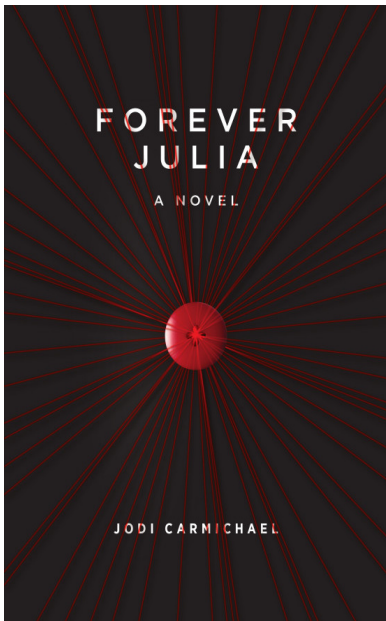


Readers' Guide



Forever Julia a novel

Jodi Carmichael

978-1-927855-20-1
262 pages
soft cover | \$14.95

Love Can Turn Dark. Fast.

16-year-old Julia falls for a wealthy and controlling boy who leads her to betray her best friend and sacrifice her integrity. Ultimately, she alone must decide what lines cannot be crossed.

Forever Julia is full of romance, heart-break, and dangerous secrets.

SELECTION - Moonbeam Award for Young Adult Fiction - Mature Issues, Bronze Medal
SELECTION - Best Books For Kids & Teens, Fall 2015

Forever Julia was featured in Canada's Literary Magazine, *Quill & Quire*.

JODI CARMICHAEL has lived most of her life in Winnipeg, Manitoba where on a typical January day any exposed skin will freeze in 60 seconds, and on an ordinary day in July, you can bask lake side for hours if slathered with 60 sunblock. Currently, Jodi lives in Hertford, England where she is living the life of a full-time writer and day-dreamer. She quickly "mastered" driving on the other side of the road and now only occasionally messes up in a round-about eliciting foul language and loud honks. She believes everything she is experiencing will likely end up in one of her books, or at the very least into her blog, *The View From Hillview*, where she reflects on life in a new land.



From the author

Dear Reader;

I actually didn't set out to write a story that dealt with abuse. My original intention was to write a Rom/Com or some sort of YA Chicklit. The working title for this novel for a long time was; *Who Needs Romeo: A Tale of a Modern Day Juliet*. In my first version, the abusive relationship with Jeremy was something in Julia's past, and my focus was on her new relationship with a mysterious boy who was struggling with very different demons than the sort that drive Jeremy's actions.

Although it was an entertaining read, that version had zero dramatic action and it fell flat in terms of character growth. As I struggled with rewriting *Forever Julia*, I had the great fortune of getting accepted into The Manitoba Writers' Guild's *Sheldon Oberman Mentorship Program* as an apprentice. I was privileged to have Carolyn Grey, award-winning playwright, puppeteer, and author as my mentor. She helped me discover the heart of Julia's story, which I squirreled away in the back story – the pre-story. She encouraged me to explore Julia's abusive relationship with Jeremy, because it was the more important story to tell.

Forever Julia was a very difficult novel to write as it was painful to place a character, a character I loved, in the hands of an abuser. Dialing up the tension and increasing the controlling and verbally abusive behaviour to the point that Jeremy was getting more and more physical with Julia fought against my inner survival instincts. However; the choices Julia makes are choices many people make. The path she takes isn't one that is rarely travelled. Sadly, millions of women and girls around the world go down this road.

So why do people put up with abuse? Why don't they flee? Why can't they see in their abuser what the rest of us can? That is the big question that arises in *Forever Julia*. Why does she stay?

When researching abuse, I spent a lot of time thinking not only of Julia and her motivation, but also about Jeremy's abusive and controlling nature. Why is he an abuser? What makes him tick? Is he a complete monster? Does he have a heart? A soul? Any compassion?

No one is completely good or bad so the challenge when writing this novel was pulling the "good" out of Jeremy and shining a light on the "bad" in Julia. Not only was this important in exploring human nature, but also in creating fully developed characters and believable character and story arcs.

Love is not abuse.

