

FamilyFiction

February 2019

Split-Time Fiction Author
JAIME JO WRIGHT

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Lenora Worth | Kara Isaac | Thomas Locke

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Joanna Gaines' new children's book, a time-slip novel in April about family, faith, and long-held secrets, and more.

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Publisher/GM
Ross Cluver
Ross@FamilyFiction.com

Editor
Chris Well
Chris@FamilyFiction.com

Proofreader
Deb Patterson
Deb@FamilyFiction.com

Design & Digital Production
Ross Cluver

National Account Executive
Salem Media Group
DeDe Donatelli-Tarrant
805.987.5072
DeDe@salempublishing.com

Web Ad Traffic Coordinator
Web & Social Media Support
Brandon Woolum
BWoolum@salempublishing.com

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The author explains what inspired the novel: "That little detail used to seem like a throwaway fact. Then I became a writer, and I learned that nothing is a throwaway fact."

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SPLIT-TIME AUTHOR: JAIME JO WRIGHT FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The award-winning author explains the process behind writing novels that are both historical and contemporary fiction.

Jaime Jo Wright's debut novel, *The House on Foster Hill* (Bethany House)—a mystery set in both the present and the past—won a 2018 Christy Award in the suspense category. She returns with another split-time novel, *The Curse of Misty Wayfair* (Bethany House): As two women across time seek answers about their identities and heritage, they must overcome the threat of the mysterious curse that has them inextricably intertwined.

In this interview, Jaime explains what draws her to write fiction set in dueling timelines, the importance of the novel's time(s) and location, and the impact of winning a major award for her debut novel.

Your latest novel involves mental illness and questions of identity. What sparked the idea for this novel?

Quite a few things, actually, not the least of which being the American culture where we are encouraged to “find ourselves,” administer “self-care,” and somehow find our worth in our introspection and personal strength.

I also have my own personal journey in that regard, and a well-layered personal story that includes not only finding who I am, but also struggling through elements of anxiety and depression that so often can be misunderstood, underestimated, or dismissed. So hidden in all of that, I found the story of Misty Wayfair and the characters surrounding her.

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I also discovered the legacy and/or curse she left behind that helped those she touched, both in the past and in the present, struggle to understand where their true identity and worth can be found.

What can you tell us about Thea Reed? What made you want to build part of the novel around her?

Thea is a lost soul. I pictured her not unlike one of the Lost Boys in *Peter Pan*. That haunting feeling of not knowing who you really are was a concept I wanted to investigate through Thea's personal journey. Thea isn't remarkable in any way, really.

When I wrote Thea, I realized in some ways her personality was methodical, introspective, and even a bit timid. Yet, that nagging need to have a purpose, an identity, is so important to her that it provides a drive to go places she's not comfortable and to explore topics that frighten her. Thea is a character that, to me, shows quiet bravery in the midst of a lot of darkness.

What can you tell us about Heidi Lane? What about her made you want to build part of the novel around her as well?

Heidi is a bit of a rebel. She's been influenced to be such by a stereotype applied to her by her family when she was young. She digs her heels in when it comes to conventional religious legalism, and yet inside, she's really torn apart by having her personal faith and intentions misread.

I wanted to create Heidi to continue the theme of searching for one's identity. Sometimes, we believe we know who we are but there is no real comfort in that. We're still ostracized for one reason or another that makes us believe we are less than. Heidi's story is of a woman who struggles with mental illness and uncovering what purpose her Creator might possibly have for her.

What can you tell us about the time(s) and location(s) for this novel? How important are these details to how the stories play out?

The time period of the early 1900s is one that I personally love. It's a period where the Victorian era was closing, and a new, more modern way of existence was fast being born as industry and technology started progressing at a rapid rate. In that respect, this time period was very important to the story as it helps set the foundation for old ideas being challenged by new concepts—a theme that runs through the entire story.

As for the location, I set *The Curse of Misty Wayfair* in the Northwoods of Wisconsin because, frankly, it's one of my favorite places in the world. It still has an aura of being untouched by the hustle of modern day, and its backdrop of forests and rivers creates the perfect setting for the legend of an old ghost.

All three of your novels involve dual storylines that are set a century apart. What draws you to this format?

I've always been intrigued by the history behind a "thing." Whether it's an old lace doily I find at a thrift store, or an abandoned house, or a vintage dress. They may be inanimate objects and yet they belonged to someone.

If they could tell us, what stories would be released from their silent vigil? What lives in the past may inadvertently intersect with ours today, and how do their choices ripple into the future?

What are the challenges of writing a novel that features two women who lived a century apart?

Probably the most challenging is the slight changes to stylistic approach as I switch from past to present. A more historical setting requires a different lens with which to look at it, a different vocabulary, and even different sensory elements versus what is naturally familiar to me in the present day.

Aside from that, it's weaving all the details through the story and having threads to tie neatly so in the end, the tapestry is complete, minus loose, unaccounted-for ends looking for a place to lodge.

When you do these dual-time novels, what kind of research do you have to do?

That depends on the content of the story, but research is always an integral part. From confirming that a word or phrase was actually in use in that specific time period, to studying clothing styles, hair styles, and accessory styles, it's important to achieve accuracy.

In *The Curse of Misty Wayfair*, the research for the asylum was very intense. I read and, honestly, skimmed many documents, books, and sites about institutions during the time. I say “skimmed” because much of it was very disturbing. It took me into very dark places and not ones that I wish to revisit any time soon.

Your debut novel, *The House on Foster Hill*, was nominated in two categories for the Christy Awards—and won in the suspense category. How does that impact or change how you now write your fiction?

I was stunned and grateful for the double nomination and even more stunned and grateful when *The House on Foster Hill* won the suspense category. Winning such a beloved award impacts me in a way that makes me intensely grateful that readers and judges alike can see through the simple story I wrote, and grab hold of the deeper thematic elements I try to weave through the story and pray can be blessing to others.

As for how it changes how I now write, it increases my desire to continue to write the quality of fiction readers are coming to expect from me. Which, in turn, makes me more desperate to walk hand in hand with the Lord on this journey we call “writing.”

What are the ways that your faith informs how you approach storytelling?

Faith interweaves itself into my everyday life. Because of that, I think the faith elements in my stories are more subtle, more introspective, and less evangelistic in their approach.

Jaime Jo Wright

I believe that faith isn't a step-by-step process but a daily tug and pull, trial and error, heartbreak and healing journey. I find my characters are significantly flawed, searching souls that are thirsty for truth.

