



About the Author

Meg Shaffer is a part-time creative writing instructor and a full-time MFA candidate in TV and Screenwriting at Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri. She lives in a state of uncertainty.

Summary

A retired bestselling author hosts a one-of-a-kind competition, with high risks and high rewards-giving the winner a chance to change lives. Lucy Hart has come a long way since feeling the cold neglect of her parents, whose attention always centered around her chronically ill sister's needs. Now a twenty-six-year-old teacher's aide, Lucy is able to share her love of books with bright, young students, and one in particular, a seven-year-old orphan named Christopher, has her yearning for a family of her own. The Clock Island books were Lucy's passion and refuge as a child, and now she shares them with Christopher, who's become as big of a fan as she ever was. No matter how badly Lucy wants him in her life, even the idea of adopting him seems out of reach without proper funds and stability. Then a blue envelope arrives at her school, inviting Lucy to compete for the one and only copy of Jack Masterson's final novel in the iconic Clock Island series. No one has seen or heard from Jack Masterson in years, but now four diehard Clock Island fans have received the invitation of a lifetime to stay on his private island and compete for the final installment, and un-published manuscript, of the well-loved series. For Lucy, a chance to read the last-ever Clock Island book is a prize worth playing for, but the possibility of winning and securing a better future for her and Christopher means everything. But first, she must contend with opportunists, cheaters, and, perhaps most distressingly, Jack's illustrator and companion on the island, Hugo Reese, whom Lucy has admired since first reading the books as a girl. All the while, the master of ceremonies, the prolific author himself, has his own secrets to keep--and a larger plan in the works that will change everything for all of them.

A Letter From the Author

The Wishing Game was born one rainy day when I was in the third grade. Our teacher Mrs. Glenn turned off the lights and put on Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory for us to watch while she graded papers. In the dark at my little desk, I watched, mesmerized.

It's been a favorite film of mine ever since, and I rewatch it every couple of years, finding something new to delight in every time. I always cry when Willy places his hand on the sacrifice Charlie has made of his Everlasting Gobstopper and whispers, "So shines a good deed in a weary world . . ."

The world was feeling very weary and tired in the autumn of 2021. It seemed like the pandemic would never end. The idea for The Wishing Game had rolled around my mind for years, but I'd never started it. Then during lockdown, I asked myself, "If not now, then when?"

So I wrote it. A few ideas came together in the book—stuck in our houses, people were reading more books than they had in years. It made me think about the books that formed and shaped my life. I kept returning to the children's books I loved, rereading every year: A Wrinkle in Time, The Chronicles of Narnia, The Westing Game. And I remembered an All Things Considered episode I'd heard years earlier, the story of a lonely teenage boy who ran away from home and turned up on the doorstep of Piers Anthony, his favorite author. I thought of how broke I was in my twenties, mired in debt, how hopeless I felt that I would ever have the simplest things in life—a home, a family, a chance to write one book, maybe two?

Writing The Wishing Game, this love letter of a book to books, helped me write my way out of weariness. I hope its readers also find a little happiness on this journey with Lucy and Christopher, Jack, and Hugo.

Make a wish!

— Meg Shaffer

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Discussion Questions

- The Wishing Game revolves around the Clock Island books that so many children loved when they were growing up. Did reading this book remind you of when you fell in love with reading? What was your favorite book (or book series!) as a child?
- The themes of “family” and “parenthood” are woven throughout the novel. Discuss each character’s experiences with family and how this impacts their decisions and motivations.
- Lucy, Hugo, Christopher, and Jack all struggle with deeply rooted fears. How does each character face and overcome these?
- Why do you think Jack Masterson recreated Clock Island in the real world? Why do you think it wasn’t finished before the game?
- The author sometimes pairs scenes from the Clock Island books with chapters of The Wishing Game. Discuss how these two stories connect and why the author made this stylistic choice to help tell her story.
- So much of the novel deals with family, especially the idea of “found family.” What do you think of the idea of “found families”? What do you think defines what “family” really is? Who is in your family of choice?
- Were you surprised by the outcome of the contest?
- What do you make of Hugo’s comment to Jack that he “can’t save the world”? How does Jack try to save everyone around him?
- If you could travel to any fictional world, what would it be?
- Who would you cast as each character in a movie adaption of The Wishing Game?