That is the real message in the novel. No one has the right to hurt another person and definitely not in the name of love. Real love supports and nurtures, it does not smother, control, or hurt. *Forever Julia* is cautionary tale for girls who are just beginning romantic relationships and for boys who are deciding what kind of a partner they want to be. If any of you are in a situation similar to Julia, I hope you gain the strength from her story to leave your abuser as Julia left Jeremy. For boys, if you are feeling rage against your partner or an extreme need to control their every move, seek help. Both you and your girlfriend deserve to find healthy, loving relationships.

Wishing you happiness and healthy love.

Jodi

Discussion Questions

1. Julia has challenges with self-esteem and anxiety. Talk about that, and how they affect her actions. Can you relate to Julia?
2. What role does Julia's mother play in Julia's decisions? Do you think she is a bad mother?
3. The front cover of *Forever Julia* has garnered a lot of discussion in terms of symbolism. What does it mean to you?
4. Do you believe that our connections to others end at death or do they carry on? Discuss.
5. Annika accuses Julia of being a bad friend, or as Annika would say, "an asshat." In what ways do you agree or disagree with her? What sort of friend are you? What about your friends? Do they have your back?
6. Julia completely messes up when she drinks down at the creek, embarrassing Annika and ultimately betrays their friendship. Why do you think she did this? Would you forgive Julia if you were Annika? Have you even gone along with the crowd just to fit in?
7. Why do you think Jeremy needs to control Julia? Have you ever felt this way?
8. Does being in a romantic relationship give you the right to expect sex from the other person? Do you have the right to demand it or to take it?
9. Is there a dating time frame where sex should be expected? Explain.
10. Does purchasing gifts for another, buying meals, paying for movies or other entertainment mean sex should follow? Why or why not?
11. Julia misses the warning signs of abuse. Why do you think she doesn't see what Jeremy is doing? Do you know what the warning signs of abuse are?
12. Julia doesn't know what love is supposed to be. Do you know what a healthy relationship looks like? What do you think love is supposed to be?
13. Julia stays with Jeremy even when he is clearly hurting her both emotionally and physically. Why does she stay with him?
14. Why do you think Jeremy behaves the way he does? Can you see his point of view? Do you feel sorry for him?
15. Jealousy occurs from time to time in even the healthiest of relationships. Can you think of a time you were jealous? This doesn't have to only be with regards to romance. Have you been jealous of your sibling? Do you feel they get more attention? Have you been jealous of a friend?

Do they seem to get better grades or are they better at sports or do they always get the cuter guy or girl? How do you react? Do you go ballistic? Or do you experience a more a mild feeling that quickly dissipates?

16. There is growing research showing that reading can increase our empathy and emotional intelligence. How did reading *Forever Julia* make you feel about people who are being abused? Do you feel more compassion towards them? How do you feel about the Jeremys of the world?

17. How did Julia's grandmother help Julia regain some of her self-worth? Could she have done more for Julia?

18. Why was it was important for Julia to come to her own decision about ending her relationship with Jeremy? Explain.

19. Where do you think Julia will go from here? Will she start dating right away or will she wait? What kind of a boyfriend will she find? Will her friendship with Annika resume?

Praise for *Forever Julia*

"This book was an amazing representation of how abuse can look like, and how it can hide behind what the abused may see as "love" especially if they have not experience romantic love yet like the young Julia has. Amazing book by one of our own Manitoba authors!! Highly recommend!"