What are the best ways for readers to support their favorite authors?

Leaving reviews is a wonderful way to give feedback and support authors. I always ask for honest reviews. I love 5-star ones, don't get me wrong, but I also like to hear what didn't resonate with a reader, or what they might like to see improved upon.

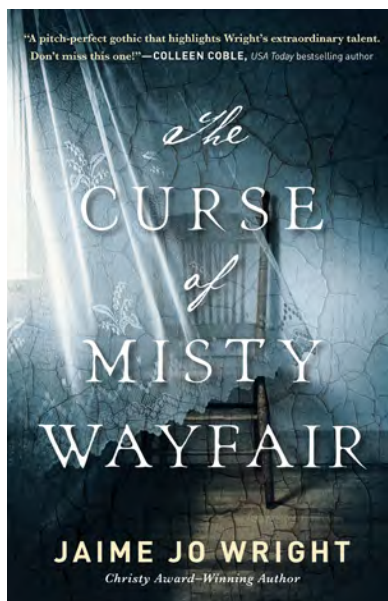
Aside from reviews, I love interaction online. For me, it's primarily via Facebook, but the endless messages and comments I receive from readers is so encouraging and so inspiring to keep writing—especially on the darker days. **FF**

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Jaime Jo Wright



The Curse of Misty Wayfair

Jaime Jo Wright

Bethany House

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Left at an orphanage as a child, Thea Reed vowed to find her mother someday. Now grown, her search takes her to turn-of-the-century Pleasant Valley, Wisconsin. When the clues she finds lead her to a mental asylum, Thea uses her experience as a postmortem photographer to gain access and assist groundskeeper Simeon

Coyle in photographing the patients and uncovering the secrets within. However, she never expected her personal quest would reawaken the legend of Misty Wayfair, a murdered woman who allegedly haunts the area and whose appearance portends death.

A century later, Heidi Lane receives a troubling letter from her mother—who is battling dementia—compelling her to travel to Pleasant Valley for answers to her own questions of identity. When she catches sight of a ghostly woman haunting the asylum ruins in the woods, the long-standing story of Misty Wayfair returns—and with it, Heidi's fear for her own life.

As two women across time seek answers about their identities and heritage, they must overcome the threat of the mysterious curse that has them inextricably intertwined. **FF**

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SPECULATIVE AUTHOR: TRAVIS THRASHER

FIGHTING FOR FAITH

The author talks about his thriller, set in a near-future America where persecuted Christians have to go underground.

With more than 50 books, **Travis Thrasher**'s titles span such categories as supernatural fiction, inspirational biographies, children's literature, and more. His latest book is the guerrilla thriller **American Omens** (Multnomah), set in a near-future America where persecuted Christ-followers must fight for their faith.

In this interview, Travis explains the book's connection to *Fight Club*, shares what it's like to get an endorsement from the co-creator of *Left Behind*, and reveals how so many of his previous books have led him to this moment.

Travis, your new thriller is set in a near-future world that postulates what it would be like if Christians in America had to go underground like they do in other countries. What inspired you to write about this scenario?

The background is interesting since this was initially an idea presented to me by WaterBrook/Multnomah back in September of 2016. I was approached by the publisher to think about concepts that were set in near-future America, and what it might look like for the church if Christians here see the kind of persecution Christians face in oppressive regimes around the world.

This was a first for me. I've been contacted by publishers with specific projects, like working on a novelization for a film or

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working on someone’s memoir, but I’ve never had one suggest a general premise like this.

I didn’t have a lot of time to come up with the concept, but some of the ideas I came up with featured characters or themes I’d been wanting to put into a novel one day. I was excited to hear that my idea warranted publishing.

Your main character, a recent convert named Hutchence, uses creative and guerrilla-like techniques to spread the gospel. What can you tell us about Hutchence?

Hutchence is an example of a character I’ve been wanting to write about for some time. For a long time now—perhaps since the movie was released in 1999—I’ve been hoping to write a Christian version of *Fight Club*. That might sound crazy, but I always imagined a character like Hutchence who shows up at another man’s door and inspires him to suddenly become radical with promoting the gospel. Sometimes the gospel can feel like being punched in the face. Ha. Little did I know how perfect this character would be in a novel like this.

There's a lot of backstory on Hutchence, and since I imagined this to be a series and not simply one stand-alone title, I always planned to have more of Hutchence's character and life explored. He's someone who's had a conversion and now solely wants to share with others the urgency of telling others about Christ. His ways are unorthodox, but that's what makes him interesting.

Hutchence puts together a ragtag team to warn the country of the coming judgment. Would you share a bit about each of these characters?

There are three main POVs in the book: Cheyenne, the algorithms expert who is searching for her missing father's whereabouts; Will, the bookstore owner and family man forced to shut his doors due to selling Christian books; and Dowland, a government operative who is assassinating believers.

These three represent the journeys we are all on. Cheyenne is searching in her faith, Will is struggling with his faith, and Dowland refuses to accept it. Cheyenne and Will are two members of this ragtag team that Hutchence assembles. Another unique character is a character named Jazz.

The book has received several great endorsements from noted authors. But then you have Jerry B. Jenkins—the co-creator of *Left Behind*—calling *American Omens* “as fresh and relevant as *Left Behind* was more than twenty years ago.” That's amazing, right? How does an author process THAT?

Yeah, that IS amazing. I think I'm still processing that, to be honest.

Jerry has been a mentor and a friend ever since I worked with him at Tyndale House in author relations. He was always encouraging me in my writing, even when my material was pretty subpar. I asked him a couple of times over the years to endorse a book, but he hadn't yet.

Jerry once volunteered to help edit an early book of mine, but at the time I wanted to keep it as it was. I know he doesn't put his name on any book, so seeing his kind endorsement was thrilling. Having him reference *Left Behind* was really generous and affirming.

Over the years, you've written so many different kinds of books—including thrillers and mysteries, as well as stories of people forced to stand up for their faith in times of conflict or trauma. Is it fair to say *American Omens* is a culmination of those books?

Great question. I hadn't thought of it in that way, but now that you mention it, I guess it might just be a culmination of all the novels I've written. I know I needed to pour everything I could into *American Omens* since it's such an amazing opportunity having Random House publishing it.

I couldn't help making it a Travis Thrasher book, however, meaning it doesn't fit into the neat box of a "thriller" or a "suspense" novel. There are some things I did that I've always done in my fiction, for better or worse. Thankfully the editors helped to get these characters and storylines into great shape.

