

KATHLEEN ERNST WAS BORN in 1982 into the 1870s
Kathleen Ernst
which emerged from
the trees, people, places, and the past
cloud-studded blue sky.
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST



Discussion Guide for *The Lacemaker's Secret*

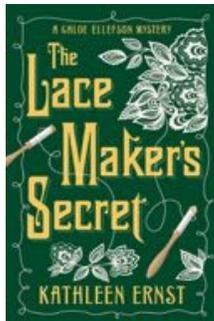
Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites Mystery #9

Written by Kathleen Ernst

Published by Midnight Ink Books

"Something is burdening you," Libby told Roelke McKenna. "Spill it. Now."
"Nothing's wrong."
Libby's eyes narrowed. "I don't believe you."
Roelke turned to the kitchen counter where an old-fashioned percolator
burbled with promise. Trust his cousin to just *know*.

Thus begins the ninth book in the popular, multiple award winning, Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites mystery series. These stories combine history and mystery with a little romance, and are written for adults and mature teens who enjoy books *without* explicit sex, gratuitous violence, or gore.



Greed, Uncertainty, and Death Get Tangled in the Mystery of a Rare Piece of Belgian Lace

Museum Curator Chloe Ellefson needs distraction from the unsettling family secret she's just learned. It doesn't help that her boyfriend, police officer Roelke McKenna, has been troubled for weeks and won't say why.

Chloe hopes a consulting job at Green Bay's Heritage Hill Historical Park, where an old Belgian-American farmhouse is being restored, will be a relaxing escape. Instead she discovers a body in a century-old bake oven.

Bestselling author Kathleen Ernst writes award-winning mysteries, historical fiction, and non-fiction books for adults and young readers. Her work has earned numerous honors, including an Emmy, a LOVEY, and nominations for an Edgar and multiple Agatha mystery awards.

SPOILER ALERT! The following pages reveal key plot points.



1. In Chapter 1, Libby asks Roelke when he and Chloe are getting engaged. If you've read earlier books in the series, do you think the two are ready to marry? Or did that moment come some time ago?
2. Chloe is shocked by Birgitta's story about her mother Marit, and struggles to decide whether to ask Marit if she knew she was adopted. Chloe's sister Kari wants to let the issue go unremarked. If you were in Chloe's position, what would you do?
3. Roelke is haunted by a decision that he made in the previous book, *Mining For Justice*, after Libby's ex-husband began stalking her:

Roelke remembered the bleak moment he'd realized that Raymo was too smart to get caught; the sickening twist inside when he'd realized it was up to him to stop Raymo before someone ended up dead. Roelke remembered how numb he'd felt after planting a stash of cocaine in Raymo's car. All too soon a gnawing guilt had replaced that emptiness. ...Roelke was profoundly ashamed of the choice he'd made. But if he could live that day over, he wouldn't change a thing.

Roelke does not consider admitting what he's done, but instead is trying to figure out how to live with the choice he made. Do you think that approach is appropriate? Roelke initially feels uncomfortable when visiting St. Theresa Church, but ultimately realizes he wants to rediscover his dormant Catholic faith. Did this feel like an acceptable way to resolve his situation?

4. Chloe imagines previous lives at Belgian Acres B&B:

Curious Holsteins watched from a pen by the barn. Chloe moseyed over and leaned against the fence, thinking about the people who'd milked cows right here for over a century. There's such power in place when thinking about the past, she thought. In walking the ground where (those who'd gone before had walked.)

Have you ever had a strong feeling about or connection to a place?



5. In the historical plotline, Jean-Paul and Etienne were tenant farmers with no hope of ever obtaining land of their own. Seraphine comes to realize that the brothers did unethical things, including trampling their dishonest landlord's crop in protest of being cheated, stealing hoes, and somehow acquiring passage money. Were their actions justified? What would you have done?
6. The Belgian community had difficult choices to make when the American Civil War broke out (a theme discussed in more detail in the 7th Chloe Ellefson mystery, *A Memory of Muskets*). Given the struggles the early Belgian settlers had faced, did Etienne and Jean-Paul's plan to have one brother enlist and one brother stay home make sense? Etienne was eligible for the draft because he had signed a Declaration of Intent, promising to become an American citizen, which enabled him to buy land at a low price. Did the men owe their service to the country that had given them a new home, or did the war have nothing to do with them?
7. After the Great Fire, Seraphine married her brother-in-law Etienne because she saw no other option. It turned out to be a difficult marriage, with Etienne turning to drink and Seraphine retreating from the outside world. Did Seraphine make the right choice? Should she have tried to manage on her own?
8. The Lejeunes made the overwhelming decision to risk all in a new country for the chance of a better life. Before Jean-Paul's death he once asks, *If you had known what it would be like here, would you have agreed to come?* Seraphine responds, *Probably not.* If you had been poor and landless in Belgium in the 1850s, would you have dared immigrate to an unknown country?
9. Isaac was quick to blame others for his own poor choices. His grandmother, Mrs. Delcroix, believed his parents had not been strict enough, and tried to take charge. Was she too hard on her grandson Isaac, or not hard enough? Was she right to tell Chloe that she wouldn't give up on Isaac, even after he attacked Chloe and Roelke?

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10. In the end, after going to confession, Roelke tells Chloe that he's not willing to share details of his problem with her because he doesn't want to burden her. Was that fair to Chloe? Should he have confided in her? Are secrets ever acceptable in a committed relationship?

If you are hosting a discussion of *The Lacemaker's Secret*, consider making a delicious story-themed treat like Belgian Pies or Belgian Spice Cookies! Kathleen has written blog posts about both, with recipes included.

<https://sitesandstories.wordpress.com/2018/10/15/belgian-pies/>

<https://sitesandstories.wordpress.com/2019/01/08/belgian-spice-cookies/>

Can you tell that Kathleen did extensive research when writing this novel? Some of her discoveries ended up influencing the story; others appear in it. A rich mix of these 'behind the scene' research details about the people, places, and the past that went into the book are available online on *The Lacemaker's Secret* page of Kathleen's website. Enjoy!

https://www.kathleernerst.com/book_lacemakers_secret.php