



Vol. 3, No. 14, April 9, 2021

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From the Editor



Happy Spring! I tend to think that everyone's weather is the same as ours here in Texas. I'm enjoying these warmer days full of sunshine and blooms starting to burst open – along with a plethora of weeds that I can't keep up with. But, as the posts on Facebook remind me – there are some that are still receiving snow, including my Air Force son and family that are stationed in Alaska.

Whatever the weather, I hope you're all enjoying your day and have time to fit some reading into your days.

Join us today as we chat with Carmen Radtke about some of her mysteries and other books set in the past. And we also celebrate this week with Angela Petch on her new release – *The Tuscan House*.

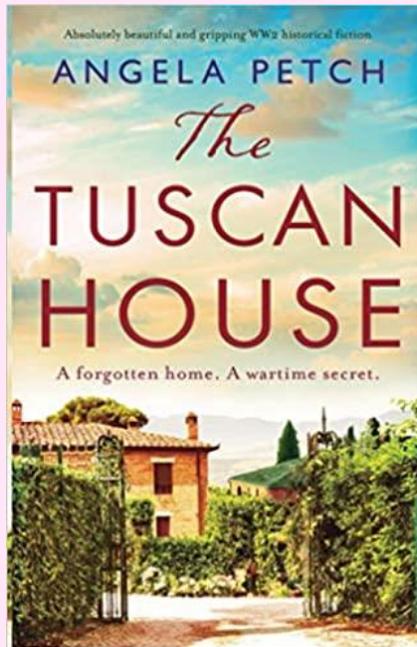
Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Florence Kraut, Alexa Kang, Rachel Zolotov, JJ Toner, Clare Flynn, Ellie Midwood, and lots more!

Trisha

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New Releases!



The Tuscan House

Angela Petch

Corbello, Italy, 1947. A woman and a little boy stagger into the ruins of an old house deep in the forest, wild roses overwhelming the crumbling terracotta walls. Since the war, nowhere has been safe. But they both freeze in shock when a voice calls out from the shadows...

For young mother Fosca Sentino, accepting refuge from reluctant British war hero Richard – in Tuscany to escape his tragic past – is the only way to keep her little family safe. She once risked everything to spy on Nazi commanders and pass secret information to the resistenza. But after a heartbreaking betrayal, Fosca's best friend Simonetta disappeared without trace. The whole community was torn apart, and now Fosca and her son are outcasts.

Wary of this handsome stranger at first, Fosca slowly starts to feel safe as she watches him play with her son in the overgrown orchard. But her fragile peace is shattered the moment a silver brooch is found in the garden, and she recognises it as Simonetta's...

Fosca has always suspected that another member of the resistenza betrayed her. With Richard by her side, she must find out if Simonetta is still alive, and clear her own name. But how did the brooch end up at the house? And with a traitor hiding in the village, willing to do anything to keep this secret buried, has Fosca put herself and her young son in terrible danger?

Author Spotlight: Carmen Radtke



Hello Carmen Radtke! We're excited to chat with you today about your writing. You have several books out – your Jack and Francis mystery series set in 1928, your Alyssa Chalmers mystery series set in 1862, and *Walking in the Shadow*, set in 1909. What drew you to write historical fiction?

I always loved stories about the past. As a child, characters like Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer and Oliver Twist led such exciting lives, and their adventures were so far removed from my experience that I wanted to be there with them. As an adult, I'm constantly intrigued or saddened by how little has changed in some respects over the centuries. So, writing historical fiction came natural. It also gives me an excellent excuse to explore museums and spend many happy hours researching and daydreaming about the past in so many different places.

Of the three eras that you've written in, do you have a favorite era? What do you enjoy most about that era?

Definitely the 1920s and early 1930s. Among my fondest memories are watching classic Hollywood movies, reading P. G. Wodehouse and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and taking my first tap dance classes. That era was filled with so much excitement and hope, which is reflected in the music, the dances, the fashion, but also science. And then there's the colorful slang which I find absolutely irresistible. Oh, to be able to eavesdrop on the Algonquin Table! The writers assembled there were usually half under from giggle water and other bootleg, but hot diggity, they had the goods alright ...