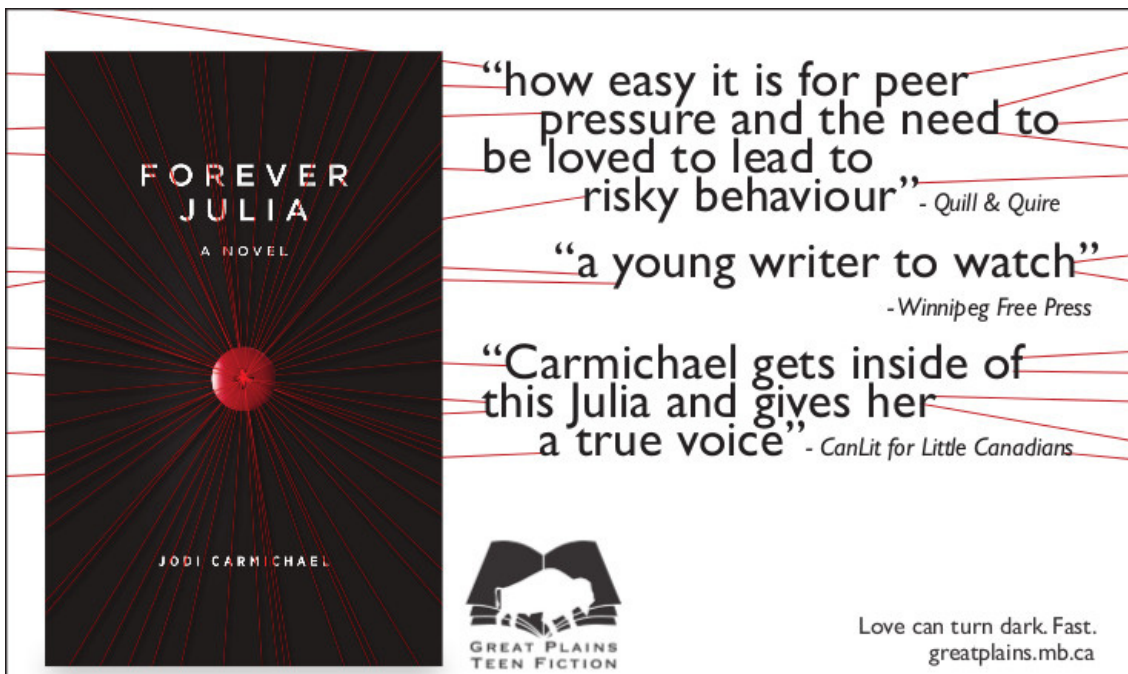
– Amanda Sanders, Prairie Books Now

"Ever mindful of her young, teenaged audience, Carmichael does a superb job of portraying Julia's sexual awakening without every getting graphic." – CM Review

"Author Jodi Carmichael writes about life as a teenager with humour and insight, showing how easy it is for peer pressure and the need to be loved to lead to risky behaviour." – Quill and Quire

"I am so glad this beautiful book exists! Julia is mad for her boyfriend...but though warning bells ring for friends and family about him, his controlling nature is at first subtle, and becomes apparent in such a gradual way. I love the struggle, the truth, the heart...it is all there. This is an exceptional story that shows so well how insidious a controlling and eventually abusive a relationship can be. No girl goes looking for a boyfriend who will treat her like that. Through Julia, we see and understand how it can happen." – Anita Daher, Author, Wonder Horse

"Wow. This book is breathtaking. I feel like every woman, no matter what age, needs to read this book. It's an eye opener. I was shaking when I finished this book, and I don't know if it's from anger or sadness or just because I want to hug the main character, Julia. This book will definitely get into your bones. Carmichael's writing is flawless and she absolutely needs recognition for writing this book." –Paula M., Her Book Thoughts



Writer's Craft

1. *Forever Julia* is written in first person, present tense. This creates a more immediate feel, as if the reader is experiencing every moment as it unfolds alongside the main character. Pick a different character in the book and select a scene from the novel and rewrite it from their point of view. Did you feel as if you were in that character's mind as you wrote?
2. Every protagonist has a character arc in a book. Plot out Julia's, making careful note of setbacks and obstacles along her journey. Why are the setbacks necessary?
3. What are the roles of the secondary characters? How do they help or hinder Julia's character growth?
4. Jeremy is the obvious antagonist in *Forever Julia*, but who or what else could be considered an antagonist? Explain.
5. How does the author develop the relationship between Julia and Grandma? Why is this relationship so important?
6. Write a different ending.
7. How does the author use weather to create tension?
8. Do a character sketch on three characters in the book. Include details such as; personality traits, physical description, their vocabulary, clothing, mannerisms, home life.
9. Writers often use music as inspiration or to create a tone that suits a scene or character while writing. What theme song(s) would you chose for *Forever Julia*? If you are writing your own novel, what theme song would you choose? What about a theme song(s) for your own life?

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Jodi is available for school presentations and has a variety of workshops available as 45-60 Minute Presentations:

- How I Became a Published Author – *The journey begins in elementary school*
 - Reading, Writing, and Editing – *What it takes to be a good writer*
- Accepting Differences – *Celebrating our uniqueness and searching for similarities to build acceptance and friendships*
- Developing a Writer's Eyes and Ears – *Steps to foster a creative brain*



Forever Julia

by Jodi Carmichael

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