



What is it about October and a Ghost Story?

Maybe it's the early darkness. The wind stirring leaves across the lawn. The first fire in the fireplace. Or perhaps it's simply that with the dying leaves, we find ourselves wondering about something human beings have wondered about for thousands of years:

What if the dead aren't really gone?

Our fascination with ghosts is much
older than Halloween. The ancient Greeks told stories of souls crossing the River Styx into the realm of Hades. The Romans had Pluto and their own elaborate beliefs about the spirits of the dead. And ghosts appear in one of the oldest books

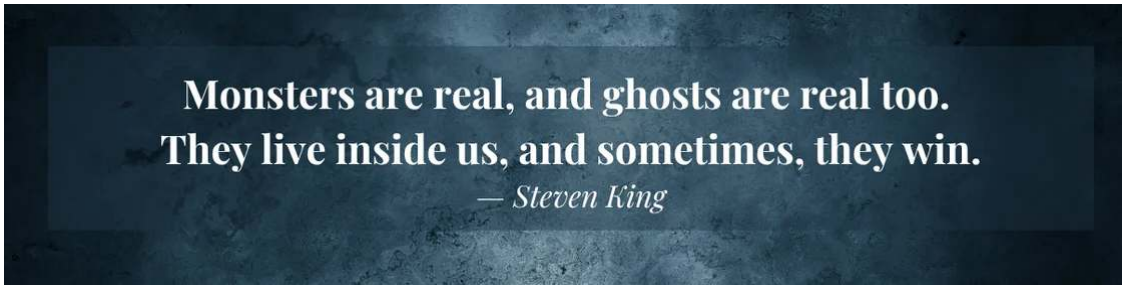
many of us own. In the First Book of Samuel, a desperate King Saul seeks out the woman at Endor and asks her to summon the dead prophet Samuel—who appears and speaks to him.

Shakespeare certainly understood our fascination. The ghost of Hamlet's murdered father sets an entire tragedy in motion. Banquo returns bloodied to Macbeth's banquet table. Julius Caesar appears to Brutus before his death.

And American writers made the supernatural their own. Washington Irving sent poor Ichabod Crane riding through the dark woods of Sleepy Hollow with the Headless Horseman behind him. Edgar Allan Poe filled his stories with premature burials, haunted consciences, mysterious deaths and people who perhaps weren't quite as dead as everyone supposed.

By the time enormous numbers of Irish immigrants arrived in America in the nineteenth century, they brought traditions descended in part from **Samhain**, the ancient Celtic festival marking the end of the harvest season. Over centuries, those traditions had mingled with the Christian observances of All Hallows and All Souls. In America, they eventually helped shape the Halloween we recognize today.

But why autumn ... <<READ MORE>>





HONOR & HOPE

THERE ARE STILL A FEW SPOTS LEFT to join me and NYTimes best-selling author Heather Webb on October 7 at Belmont Country Club in Ashburn, Virginia as

we travel between two eras to explore:

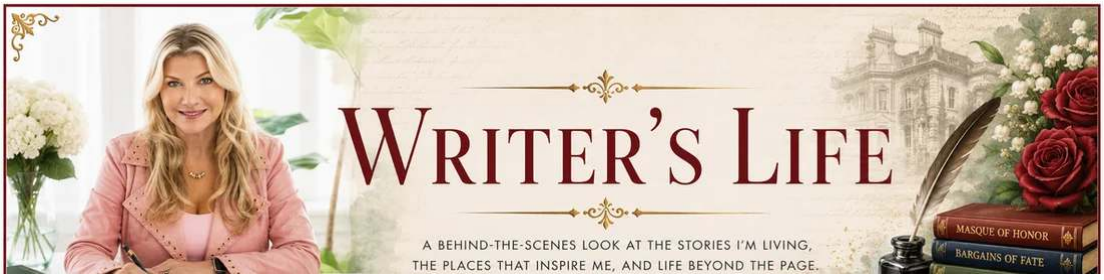
- The interwoven worlds behind ***The Hope Keeper*** & the novels in my **Fields of Honor** series
- Love, marriage, money, reputation, and scandal
- Societal changes between the 1820s and the 1920s
- The role Belmont played in the lives of the McCartys and Lees of my stories and the lives of the McLeans who owned the **Hope Diamond** and Belmont in Heather's book.
- The real history that inspires historical fiction





Learn More Here

The evening begins with a cocktail reception featuring my husband's Napa-based **Amlés Wines**, followed by a historical talk with Heather and me, and a book signing.