On the other hand, the wounds from WW1 were still visible, most people were or became desperately poor, and tolerance could shift to bigotry in a heartbeat. But there was also an immense spirit of solidarity. Nowadays we have an even bigger divide between rich and poor, but it's not as obvious as in the heydays of the Jazz age, when party revelers in silk evening gowns or top hat and tails would drive in their chauffeured cars past a queue of hungry children and adults outside a soup kitchen. My characters sit in the middle between those extremes, so we get a glimpse of all the aspects, good and bad. Mostly good though, in my mysteries. Apart from a crime or two, of course.

Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

Books, magazines, and newspapers! I love looking at old advertisements and see what people were dreaming of or aspiring to. Living costs are important too. If you know the average wages and how much it cost to buy milk, bread, or a pair of stockings, you have a good idea of the daily struggles. Reading articles about the topics of the day are fabulous too. Although nothing beats personal journals and letters for me. They give me the kind of insight no amount of newspaper articles will.

What inspired your Jack and Frances mystery series? Can you tell us a bit about that series?

Jack and Frances came out of my research for *The Case of the Missing Bride*. I read up on recessions in Australia (the reason to send the real brides abroad) and discovered a sidebar about Australia during the Great Depression. I knew next to nothing about that era down under, though plenty about its effects on Europe and the US. For a short period, Australia had the second-highest unemployment rate in the world, trailing only Germany. They had a food dole in some parts of the country and strict rules about female employment. But they also had many liberties women in other countries were still waiting for, like an easy divorce and established voting rights. Then there was the rich mix of immigrants from Europe, the unease about the convict past of big parts of Australia and the stubborn clinging to the idea of Great Britain as Home. That gave me Jack, the returned soldier who'd come to Australia as a child, Frances, who was already born in Adelaide, and my beloved Uncle Sal, a retired vaudeville artist of Italian descent who'd met Frances's father on the ship that brought them all to Australia. The baggage of the past intertwined with the hopes of the future and the challenges of the present ...

Your Alyssa Chalmers series jumped back in time from your Jack and Francis series. What drew you to write about that specific era? And can you tell our readers a bit about that series?

I'm a huge fan of writers like Elizabeth Peters and Anne Perry and their mysteries set in the Victorian era. That period never ends to amaze me, because it's so contradictory. Women were disregarded, yet the Queen was revered. Technological and scientific breakthroughs shaped everyone's life and yet the bigger part of society had no part of the progress. I'd thought for years about writing about the latter half of the 19th century, but only vaguely.

Until I came across an old article. In two curt paragraphs it mentioned a boat load of brides who were sent in 1862 from Melbourne to the newly formed British Columbia. They never arrived. There wasn't much else about them, because the fate of women with no money or connections didn't really matter that much. The only real consequence was that there was no second bride export from Australia.

As luck would have it, as soon as I started my research, I found a letter collection from exactly that period, covering life in Melbourne. Just a few years before, a gold rush had led to an influx of hopeful immigrants. Prices for everything sky-rocketed – and when there was no more easy gold to be found, people were bankrupt or even homeless. To young women with no prospects, the idea of a prosperous husband abroad must have come as heaven-sent.

The Case of the Missing Bride is my fictional version of events, where I save as many of them as I can. In *Glittering Death*, the brides settle in Canada, although again murder most foul awaits, and Alyssa Chalmers has to sleuth again. Apart from that, I've given them the kind of life they should have had and never got.

Out of all the mystery books you have to your credit, out of the mists steps Jimmy Kokupe, from Quail Island in 1909. He sounds like he has his own fascinating tale to tell, with his own demons and hardships. How did his story evolve and come into being?