Even though I imagined *American Omens* as book one in a series, I made sure to have it be a strong story that works on its own. It doesn't end with a cliffhanger like my teen series.

I'm not sure if there will be more—none are under contract.

Obviously if the response is strong enough, then the publisher will want more. *Left Behind* started as a one-book contract, so... you just never know.

Some of your books have been either biographies or based on real people and events. How much does working on these kinds of books impact your fiction?

Every book I work on is a learning experience. Not just learning about the form of writing, but learning about life.

Collaborating with others on memoirs allows me to walk in someone else's shoes. I've worked with actors, athletes, politicians, businessmen, pastors, comedians, filmmakers, musicians... Talk about all the variety of characters who have invited me into their lives!

Everything in my life informs the fiction I'm working on at the time. I'm not the young dreamer who wrote *The Promise Remains* 20 years ago, nor am I the jaded publishing guy who penned *Sky Blue*.

My own faith journey is reflected in *American Omens* as well as some of the realities of what's happened to me the last few years. It's fun putting real life into fiction and then blurring the lines of reality.

What do you hope readers come away with after reading *American Omens*?

More than anything, I hope Christian readers will come away with a renewed sense of urgency in their faith. For readers who

might be searching and wondering in their own lives, I hope this opens a door for them to continue to ask questions and look for answers.

I've always said that fiction can be criticized enough simply because it's difficult to pull off, but when you have "Christian fiction," then you'll be critiqued based on the faith component of your story.

I stopped worrying about that long ago. If someone says this book is preachy, so be it. Hutchence likes to spout out his views on the world, but then again, lots of people do that.

Given your wide range of book types, how do you go about choosing what to write at a given time?

Memoirs and novelizations come to me from publishers, so I never know exactly when someone might be contacting me and what it will be about. For example, when I was contacted about working with *Saturday Night Live* alum Chris Kattan, I simply had to laugh and think, I'm going to be writing a book with Mr. Peepers and Mango!

For fiction, I don't have the luxury to simply choose what I'd like to write and then find a publisher to release it. It's hard enough trying to sell any book, and I know writing a variety of types of books only makes it even more difficult to get my name established. You never hear taglines like "From the author of the Hallmark film *Time for Me to Come Home* comes an eerie tale of the near future!" Since I love thrillers and darker stuff, *American Omens* is the type of book I want to write.

What kind of author do you prefer to be known as?

Bestselling. Okay, that's a joke. Then again, I do want my books to sell so the publisher is happy and wants to do more.

Personally, I want to be known as an author who constantly surprises. I feel with each novel I write, the chance to hit a home run is always there. I want to continue to explore and to write different types of literature.

Honestly, I really do feel like I'm just getting warmed up. I have a very long list of ideas, too.

What are the best ways for readers to support their favorite authors?

Word-of-mouth sells books. It always has and always will.

I've become pretty good at selling my own stuff to strangers. I'm self-deprecating and realize a lot of people truly don't care. That's okay. I also don't think I'm some Hemingway or Harper Lee. I've become more comfortable with who I am as a writer.

That being said, there's nothing better for me as a writer than to hear a reader expressing their love for one of my books. People listen, and if there's enough buzz about a particular title, then those people will go and check it out.

Encouragement is always a wonderful thing. I hear more criticisms in my profession since there are people constantly working on making a book better. So anytime a reader shares any sort of praise, I really value it. **FF**

Visit Travis Thrasher's author page here:

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American Omens

The Coming Fight for Faith

Travis Thrasher

Multnomah



In this taut thriller that imagines a near-future America following the decline of the Religious Right, the Christ-followers who have anticipated a rising intolerance for their beliefs for decades find out they're right after all.

In the U.S. in 2038, a secret society is imposing its agenda on outspoken Christian leaders, killing when necessary. Corporate regulations restrict religious expressions and policies.

A recent convert, Hutchence, uses creative and guerrilla-like techniques to spread the gospel of Jesus. This enigmatic man enlists a ragtag group of individuals to help him proclaim a warning to the rest of the country: God is sending His judgment on our nation, and His first act will be to destroy Chicago.

One recruit is a young and talented computer analyst who specializes in mastering algorithms for corporate and political use, and who is on the run from the company she works for, while trying to discover the truth about her father's mysterious disappearance. Another is a conspiracy theory junkie and survivalist who has discovered proof of assault on people of the Christian faith. And a widower with three girls is recruited by this mysterious Hutchence to help lead a return to God in America. **FF**

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ALLISON PITTMAN



a novel

The Seamstress

HISTORICAL AUTHOR: ALLISON PITTMAN

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS

The author explains the challenges of giving life to a minor character from a Dickens classic.

Allison Pittman, author of more than a dozen critically acclaimed novels, is a three-time Christy Awards finalist. Her new novel, ***The Seamstress*** (Tyndale House), expands on the story of a minor character from one of Charles Dickens' classic novels.

In this interview, Allison explains what inspired her to focus on this particular character, reveals what research went into writing the novel, and shares the core themes explored in the book.

***The Seamstress* reveals the untold story of a cameo character in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. What inspired you to elaborate on the life of this character in particular?**

At the end of the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, the character Sydney Carton has this beautiful, sweet moment with a young seamstress. (Dickens describes her as a "little seamstress.") It's a moment meant to show the redemption of Sydney Carton, a man who sees himself as one who has wasted his life.

The seamstress herself is nameless, appearing only in the final pages of the novel. Even so, left to herself, she is a powerful, important character. But—she mentions having a cousin in the country.

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That little detail used to seem like a throwaway fact. Then I became a writer, and I learned that nothing is a throwaway fact. Why mention the cousin? The seamstress is a symbol. A metaphor. She doesn't need a cousin.

I was standing in front of the students in my sophomore English class, discussing this final scene, and I had a throwaway line of my own: "I should write that story."

Can you tell us about the research that went into writing this novel?

Well, I wish I could say it included a week-long visit to Paris and Versailles, but remember—the idea came to me while teaching an English class, so a research trip just wasn't in the budget. I focused my research on four touchpoints: the Dickens novel to line up my story events with that final scene; a biography of Marie Antoinette to look for character insight beyond the cultural clichés; a fantastic book about the design, architecture,

and history of the palace at Versailles; and a resource offering meticulous detail about the fashion of the time.

