truth behind the missing ship. Their professions also added a delicious layer of complexity to the plot, as fraternization between members of Congress and the women who worked in the Capitol were forbidden. While today it is common for people to become involved with others they meet in the workplace, this wasn't the norm in the late nineteenth century.

3. Did *Beyond All Dreams* involve any special research?

I wanted the novel to provide a peek into what it was like to work in the U.S. Capitol in the late nineteenth century. Both my hero and heroine work in the Capitol building, so it was a major setting in the book. I needed to know where they would have eaten their meals, placed a telephone call, or relaxed between meetings. I wanted to get the details right, but in a post 9-11 world, comprehensive floor plans of the Capitol are entirely off-limits to the public. Luckily, librarians are a cooperative lot, and I was able to get in touch with librarians currently working for Congress who were able to answer many of my questions. Also, I was able to find blueprints of the original building, and sure enough they are labeled with everything from the cafeterias, cloakrooms, and staircases. I know the twentieth century brought huge changes to the Capitol, but the old blueprints were quite accurate for a story taking place in the 1890s.

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4. What are some of the themes in the novel?

On the spiritual side, I touch on the themes of forgiveness and the ethics of war and secrecy. On the romantic side, I delve into the ever-controversial question of whether "love at first sight" is possible. The novel deals with love in its many forms: platonic love, parental love, and the difference between infatuation and a lasting, committed love. I believe the heartfelt and exuberant exploration of these issues make for a lively read.

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5. You are known for having heroines engaged in interesting professions. Is that the case in *Beyond all Dreams*?

Indeed! Anna O'Brien is a map librarian at the Library of Congress, so she's in constant contact with politicians who need research on everything from land rights to nautical boundaries. Her ability to hunt down arcane bits of information is what triggers the grand adventure that unfolds in the novel. Even though she leans on a congressman for help navigating Washington's political society, it is Anna who has the skills and intellect to unlock the mystery. This novel was especially fun for me to write as I have been a research librarian for the past twenty years, and felt very comfortable creating a heroine in that profession.

6. Is this book part of a series?

No, all of my books are stand-alone novels.

7. What's the take-away message you want readers to receive after finishing the novel?

More than anything, I wanted to write a thrilling, deeply romantic and heart-pounding love story. The nature of the plot forces Anna and Luke to resolve their own wounds from difficult pasts before they can forge a lasting relationship. It's a profoundly emotional story, but I tried to inject notes of subtle humor, hope, and inspiration throughout the story.