Walking in the Shadow was actually my first finished novel. I'd discovered the remains of the leprosy camp during a day trip to Quail Island and it haunted me. Then I found out about the cured man who nevertheless returned to the island to take care of the other patients and sacrificed his freedom yet again. I spent nights awake, wondering about the why, until I wrote the novel. I think it's timelier than ever now, because it shows the triumph of the human spirit. To love through what these men did and emerge unbroken deserves remembering and celebrating.

You've been a prolific author during 2020, releasing four books, if I've counted correctly. What has your writing routine been like through the past year of Covid, masks, and social distancing?

Luckily, writing usually is solitary enough. It's just that this last year it's been a different kind of solitude. And with Zoom chats and messaging with other writers it never really felt alone, although sometimes I got lost in the abyss. Funnily, stories like Jimmy's helped. If these men could bear being isolated for the rest of their existence in dignity and gratitude, then I had no excuse to feel sorry for myself, when so many others experienced real heartbreak on so many levels.

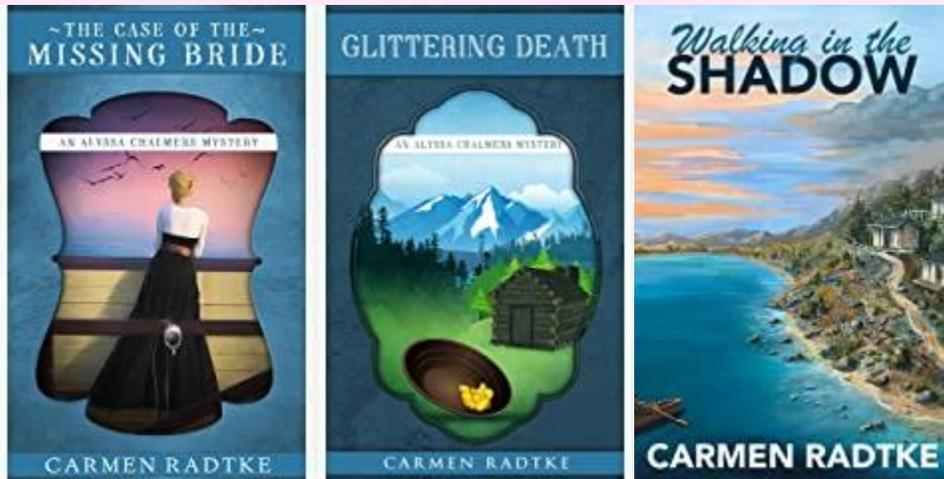
How much research comes into play in your mystery series set in the past?

Lots! Only a tiny about makes it into the books, but it needs to be there as the foundation. That includes no fudging with dates. I have forgiven Cole Porter for writing *Anything Goes* a few years later than would have been good for me ...

Do you have anything in the works that we can be watching for?

I'm working on the next Jack and Frances mystery, which follows on their arrival in England at the end of "*Murder Makes Waves*". I hope to have it ready in summer. I hope even more that by then I will have stopped envying them their adventures and their travels.





You can find Carmen Radtke's books here:

<https://myBook.to/Jimmy>

<https://mybook.to/LaD>

<https://mybook.to/Bride>

You can find Carmen Radtke here:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CarmenRadtke1>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/authorcarmenradtke/>

BIO: Carmen Radtke has spent most of her life with ink on her fingers and a dangerously high pile of books by her side.

She has worked as a newspaper reporter on two continents and always dreamt of becoming a novelist.

She's the author of the cozy historical mysteries "The Case of the Missing Bride", "Glittering Death", both featuring Alyssa Chalmers, the Jack Sullivan quick read "False Play at the Christmas Party" and the Jack and Frances historical cozies, "A Matter of Love and Death", "Murder at the Races", and "Murder Makes Waves". She's currently writing the next Jack and Frances adventure.

When Carmen is not writing, reading or dreaming of travel, she is busy acting as resident cat servant or tap-dancing (badly, but she lives in hope).

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