While I, of course, read widely for details of the history of the French Revolution, I paid close attention to the details of the revolution as filtered through those sources and points of view. I always hope that the history behind my stories will come to life through my story. I tried to take bits and pieces of the conditions that led France to this point of revolution and “assign” them to characters to carry them to life.

Tell us about some of the core themes explored in your book. How do you hope readers might relate these themes to their own lives and real-world experiences?

I think, after sifting through the layers of the parallel stories, the core theme comes down to two concepts: honor and grace. In the story’s first pages, Gagnon acts with honor, taking in the orphaned cousins; moreover, he is honorable the entire time they are in his care, even when they grow from little girls into young women. He guards and shields them, honoring God in every moment, even when that moment means letting them go.

Renée honors her country’s queen, even when popular opinion dictates such respect is not deserved.

And Laurette, in her darkest moment, honors what she knows to be good and right.

Even the rebel Marcel acts in a manner that he sees as honorable, ready to fight and die for those who cannot do so for themselves.

Ultimately, it is this sense of honor that drives all of these characters—for a time—to make choices that divide them from each other. And yet, after so much hurt, betrayal, desperation, and bloodshed, grace and forgiveness wrap them back up together.

There is a scene in the novel when all of the principal characters are gathered around a table, sharing a very meager meal. They differ in politics, in age, in ideology, and in experience. Still, there is kindness, civility, and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of each other.

We all have to do better, to want a better world for each other, even if it means not having everything exactly as we'd like it to be. We need to be willing to give, to listen, to share, and—yes—to speak, when our words can be measured and delivered with care.

Why is it important to explore these topics in our current culture?

Dickens famously opens his novel with the paradox: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” He concludes that series of paradoxical statements by saying (forgive the paraphrase) that the events of his story take place in a time just like the present age.

To me, no matter when you read that novel, you are reading in the present age. When taken in superlative generalities, the tumultuous time of the French Revolution was no different than what and where and when we are living today.

The characters in the story are living in a time of upheaval: political, economic, religious, cultural—all fronts. Their world is changing, and the system under which they've been living is failing. It's a time of unchecked violence, weak leadership, and a cultural trend toward secularism. So—I can see it. Can you?

How is the perspective of your novel unique?

How does it hark back to the classic novel?

This novel brought me to a completely new writing place. I've written novels where every character on the page is one created from my imagination.

Then, in *Loving Luther*, I used that imagination to craft a story about people who were once real, living, breathing people. And I've given cameo appearances to historical figures—Brigham Young, Lottie Moon, Aimee Semple McPherson.

But this! To take a fictional character, lift her up from one story and bring her to life in another—not a retelling or a reimagining, but a completely new tale—that was new to me! I tried my best to craft a novel that fans of Dickens would appreciate.

The final scene is a direct homage to Dickens' scene, with some of his very lines interspersed. I am also unashamedly sentimental in parts, free with the emotive dialogue of my characters. Those who are noble are undoubtedly so, and those who are scoundrels are unashamed in their dealings.

What's the value of fiction and storytelling in today's society?

Fiction gives us a chance to explore. I don't mean just learning about cities and history, but a chance to explore mindsets and points of view. In *The Seamstress*, readers get to see not only

the unfolding of a revolution, but the desperation and poverty that led to that violence and destruction.

Fiction allows us to empathize with the kinds of people we might never meet in real life. I think sometimes we feel safer letting a fictional character into our heart because it's a safe way to explore new emotions. We can make predictions and lose nothing if we're wrong. People like to think of fiction as an escape, but I prefer to see it—and create it—as an immersion.

What role does faith play in this story?

Both Laurette and Renée were raised with an ever-present sense of religion in a staunchly Catholic village. Neither girl, however, in her simple, pastoral life, ever sought anything deeper than ritualistic practice—Laurette, not even that. Their prayers are memorized and recited, with a concept of God as a looming, far-off presence.

Though their paths are markedly different, each has to come to a place where she needs to trust in the forgiveness of Christ in order to forgive her own choices. Faith is what allows us to live with ourselves.

Which scene in *The Seamstress* did you most enjoy writing?

Oh, my... Even though it is tragic and violent, I think it has to be the scene of the women storming the palace at Versailles. For one thing, as a not-so-secret feminist, it's somewhat satisfying to see women taking action.

There's something so powerful about the idea of women made bold for the sake of their children—to see them add weapons to their voices and confront subjugation with threat. I could

never advocate that in today's climate, but in the context of history, it is such a powerful moment.

That scene is also a perfectly crafted chapter in the Dickens novel, with the sinister Madame Defarge at the helm. And finally, though I won't go into detail exactly how, it brings the cousins Laurette and Renée within consciousness of each other, and as a writer, those little moments are so much fun to craft!

As you were crafting the characters featured in *The Seamstress*, which one did you personally relate to the most? Which character surprised you the most?

I related to Laurette the most because she is basically just a total mess. She's impulsive and petulant and wracked with self-doubt. She is forgiven much.

What are some future projects you're working on?

As of this moment, all future projects are still in an early stage—too early for specifics. I will say that I am NOT finished with Dickens. I'm looking at other fictional characters who need to leap into my pages as well as historical figures who might show up in a story yet untold. **FF**



Visit Allison Pittman's author page here:

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The Seamstress

Allison Pittman
Tyndale House



**A beautifully crafted story
breathes life into the cameo
character from the classic novel
A Tale of Two Cities.**

France, 1788

It is the best of times . . .

On a tranquil farm nestled in the French countryside, two orphaned cousins—Renée and Laurette—have been raised under the caring guardianship of young Émile Gagnon, the last of a once-prosperous family. No longer starving girls, Laurette and Renée now spend days tending Gagnon's sheep, and nights in their cozy loft, whispering secrets and dreams in this time of waning innocence and peace.

It is the worst of times . . .

Paris groans with a restlessness that can no longer be contained within its city streets. Hunger and hatred fuel her people. Violence seeps into the ornate halls of Versailles. Even Gagnon's table in the quiet village of Mouton Blanc bears witness to the rumbles of rebellion, where Marcel Moreau embodies its voice and heart.

It is the story that has never been told.

Allison Pittman

In one night, the best and worst of fate collide. A chance encounter with a fashionable woman will bring Renée's sewing skills to light and secure a place in the court of Queen Marie Antoinette. An act of reckless passion will throw Laurette into the arms of the increasingly militant Marcel. And Gagnon, steadfast in his faith in God and country, can only watch as those he loves march straight into the heart of the revolution. **FF**

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Romance author **Lenora Worth** has written close to 50 books. Her latest is ***Her Amish Child*** (Love Inspired), the second book in the **Amish Seasons** series: Can their temporary arrangement turn into forever love?



