

THE GLASS HOUSE

BROOKE DUNNELL

ABOUT THE BOOK

Dutiful daughter Julia Lambett puts her life on hold and heads across the continent to help her father move into an aged-care facility. But packing up the family home is no easy task, especially when Don reveals another guest has come to stay.

Thwarted by her stubborn father, and grappling with marital insecurities at home, Julia finds welcome distraction in a chance encounter with a childhood friend. But there is a lot she's forgotten about Davina Weir. Like how her one-time best friend seems to delight in wrongfooting her, and how Davina likes to appear generous, but she never shares anything.

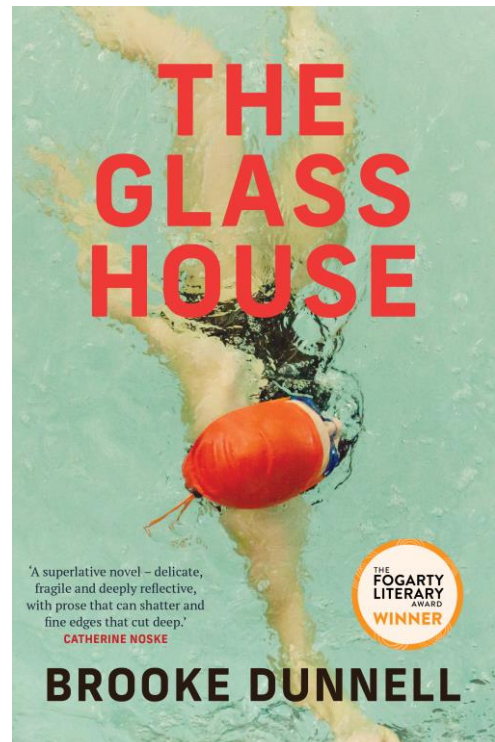
Troubled by disturbing dreams about her stepdaughter at home, Julia is increasingly filled with foreboding. Why is her father refusing to move? Why is Davina taking such a stifling interest in Julia's faltering marriage? And what will happen when submerged secrets and long-hidden memories finally rise to the surface?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brooke Dunnell is a writer, mentor and workshop facilitator. Her short fiction has been widely published, including in the mini-collection *Female(s) and Dogs*, which was a finalist for the 2020 Carmel Bird Digital Literary Award and shortlisted for the 2021 Woollahra Digital Literary Award. The unpublished manuscript for *The Glass House* was the winner of the 2021 Fogarty Literary Award. Brooke has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Western Australia and lives in Boorloo/Perth with her husband and two dogs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the title, *The Glass House*?
2. When Julia goes to Perth, how much of why she goes is tied up in her ambivalence toward what she is leaving behind?
3. Do you think that either Julia or Rowan is more responsible for the current state of their relationship?
4. Why does Paul threaten never to visit Don again?
5. What do you think Don is unforthcoming with information about where Biscuit has come from and why he is there?
6. What is the foundation of the childhood friendship between Julia and Davina?
7. How would you describe the dynamics between Davina and Julia as adults? Have these changed since their childhood?
8. What motivates Davina in her newly resumed friendship with Julia?
9. Davina brings up Julia's infertility several times, insisting that the issue needs to be confronted. Why do you think she does this? Is Julia's avoidance of the topic simple discomfort, or something more?
10. How would you describe Julia's relationship with Evie? In what ways was the child Julia different from her stepdaughter?
11. How would you describe Julia's relationship with Samara? Does this change over the course of the novel?
12. What does this book say about the role of communication and sharing within a family? Is it good for parents to keep some things from their children?



13. The paramedic who helps Don says, 'In the end, you've got to let them. A bung arm and a few days in the hospital is no more miserable than not being able to live your life.' (p. 149) Do you agree with this philosophy when it comes to looking after elderly parents?
14. What kind of a man is Don? And what kind of a father is he?
15. What does an adult need to learn about becoming the parent of their own parent?
16. What does this novel have to say about the strength of blended families?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What was the inspiration behind the story of *The Glass House*? Was it your intention to make this sometimes tension-filled novel an ultimately uplifting read?

A few different concepts came together to create *The Glass House*. One was the idea of an adult child who longs to be a parent returning to their childhood home, where they develop a new perspective on their own parents. I had a very clear idea of this home being a dark brick 1970s house like the one where I grew up in suburban Perth, a setting I haven't seen depicted in fiction as much as I'd like. I imagined the long hallways and yellow-tinted rooms being packed with decades of family detritus as symbol of the work the characters need to do in order to unpack the past. The other two elements that helped to make up *The Glass House* were the woman with unclear motivations offering to be a surrogate for a friend, and the dark dreams that suggest a beloved but distant child is under threat.

