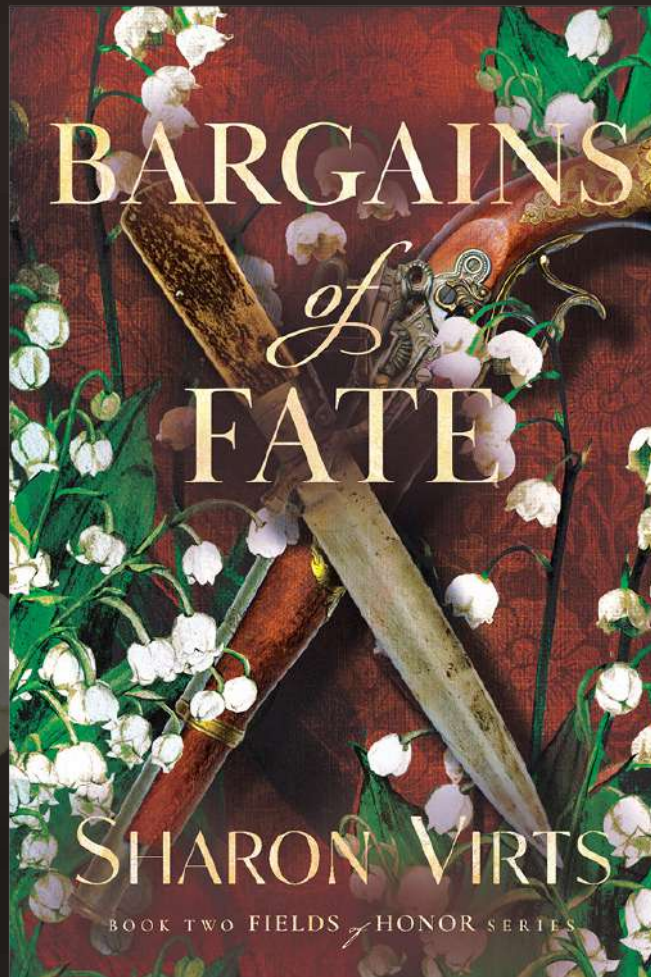


BOOK CLUB GUIDE



BOOK 2

The FIELDS *of* HONOR Series

SHARON VIRTIS



Dear Reader,

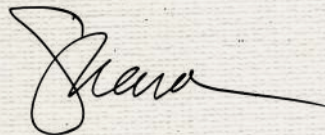
My journey to *Bargains of Fate*, the second novel in the *Fields of Honor* series, began in much the same way as the first with a question that refused to let me go. What happens after the duel? After the moment that defines reputations, fractures families, and alters the course of lives? History often captures the climax, but I found myself drawn to the consequences, the quieter, more complicated truths that unfold in its wake.

As I continued researching the lives surrounding Selma and the legacy of Jack McCarty and those closest to him, I became increasingly fascinated by the weight of survival. How do individuals move forward when their past is marked by scandal, loss, and deeply personal missteps? In *Bargains of Fate*, I wanted to explore not only Jack's struggle to reconcile the man he was with the man he hopes to become, but also the emotional resilience of the women around him, particularly Lucinda, whose strength, intuition, and sacrifices shape the course of their shared future.

The *Fields of Honor* series is rooted in real people and real events, but it is the emotional truths that guide my storytelling. I am drawn to the tensions between love and ambition, loyalty and betrayal, and the fragile balance between public honor and private consequence. In this second installment, those tensions deepen, and the choices my characters face become even more consequential.

It is my hope that as you read, you will find yourself not only immersed in their world, but reflecting on your own understanding of forgiveness, accountability, and the bargains we all make in pursuit of the lives we desire.

Best,



BEHIND THE SCENES: A World Shaped by Consequence

Bargains of Fate

In *Bargains of Fate*, the story continues not at the height of conflict, but in its aftermath.

Set in the years following the War of 1812, Virginia enters what is often called the "Era of Good Feelings." Yet beneath the surface, society remains governed by reputation, family alliances, and the unspoken rules of honor. In places like Loudoun County, Virginia and Washington, DC, personal and public lives are deeply intertwined. A man's past is never truly behind him.

For Jack McCarty, life appears to have settled. He has rebuilt his career, secured his place in society, and married to the love of his life. But in a world where memory lingers and judgment is quiet but constant, stability can be more fragile than it seems.

Around him, others are navigating their own uncertain paths. Jack's wife Lucinda stands at the center of both family and society, balancing loyalty with intuition. Her sister, Fanny Lee, faces choices shaped as much by circumstance as by desire. What begins as a hopeful future can quickly shift when expectations, timing, and pressure collide.

As new relationships form and old ones are tested, the story expands to include a wider circle of influence: friends, family members, political figures, and unexpected allies. Some offer guidance while others introduce new complications. And in this tightly woven community, actions rarely affect just one life.