In this interview, Lenora shares what inspired the story, how this book fits into the larger series, and the best ways for readers to support their favorite authors...

**Lenora, please tell us a bit about *Her Amish Child*.
Where did you get the idea for this story?**

I got the idea for this story when I was writing the first book in this series (*Their Amish Reunion*). I knew this would be a series but with different characters in each book. The idea of a widow finding a baby on her doorstep intrigued me so I jotted down notes and came up with a short proposal.

**What can you tell us about Amish widow Raesha Bawell?
What made you want to build a story around her?**

Raesha is a strong character. An Amish woman who lost her husband at a young age, who lives with her aging mother-in-law—also a widow. It's based somewhat on the Ruth and Naomi story in the Bible. Raesha refuses to leave her mother-in-law. She is also a successful businesswoman, having taken over the Bawell hatmaking business after their husbands pass away. She was a challenge but I loved her.

Tell us about the Amish Seasons series. How does *Her Amish Child* fit into the bigger picture?

Amish Seasons started when I seemed to be struggling with strong proposals for my next series of books for Love Inspired. I was walking on the beach with my husband when the first idea popped into my head. It was such a radical departure from what I usually write, I thought I'd get turned down flat. But everyone liked that idea and so it became a multi-book contract.

In each book, the theme of returning home runs deep. For an Amish who has left and returns home, this is a challenge and demands a true devotion to faith and family. When we go back to a place we left, we have to ask for forgiveness and redemption. Those themes resonate in these stories.

So the seasons of life are reflected in each book as well as the season of time—spring and summer, fall and winter. That cycle of the earth returning to its seasons sets the backdrop for my characters returning home to find true happiness and a strong faith.

What are the challenges of writing about the Amish in a way that stays true to their culture and yet also makes for an engaging story?

The challenge is to be authentic, to speak the truth about the Amish life and the tenets of that life, and for me, since I'd never considered writing an Amish book—to get the details as close to correct as possible but to also show the humanity. Human nature is the same, no matter the upbringing or environment. There is good and bad in all societies. I loved delving into that aspect of these stories.



What are the best ways for readers to support their favorite authors?

The best way a reader can support an author, other than buying a book, of course, is to leave a review if you've read the book. Reviews are important in this electronically-driven world. Even a bad review still means the person read the book. Word-of-mouth is always the best advertising and reviews are a perfect example of word-of-mouth. If people are reading and talking about our books, we all win. **FF**

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Lenora Worth



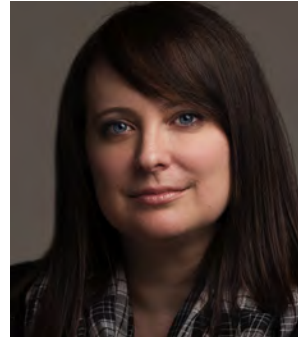
Her Amish Child
Amish Seasons #2
Lenora Worth
Love Inspired



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Erin Bartels has been named one of “the greatest up-and-coming fiction writers today” by the *Saturday Evening Post*. In her debut novel, ***We Hope for Better Things*** (Revell), Erin takes readers on an emotional journey from the volatile streets of 1960s Detroit to Michigan’s Underground Railroad during the Civil War—to uncover the past, confront the seeds of hatred, and discover where love goes to hide.



In this interview, she explains how she came up with the plot, who the novel is written for, and what modern readers can learn from America’s turbulent past.

***We Hope for Better Things* blends family drama, mystery, and romance into one intriguing story. How did you come up with the plot for your debut novel?**

It started with the idea of the photographer—the invisible presence whenever we look at a photo. From there, the story grew—a lot.

Once it was clear that race relations was going to be part of Nora’s story, I began to think about how quickly a family’s legacy might change. How long would it take to go from brotherhood to bigotry and back again? How long does it take a wound to heal?



Your novel covers some very volatile times in American history, including the 1960s and the Civil War. Why did you decide to focus on these time periods?

There's a long answer to this question, about historical cycles and the myth of progress. But the short answer is, I didn't decide to focus on the 1960s and 1860s. Those times chose me once the story evolved to tackle issues of race and racism. One hundred years apart, and yet in many ways not a lot of progress was made. Today we are still working toward true equality in a country that was ostensibly founded on the principle.

You have stated that you try to capture “the big emotions inherent in small moments and to tackle sprawling issues in specific details.” What are some of the issues you tackle in your book?

While the issues tackled include racial prejudice, difficult career choices, adultery, neglect of family, economic inequality, whether there are some things too horrible to be forgiven, and even whether we can trust that God is good, they are tackled on a very

personal scale, through the eyes of three thoughtful women who ask important questions of themselves, admit they're not perfect, and choose to change.

What type of research was required for accurately writing about these issues and time periods?

A lot. I spent all of 2013 reading about a thousand pages' worth of history and sociology, stretching from the early 1800s through the 1970s. I also watched documentaries, listened to podcasts, consulted various experts, read countless articles about current events as they occurred, and had long discussions about what's been happening in our country for the past decade.

Perhaps most important, four African American friends read early drafts and offered their critiques. Their input was invaluable.

What do you hope readers will gain from reading your novel?

I hope readers come away with more empathy for others. We never know what someone else has been through or what their family has been through, and we could all stand to be a bit more patient and understanding.

I also hope readers come away with a desire to examine their own preconceived notions and prejudices, as I did when I was writing. We can't change other people. We can only change ourselves. And while we can't change the past, we are molding our future every day. What kind of future do we want? **FF**

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Erin Bartels



We Hope for Better Things

Erin Bartels
Revell

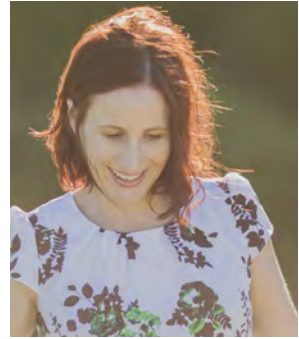


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New Zealand-based author **Kara Isaac** is a RITA Award-winning writer. Her latest novel is ***One Thing I Know*** (Howard Books): Relationship coach Rachel Somers has the whole world fooled—but the one man who just may see through her holds not only the key to her success, but also her heart.