My writing tends to be realistic, so I couldn't bring myself to give the characters a straightforward 'happy ending' if I didn't think this was the most likely outcome for their situation. I knew I didn't want Julia and Rowan to have a kind of miracle or unexpected pregnancy at the end of the novel, because that would undo all the work it took for them to come to terms with their possible future. At the same time, over the course of writing the manuscript it became clear to me that they would stay together once they were able to stop dodging the issue and talk about what was really important to them.

I hope readers find the ending uplifting in the sense that Julia learns to be true to herself and stop putting her life on hold for something that may never happen. She's going to find a bigger house, change her career, and get a dog for the family – all things that are under her control.

How did you go about creating the characters in this family? Are they based on any in your own?

The closest any character in *The Glass House* comes to a member of my family is Julia, who resembles me in a way – she's a similar age, faces similar issues, and is similarly indecisive! Aside from her, none of the Lambetts reflect my family of origin, though Julia's childhood home in the suburbs has a lot in common with the one I grew up in and where my childhood friends grew up.

The Lambetts are like most other fictional characters – Frankenstein's monsters made up of what I've learned, observed and imagined. For example, I heard a second-hand story about an older man who'd married a much younger woman and had children with her, only for the woman to die suddenly, leaving him to bring up the kids on his own. This inspired the age gap between Don and Goldie and the shock and almost resentment Julia experiences, alongside her grief, when her mother passes away unexpectedly. Julia's complicated feelings about her mother led me to picture Goldie as a dedicated wife and homemaker, because I felt her loyalty to a grumpy, three-decades-older man would be hardest for Julia to understand. Even as adults, it can be difficult to see our parents objectively, and this is certainly true for Julia.

Can you tell us how you went about writing this novel? At what point did you decide to include the dream sequences?

The dream sequences were part of this manuscript from the very beginning. I wanted to play with language in those passages by trying to minimise the use of pronouns as much as possible, so that the point of view experiencing the events would feel ambiguous. I also wanted to capture the way we experience dreams in very short flashes of detail, and how the known mixes with the unknown. By making Julia certain she knew

why she was having these dreams and what elements had been mixed up in order to produce them, I was hoping to mislead readers just enough that the truth would be a surprise.

The novel unfolded somewhat organically, possibly because I'd been playing with the different ideas for so long that they had time to sort themselves out on a subconscious level. I had a couple of planning documents so I could keep track of the different threads and make sure there was substance in each chapter, and so that I could balance Julia's memories of the past with what was going on in the present. Though I did have an outline of what would happen in the novel, there were aspects that surprised me – for example, Samara and Evie coming to help Julia in Perth wasn't always part of the narrative, but it fit because there needed to be someone else in the house at some point! I also wanted Julia to be able to talk directly to Evie about what was going on with her, and I didn't want this to be yet another phone call scene or to have to wait until Julia got back to Melbourne. It also occurred to me as I progressed with the novel that this is what Samara and Evie would do as characters – they're far more assertive and direct than Julia, and they would go and help her if they felt she needed it.

In practical terms, having the deadline to submit to the Fogarty Literary Award really helped me, because I knew I wanted to enter the competition and give myself that chance. I worked back from the due date to form approximate deadlines for when various drafts would need to be completed, and though it was touch and go for a while there, it ultimately worked out!

What's next for Brooke Dunnell?

I'm really looking forward to talking to readers about their impressions of *The Glass House* and where the novel resonates with them. As writers we think we have a comprehensive view of the characters and world we've created, but in many ways our understanding is just as subjective as anyone else's. I'm fascinated to learn what other people took from the novel.

I'm working on a second novel at the moment, *Last Best Chance*, which is a thrilling and intimidating process – just like writing the first one! It will come out with Fremantle Press in 2024. I also continue to write short stories, as that's the other genre that I most love to read as well as write. Being able to complete a short story gives me a little boost of confidence when I'm floundering with my longer manuscript. The story may or may not be good, but at least it's finished!

I'll continue to teach, mentor, read, talk and just generally be involved in the writing community. As both a reader and a writer, I love talking to authors about their stories. One of my favourite pastimes is having long, detailed conversations about characters and how they behave in fictional scenarios. It's a bit of speculation, a chunk of craft, and something inexplicable, and I find it so incredibly satisfying. Writing and reading fiction is an adult form of play, and you don't even have to leave the house. What could be better than that?



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