

Love Through the Ages

JULIA QUINN RETURNS TO A BELOVED SERIES WITH A SPINOFF PREQUEL

By Jennifer Peters

JULIA QUINN WAS a mere 25 years old when her first romance was published in 1995, and in the ensuing decades, she's become one of the most beloved authors of historical love stories. When you think of Regency romance these days, you can't help but think of Quinn's many sweet stories, dashing dukes and lovely ladies. And to make sure you don't forget just how many charming tales she's spun, Quinn is back this month with a brand-new spinoff from her much-touted *Bridgertons* series, *Because of Miss Bridgerton* (Avon). We caught up with Quinn to discuss her new book, her incredible career and so much more!

Your first book, *Splendid*, was published in 1995, when you were just 25. How has the publishing industry changed in the past 20 years? How do you think you've changed as a writer in the past 20 years? I don't even know where to start. I didn't even have an email address when I sold my first book. I certainly don't think anyone dreamed that one day we'd be reading on our phones. For me as a writer, I think the biggest change is that I spend a lot more time in the pre-writing phase, figuring out my characters and exploring their histories. It's enabled me to make them far more three-dimensional and deeply nuanced.

If you could go back and give 25-year-old Julia advice about being an author, what is one thing you would tell your younger self? Be patient.

A lot of people view historical romance as the stuff of old-school "bodice-rippers." Of all the romance subgenres, historical romance is probably the most mocked or belittled. So, what made you, at 24, decide that you wanted to write in this particular genre? It was what I liked to read. Simple as that. And truthfully, back in 1992, when I started my first book, all subgenres of romance were equally uncool.

Historical romance, while so often derided by the "mainstream," actually produces some of the biggest names in romance — including you, Eloisa James and Sarah MacLean. What makes historical romance such a hit? Why do we love dukes and duchesses and marquises so darn much? I've thought about this a lot. I don't know that I can explain the popularity of all the various time periods, but looking at what I write — 19th (and now 18th!) century Great Britain, I think the era is the perfect blend of the modern and the fairy-tale. It's close enough to modern times so that people thought and behaved in ways we can relate to. Contrast this to medieval times, for example. There was a mysticism and religiosity of the time that pervaded every corner of a person's life. As an author, you couldn't write a character without considering this.



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But at the same time, the Georgian and Regency times are far enough back that they've gained the sheen of a fairy tale, and readers are willing to suspend their disbelief in ways that they wouldn't for modern characters.

You finished *The Bridgertons* series almost a decade ago, yet have returned to the family for your latest book, *Because of Miss Bridgerton*. What made you want to return to a series that had, essentially, been completed? It was the readers. They love that family, and, truth be told, I kind of missed them, too. That said, I'm glad I took as much time away as I did. When I finished writing *On the Way to the Wedding* in 2005, I was

ready to take a step back. Readers were so emotionally invested — which is wonderful! — but I needed a little creative space.

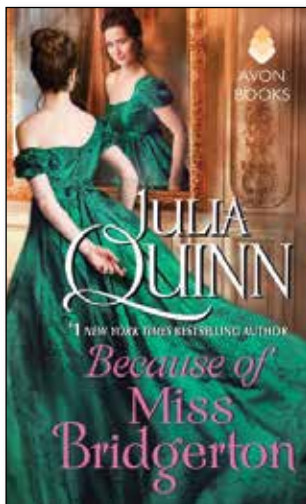
The book takes place during the American Revolutionary War. What made you want to explore this time period — but across the pond, on an English estate? Readers have long asked for the story of Edmund and Violet, the parents of the Bridgerton clan, and I have long maintained that I would never write that book, since anyone who has read any of the current eight Bridgerton novels knows that Edmund dies at the age of 38. Can you imagine if you were a new reader of mine, and you fell in love with Edmund as the hero of a romance novel, and then you found out I killed him off at 38? Sorry. Not gonna happen.

But even so, I wanted to write about these two when they were younger, and several years ago I got the idea of using them as secondary characters in books about their siblings and/or friends. With that idea in place, I really didn't have any choice but to go back a generation to the late 1770s. (I should add, however, that Edmund and Violet do not show up in *Because of Miss Bridgerton*. Edmund is only 15 when the story takes place, and he's away at school the whole time.)

Billie Bridgerton and George Rokesby start off as essentially sworn enemies. They hate each other! So, for you, what made them just jump out as the perfect couple? I don't know if I'd call them enemies, more like mutual thorns in each other's shoes. But I think this makes their story more realistic. Everyone loves an enemies-to-lovers story, but it's hard to carry this off without it devolving into "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you . . . Why can't you see that I love you?" With Billie and George, they kind of can't stand each other, so you've got that great enemy-ish energy, but they also have this huge shared history. They've basically grown up together, and this means that even when they rub each other the wrong way, they've got this foundation of common values and love.

Billie is more than a bit of a tomboy. Was it fun to write a historical lady who was at home in breeches as she would be in a ball gown? Were there any additional challenges, either in terms of how you wrote or what you could get away with, by having Billie be such a tomboy? I had to make sure that Billie understood how unique she was. And how eccentric she would appear to her contemporaries. It would have been highly unrealistic if society celebrated her for her odd habits. And even though Billie chafes at the limitations she faces as a woman in 18th century England, she is still very much a product of her times, and she understands that she needs to compartmentalize her life. Thus, when she's in London, she behaves as a young lady ought. Or at least she tries to.

Billie is the sort of character that I think many — maybe even most — women can relate to. She's a little haphazard and clumsy and feels insecure



about the things that are typically feminine but very confident in other areas of her life — like her work running the estate with her father. She feels like she doesn't want or need a man, but she feels bad about not feeling quite so capable of flirting or landing a date if she did want one. In short, I think she feels the way I do — and the way many other readers do. Do you see any of yourself in Billie? What advice would you give her about life and love? I don't know about you, but I spent high school bemoaning the fact that I never seemed to say the right thing around boys, and I wasn't the girl everyone wanted to dance with, etc. So I really don't have to dig all that deep to create a character like Billie, who doesn't feel like a conventional Miss

Popularity. But you know, I stuck it out, and eventually I kind of grew into myself and learned how to be the person on the outside that I was on the inside, and that's when I fell in love. So I guess I'd advise Billie (and anyone, really) to take the same advice I'd give to younger me: Be patient.

Billie and George fall in love a little more slowly, it seems, than in a typical romance. Did you ever want them to give in to their feelings sooner than they did? Oh, it definitely felt like they were falling in love too fast while I was writing the book. The trick for me was to show how utterly gobsmacked each was by their feelings.

Do you think the fast-moving love story is over-used? When it comes to love, do you think it's possible to fall in love as fast as we often need characters in books to fall in love? Or do you think real love needs a slower build, like we get with Billie and George? The slow-build probably is more realistic, but I love a good lust-at-first-sight story as much as the next reader. As far as real life goes, I think there are as many ways to fall in love as there are people.

If you could go back in time and live in any historical period, when would you want to live? I wouldn't. I'm a science geek married to a professor of infectious diseases. I'm not going anywhere without vaccines and antibiotics.

What are you working on next? A novella, actually. I'm doing an anthology with Elizabeth Boyle, Laura Lee Guhrke and Stefanie Sloane called *Four Weddings and a Sixpence*. It's going to be a lot of fun!

You'll be at the RT Booklovers Convention in Vegas in April. What are you most looking forward to at this year's event? I really like meeting readers. Not necessarily at parties or big events — just out and about, at workshops and booksignings, even in the elevator. I hope people will say hello! ✧

For more information on the Bridgertons and Julia Quinn's other books, visit JuliaQuinn.com.