In this interview, Kara reveals the inspiration for the story, explains what made her want to bring Rachel and Lucas together, and what she hopes readers get out of the experience.

Kara, what inspired the plot in *One Thing I Know*?

I first started writing the manuscript that became *One Thing I Know* in 2011. I was heavily pregnant with our first child at the time. So pregnant that I could no longer comfortably reach my keyboard to type so instead I spent some time brainstorming some new story ideas. One of those was “What if there was a relationship expert who was just a front for someone else?” The idea intrigued me, and so I started writing the story in 2012 a few months after our son was born. It has gone through many iterations and rewrites since I first finished it six years ago, and I am so thrilled that it will soon be in the hands of readers!

Rachel Somers is a relationship coach hiding behind her aunt’s public persona. What can you tell us about Rachel?

Rachel is a really complex character. Her background and family dynamic have meant that she is now in a place where she isn’t happy with the life that she is living but feels trapped in it



because she needs the money it makes her for her father's care. She lives a very small, contained life where only a handful of people know her true identity, and she won't allow herself to become close to anyone else because of her fear of being found out. She is hugely loyal to the people that she loves but deep down inside believes that everyone deserves happiness—except her.

Lucas Grant is a radio host who just wants to talk about sports—but callers keep asking him for relationship advice. What can you tell us about Lucas?

From the outside Lucas looks like he has it all. He has a popular call-in radio show and is one of the most eligible bachelors in Wisconsin. Underneath he is a cynic, jaded by his father's betrayal of their family. He has very high standards for himself and others and finds it almost impossible to forgive anyone who doesn't meet them. He lets very few people close to him, as he believes that sooner or later they will abandon him or let him down—just like his father did.

What is it about Rachel and Lucas that made you want to tell their story?

As a writer, one of the things that I want to do is look at faith from a different angles in the stories that I tell. Lucas and Rachel are both people who carry a lot of hurt and are very far from faith, but they have people close to them who are believers in Jesus. Their individual characters and backgrounds mean that they are not people who will come to faith quickly or easily.

I've read novels where people go through a Saul of Damascus experience between the beginning and end of the book, which is wonderful, but I wanted to tell a story of two people where their journey to faith is much longer. Making their story the first of a set of three books means that I have the opportunity to show that journey over a longer time period and from different perspectives.

What do you hope readers take away after reading *One Thing I Know*?

There are a couple of things that I would love readers to take away from *One Thing I Know*. The first is that there is no mistake too big or past too messy that stops Jesus from wanting a relationship with us. The second is for those of us who have friends and family who aren't believers to never give up on them. You never know how God is using the things you say or the way you live your life to speak to them, even if from the outside it appears that they could not be less interested in knowing Him. **FF**

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Kara Isaac



One Thing I Know

Kara Isaac
Howard Books



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As a young reader, bestselling author **Davis Bunn** loved classic fantasy and science fiction. Under the name **Thomas Locke**, he continues to pursue his passions today by writing rich, complex tales that introduce readers to new worlds. His dystopian novel ***Enclave*** (Revell) is set in a future where what was once America is now a collection of enclaves loosely run by a federal government. Twenty-one-year-old Caleb has a plan that could help secure his enclave's future—but if his secret is uncovered, he won't live to see another dawn.



In this interview, the author shares his earliest memories of reading science fiction, reveals why his first science fiction novel should never be published, and outlines what he hopes readers learn from *Enclave*.

You've said that you always loved fantasy and science fiction. What prompted your interest in these genres?

I loved speculative fiction from my earliest days as a reader. I can still remember the joy of having my mother take me to the city's main adult library, where she could leave me for the best Saturday afternoons of my entire life.

The weekend librarians all got to know me and used to joke with Mom over how I would sit utterly still with this huge pile of SF and fantasy books in front of me, going through as many as I possibly could. I would count out the minutes and rush to finish one more, because I could only take four home with me.



Four books for a week's reading? Who were they kidding?

What was the first science fiction book you wrote?

My first science fiction story was the first book I ever wrote. It was pretty awful. I don't remember the title. The manuscript was destroyed when flash floods inundated our cellar. All my readers should celebrate.

Your books take readers away from what they know to be true and instead help them explore the what-ifs of science fiction. How did you come up with the plot for *Enclave*?

I have really enjoyed some of the dystopian fiction I've read. But I felt like here, too, there could be great opportunity to insert a positive element, a heroic structure that lifted up the story—and, if we're successful, the genre. No matter how bleak the setting, there are still opportunities for great deeds.

Who's your favorite character in *Enclave* and why?

Kevin Ritter is a deputy sheriff who loses his job because he is discovered to be working for the newly reopened Underground Railroad. Only this time, they are helping refugees from northern cities seeking to relocate in Charlotte, North Carolina, where things are moderately safer.

Kevin is a brawler by nature, the son of a very wise woman who knows he needs an outlet for his strength and rage. He grows because he trusts her to make moves he might not agree with but that guide him to becoming a leader. I like Kevin a lot. I think we'd be good friends.

What do you hope readers gain from reading your book?

There is a visceral edge to the growth in the dystopian audience. These stories have been around for ages. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* were two that impacted me deeply as a kid.

The newer novels' bleak hopelessness and their dire predictions nowadays represent a big change in how young people view their future. I want to address this where they live, in their chosen genre, and add a clear message that even here there is hope, if the individual accepts the challenge to grow. Even here. **FF**

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Thomas Locke



Enclave
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Debby Giusti is a medical technologist who loves working with test tubes and petri dishes almost as much as she loves to write. Her recent novel ***Amish Safe House*** (Love Inspired Suspense) is the second book in the **Amish Witness Protection** series: After Julia Bradford's son witnesses a gang shooting, hiding in witness protection on Abraham King's Amish farm is the only hope the Englisher and her children have.



In this interview, she explains the challenges of balancing romance and danger in a story set among the Amish...

Debby, what can you tell us about *Amish Safe House*? What inspired the story?

Placing characters in witness protection has always been a favorite scenario for suspense authors to use. Naturally, when my editor asked if I would be interested in taking part in a new Love Inspired Suspense continuity involving characters hidden within Amish communities, I eagerly jumped on board.

Amish Safe House is the second story in the series and features single mom Julia Bradford and her two children. When Julia's teenage son witnesses an inner-city gang killing, she and her children need protection from the street thugs who have them in their crosshairs.