The courtroom, the drawing room, and the private conversations between all become arenas where reputation, ambition, and loyalty are quietly negotiated. Even moments of national celebration, such as the return of Marquis de Lafayette to the United States, serve as reminders of the ideals people strive for...and the ways they fall short.

At its heart, *Bargains of Fate* is not simply about what happens next, it is about what endures. The choices made in the past continue to echo forward, shaping futures in ways both seen and unseen.

CHARACTER SPOTLIGHTS

Bargains of Fate



JACK McCARTY

Jack has always felt very real to me. He is driven, proud, and determined to make something of his life. He has worked hard to rebuild after the past, and on the surface, he has everything he once hoped for. But Jack is not a man who settles easily. His ambition, his sense of justice, and his refusal to look away from trouble often place him at the center of it. I think of him as someone constantly striving for both success and peace.



LUCINDA (LEE) McCARTY

Lucinda is, in many ways, the heart of this story. She sees more than she says, and understands more than others realize. There is a steadiness to her that I admire; a quiet strength that holds her family together even when circumstances grow uncertain. She loves deeply, but she is also perceptive and strong-willed in her own right. Lucinda reminds me that not all influence is loud.



FANNY LEE

Fanny has a spark about her that I have always enjoyed writing. She is hopeful, expressive, and eager for a future that feels like her own. But like many women of her time, her choices are not entirely hers to make. I see Fanny as someone standing at a crossroads trying to balance what she wants with what is expected of her. Her journey is full of heart, and not without its challenges.



JAMES DULANEY

James is one of those characters whose presence is deeply felt, even in quiet moments. As Jack's close friend, he represents loyalty and shared history. He moves easily within their world, yet his path is touched by unexpected turns. I've always thought of James as someone who reflects both the promise and the uncertainty of the lives these young men are building.



DENNIS McCARTY

Dennis is a complicated man. He has charm, position, and a certain confidence that draws people in, but there is also an unpredictability to him that cannot be ignored. He lives very much in the moment, and that can make him both engaging and dangerous. Writing Dennis meant exploring how quickly control can slip, and how far-reaching the consequences can become.



JOSEPHINE BEATTY

Josephine intrigued me from the start. She is confident, perceptive, and entirely comfortable in her own presence. There is a strength to her that doesn't ask permission. She understands the world she moves in and knows how to navigate it. I think of her as someone who challenges expectations by being exactly who she is.



FRENCH BEATTY

French is shaped by the world he inhabits; one of influence, family legacy, and quiet ambition. He pays attention. He understands how relationships and reputation can open doors and close them. I see him as someone who watches carefully and moves thoughtfully, always aware that even small decisions can carry weight.



CHARLES FENTON MERCER

Charles Fenton Mercer is a figure of influence, someone who sees the larger picture and understands how power works in both public and private life. His relationship with Jack is layered, shaped by his sense of what must be done.

A SUMMER PICNIC SPREAD

Bargains of Fate

There is something timeless about a summer picnic; the easy conversation, the shared dishes, the sense that for a few hours, the world slows just enough for us to savor both food and company.

In *Bargains of Fate*, moments like these offer a gentle contrast to the tensions of daily life. They remind us that even in a world shaped by expectation and reputation, there is still space for connection, laughter, and simple pleasures.

For your book club gathering, consider recreating the feeling of a classic summer picnic ... no blankets required. Think light, seasonal fare, beautifully arranged on platters and served with refreshing drinks.

The goal is not formality, but warmth and abundance—an inviting table that encourages guests to linger, sample, and enjoy.

A Picnic-Inspired Menu

SAVORY BITES

Pimento Cheese Tea Sandwiches

A Southern staple that is creamy, slightly tangy, and perfect on soft white or brioche bread, cut into small squares or triangles.

Deviled Eggs

A picnic classic, lightly seasoned and easy to enjoy in a few bites.

Seasonal Cheese Board

A mix of soft and firm cheeses with crackers, fresh herbs, and a touch of honey or fig preserves.



FRESH & LIGHT

Dipped Strawberries

Fresh strawberries, dipped in chocolate or simply served as they are for a bright, sweet finish.

Summer Fruit Medley

Sliced peaches, berries, and melon - simple, colorful, and refreshing.

SWEET TOUCHES

Shortbread Cookies

Something delicate and easy to pair with fruit or a glass of wine.

Chocolate Tarts

Rich, velvety chocolate nestled in a delicate pastry shell; an indulgent bite that adds just the right touch of decadence to your picnic spread.

REFRESHING DRINKS

Wine Spritz

A light and celebratory option. Blend white wine with a splash of sparkling water and a twist of citrus.

Classic Brandy Cocktail

For a slightly more refined nod to the era, serve a simple brandy drink over ice with a hint of sugar and citrus.

Sparkling Lemonade

A non-alcoholic option that still feels festive and seasonal.

As you gather around your table, let the setting reflect the spirit of the story: gracious, inviting, and just a touch indulgent. After all, some of the best conversations begin not just with a good book, but with good food shared among friends.