Abraham King left law enforcement after his wife and young daughter were murdered and returned to his peaceful, albeit lonely, Amish roots riddled with guilt. Now three years later, a friend working as a U.S. Marshal asks Abraham to provide refuge



for an *Englisch* family in the Witness Security Program. Abraham agrees, never suspecting the “family” consists of a down-on-her-luck mom and two fatherless kids who tug at his heart.

How does this fit into the Amish Witness Protection series?

Each story in the series involves characters who witness crimes and must enter the WITSEC program for their own safety. U.S. Marshal Jonathan Mast and two of his associates have an overarching role in the series, creating new identities for the witnesses.

Placing them in various Amish communities provides cover and safe haven, but inevitably danger looms, and in each exciting climax, the heroes and heroines must fight for their lives and triumph over evil forces before they declare their love and live happily ever after.

What are the challenges of balancing all these different elements? It’s suspense, it’s romance, it’s Amish...

As you mentioned, there are a lot of threads to draw from as I write. Each element—romance, suspense, faith—must be woven

together into a seamless story that, hopefully, will engage readers and keep them turning the pages. That challenge is what I enjoy most.

As the story develops, the dangers and obstacles become real to me, and like my characters, I often have to outsmart my antagonists to ensure the hero and heroine find true love. Equally important is their ability to ask God's forgiveness for mistakes they've made in the past and to accept the Lord into their hearts. Only then can they live life to the full.

What do you hope readers take away reading *Amish Safe House*?

Bad things happen to good people, and my heroes and heroines have to battle strong antagonists and opposing forces that form the external conflict in each of my stories. They also have to come to terms with their own internal conflict—a wound or mistake they've made in the past along with the guilt they carry that weighs heavily on their hearts. They believe God isn't interested in them and in their problems when in reality they've closed the door and shut the Lord out of their lives.

Amish Safe House follows that same premise. At the end of the story, Julia and Abraham see past mistakes through the Lord's tender gaze of merciful forgiveness. Christ's love is limitless and unconditional. I hope my stories drive home that truth to any reader who has been hurt or feels abandoned by God.

How does your faith impact how you approach storytelling?

My writing is not only my passion but also my ministry. I pray as I write, asking the Lord to provide the words and the inspiration. I also pray that the work of my hands—my writing—will bear good fruit.

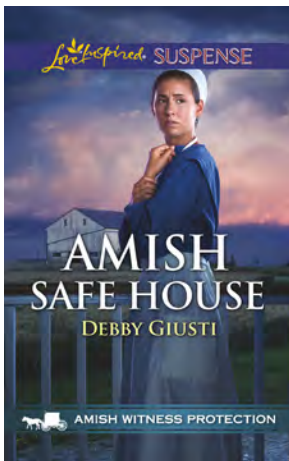
Debby Giusti

For each book, I create flawed characters who feel unworthy of God's love at the onset. As the story progresses and danger closes in, they often have nowhere to turn except to the Lord. Once they call out to Him, they find the wherewithal to risk everything for a greater good as well as for the one they love.

In this age, so many people seem to be broken or wounded and unable to live authentic lives. I pray for my readers and ask the Lord to free them from anything that holds them back from accepting God's love. My goal is to write stories that reflect my faith in God and His abundant mercy and love for all of us. **FF**

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Amish Safe House

Amish Witness Protection #2

Debby Giusti

Love Inspired Suspense

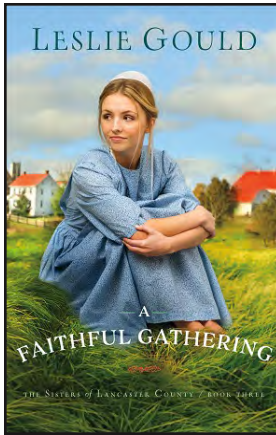


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Leslie Gould

Bethany House

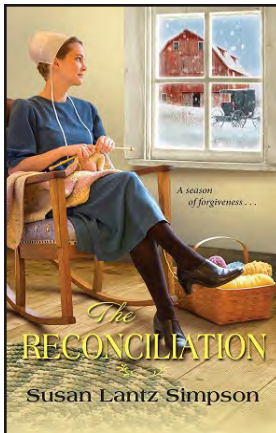
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Susan Lantz Simpson

Zebra

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Wanda E. Brunstetter

Shiloh Run Press

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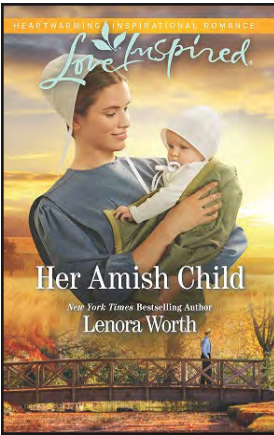
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Her Amish Child

Amish Seasons #2

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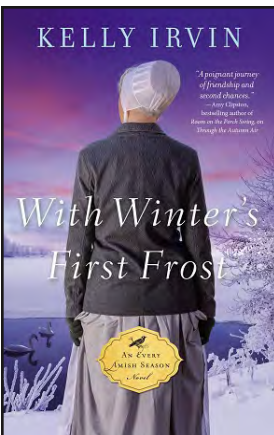
Love Inspired

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With Winter's First Frost

Every Amish Season #4

Kelly Irvin

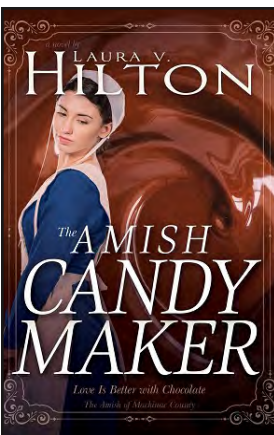
Zondervan

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The Amish Candy Maker

Amish of Mackinac County #2

Laura V. Hilton

Whitaker House

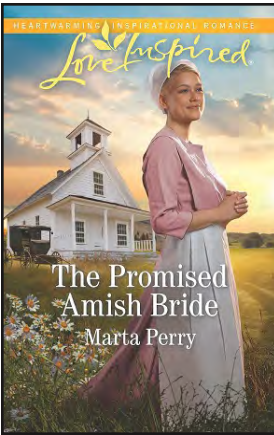
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Allison Pittman

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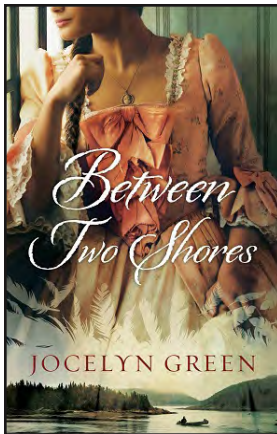
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Between Two Shores

Jocelyn Green

Bethany House

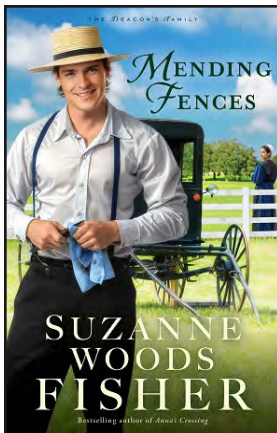
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Mending Fences

The Deacon's Family #1

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A Return of Devotion

Haven Manor #2

Kristi Ann Hunter

Bethany House

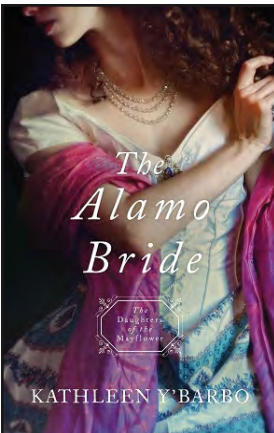
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Alamo Bride

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Kathleen Y'Barbo

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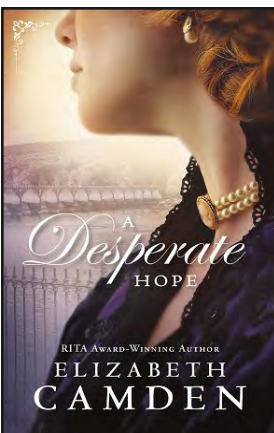
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A Desperate Hope

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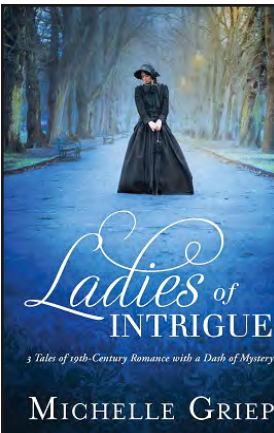


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3 Tales of 19th-Century Romance with a Dash of Mystery

Michelle Griep

Barbour Books

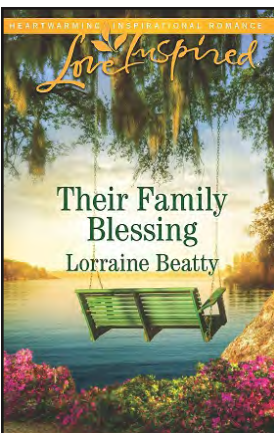
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Their Family Blessing

Mississippi Hearts

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One Thing I Know

Kara Isaac

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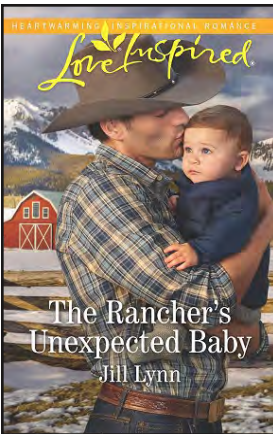
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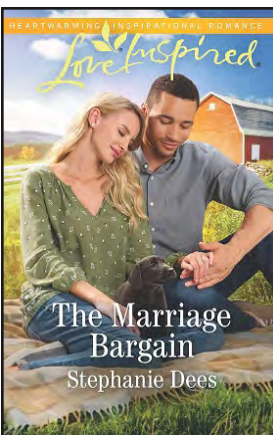
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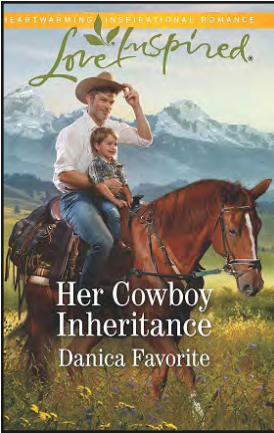
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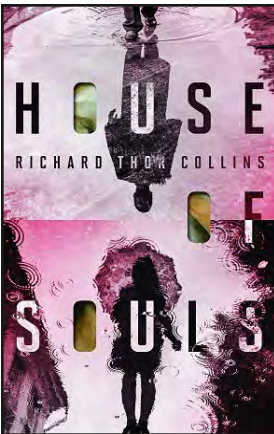
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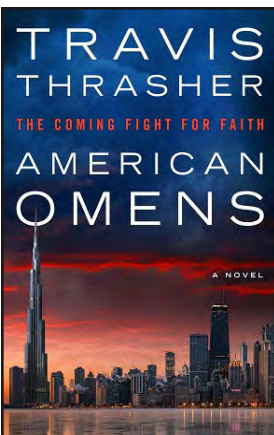
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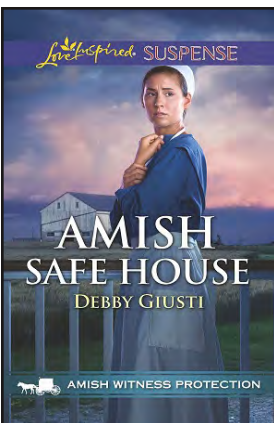
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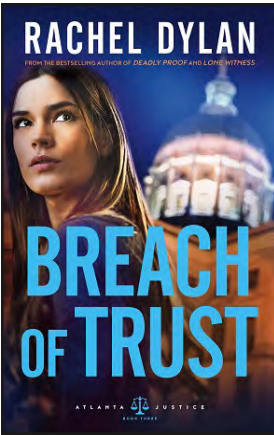
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Rachel Dylan

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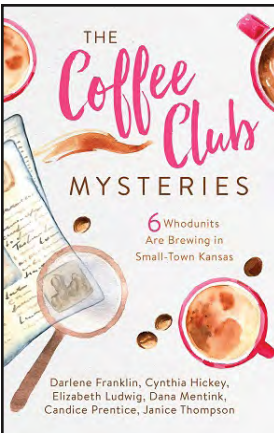
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6 Whodunits Are Brewing in

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Candice Prentice, Janice Thompson

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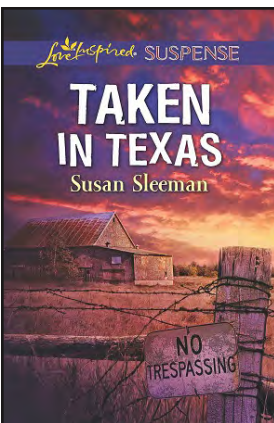
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