Select recipes on the next pages.



Pimento Cheese Tea Sandwiches

Ingredients

2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, finely grated
4 oz cream cheese, softened
½ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup diced pimentos (drained)
½ tsp garlic powder
Salt and pepper to taste
Soft white or brioche bread

Instructions

In a bowl, mix cheddar, cream cheese, and mayonnaise until smooth.
Stir in pimentos, garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
Spread evenly on bread slices and top with another slice.
Trim crusts and cut into small triangles or squares.
Chill slightly before serving for best texture.

Deviled Eggs

Ingredients

6 large eggs
3 tbsp mayonnaise
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp white vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste
Paprika for garnish

Instructions

Place eggs in a pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil.
Remove from heat, cover, and let sit for 10–12 minutes.
Cool, peel, and slice eggs in half lengthwise.
Remove yolks and mash with mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, salt, and pepper.
Spoon or pipe filling back into whites.
Sprinkle lightly with paprika before serving.

Shortbread Cookies

Ingredients

1 cup unsalted butter, softened
½ cup sugar
2 cups all-purpose flour
¼ tsp salt
1 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions

Preheat oven to 325°F.
Cream butter and sugar until light and smooth.
Mix in vanilla.
Add flour and salt, mixing just until dough forms.
Roll out and cut into shapes, or press into a pan and score.
Bake 18–22 minutes, until edges are lightly golden.
Cool completely before serving.

Chocolate Tarts

Ingredients

Crust:
1¼ cups crushed graham crackers or shortbread crumbs
5 tbsp melted butter
2 tbsp sugar
Filling:
1 cup heavy cream
8 oz semi-sweet chocolate, chopped
1 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°F (175°C).
Mix crust ingredients and press into tart pans.
Bake 8–10 minutes, then cool.
Heat cream until just simmering, then pour over chocolate.
Let sit 2 minutes, then stir until smooth. Add vanilla.
Pour filling into crusts and chill until set (about 2 hours).
Serve with berries or a light dusting of powdered sugar.

Classic Brandy Cocktail

Ingredients

2 oz brandy
1 sugar cube (or ½ tsp sugar)
2–3 dashes Angostura bitters
Orange peel
Ice

Instructions

Place sugar cube in a glass and saturate with bitters.
Add a splash of water and muddle until dissolved.
Add ice and pour in brandy.
Stir gently.
Express orange peel over the drink and drop it in as garnish.



Bargains of Fate

AUTHOR'S QUESTIONS FOR BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION

1. Jack McCarty works hard to rebuild his life and reputation. What do you think defines a person more: their past actions or the choices they make afterward?
2. Lucinda often observes more than she says. How does her quiet strength influence the people around her? In what ways can restraint be more powerful than action?
3. Fanny faces difficult choices shaped by timing, expectation, and circumstance. How much control do women of this era truly had over their futures?
4. Reputation plays a powerful role throughout the story. How do you see public perception shaping private decisions for these characters? Is reputation still as influential today?
5. Friendship and loyalty are tested in subtle and complex ways. What does loyalty mean in this story? Are there moments where loyalty and honesty come into conflict?
6. Ambition is a driving force for many characters, especially Jack. When does ambition become a strength and when might it become a liability?
7. Women in the novel often influence events in ways that are not immediately visible. Which female characters stood out to you, and how did they shape the course of the story?
8. Moments of national pride and unity contrast with personal conflict. What do you think the story suggests about the gap between ideals and reality?
9. Characters are frequently faced with difficult choices without clear right or wrong answers. Was there a moment where you questioned what you might have done in their place?
10. At its heart, this story explores consequences, both immediate and long-lasting. What themes or ideas stayed with you most after reading?



About the Author

Sharon Virts is a bestselling author known for richly layered historical fiction that blends meticulous research with psychological suspense and immersive storytelling. A Virginia native, Sharon grew up captivated by tales of the past—stories of forgotten lives, buried truths, and long-hidden mysteries. That early fascination sparked a lifelong curiosity—about the people, events, and places history has overlooked that— that now fuels her writing.

Her bestselling novels *Veil of Doubt*, and *The Grays of Truth*, and the *Field of Honor* series featuring *Masque of Honor* and *Bargains of Fate* weave historical accuracy with cinematic narrative and atmospheric tension, crafting stories that linger long after the final page.

Veil of Doubt was named a finalist for Best Historical Fiction by both the American Book Fest's 2024 Best Book Awards and the IAN Book of the Year Awards. *The Grays of Truth* won the 2025 International Book Award for Best Historical Fiction.

Sharon's contribution to the arts, preservation, and community service have earned her recognition as one of Washington Life Magazine's Philanthropic 50 in 2020 and a 2024 Loudoun History Award honoree.

Sharon lives with her husband, Scott Miller, at Selma Mansion in Virginia, a historic estate they rescued from demolition and lovingly restored. There, surrounded by stories of the past, she continues to write the ones still waiting to be told.

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