Art, Connection, and a Birthday to Remember

Some birthdays are more memorable than others, and this one will be hard to top! I spent the weekend participating in the inaugural Reflectionist exhibit, surrounded by art and the people who make creating it so rewarding.



Every painting I exhibited sold, which was both thrilling and deeply moving. There is something very personal about sharing work that began in your own imagination and discovering that someone wants to live with it. As a writer and an artist, that connection means so much to me. Add a wonderful birthday celebration, and I came home with plenty to be grateful for.







Add a wonderful birthday celebration with friends who flew down to Dallas to join me, and I came home with plenty to be grateful for.

(I had to add picture of my birthday cake and amazing cotton candy!)





When a Mother Is Accused

Emily Lloyd and Lindsay Clancy: Two Mothers, Two Courtrooms, 154 Years Apart

When I began researching the 1872 trial that became the foundation for *Veil of Doubt*, one question kept nagging at me: **What would have happened to Emily Lloyd if women had been allowed to sit on her jury?** My conclusion may surprise you.

I think they might have hanged her.

Emily was accused of poisoning all four of her children. The accusation was almost incomprehensible in 1872, when motherhood occupied a near-sacred place in Victorian society. Women were expected to be nurturing, self-sacrificing and morally responsible for the home. But as I worked my way through the surviving testimony, I noticed something I hadn't expected.

The women were hard on Emily. They noticed things. They judged things. They interpreted her behavior through their own understanding of what a wife and mother should be. Again and again, I was struck by how unforgiving some of their testimony could be.

The men seemed different. Emily's jury was entirely male because women could not serve. And those twelve men were ultimately unable to accept that this young mother was criminally responsible for murdering her children. She was acquitted.

For years afterward, I have wondered whether Emily might have walked from that courtroom because twelve men judged her—and whether twelve women, applying the expectations of nineteenth-century motherhood, might have sent her to the gallows instead. Then, 154 years later, I watched another courtroom wrestle with another mother accused of killing her children. Her name was **Lindsay Clancy**.

Two Mothers. Two Very Different Worlds... **<<Read More>>**



When Poe becomes Paint

Edgar Allan Poe has been haunting my work for a while now. When I wrote *Grays of Truth*, Poe found his way into the story for a very real reason. The story's hero, General Scott Ketchum had been his classmate at West Point. Poe wasn't simply a famous name from another century to Scott. He was someone he had actually known.



So I quoted Poe in the novel, allowing his words to drift into a story already filled with many of the things that haunted his own work—grief, loss, memory, love, and the terrible permanence of things that cannot be undone. Now fall is arriving again. The light is changing. The days are growing shorter. And I've found myself returning

to Poe. Only this time, I'm not approaching him as a writer. I'm approaching him as a painter.

Artists have illustrated Edgar Allan Poe's works for generations. I don't want to illustrate him. I want to paint the emotion of his work. **What color is grief? What shape is fear? Does sorrow have texture? What does madness look like as it moves across a canvas?** Those questions have led me to a new body of paintings inspired by Poe's poems and stories. But I'm trying very hard *not* to paint the stories themselves.

For **Annabel Lee**, I don't need to paint Poe's poem literally. In *Annabel's Sea*, she is nearly one with the tumultuous water around her—small against the enormity of sea and sky, yet unmistakably there. The light does not lead away from her. It leads toward the sea, toward Annabel. For Poe, following that light is the only path back to the woman he has lost.

The Black Cat took me somewhere darker. Poe named his narrator's beloved black cat Pluto, after the Roman god of the underworld. But as the story descends into alcoholism, rage, violence and madness, Pluto becomes something more than a cat. To me, he became the physical presence of the narrator's addiction and demons—the thing he cannot escape because he cannot escape himself. And so in my painting, *Pluto*, I wanted to give Poe's narrator something Poe never did:
A way out.





The cat emerges in high relief from the wall, enormous, black and almost inseparable from the darkness around him. He is impossible to ignore. But across the room is a door. It is battered and charred, but it is open to him. Even the path toward it changes color, as though somewhere within all that darkness there remains another direction he might take. He can leave—but only if he can summon the courage to confront the demon looming beside him.

These paintings aren't meant to illustrate Poe's stories. They are my response to them. In one, light leads a grieving man **toward** the darkness because the person he loves waits somewhere within it. In the other, light offers a tortured man a path **out** of the darkness—if only he is willing to take it.

There are recognizable things throughout this series—a raven, a distant house, a wine cask, a solitary woman beside a raging sea, a black cat emerging from a wall. But I want them to emerge from the paint the way memories and fears emerge from darkness: partially, imperfectly, sometimes only after you've been looking for a while.

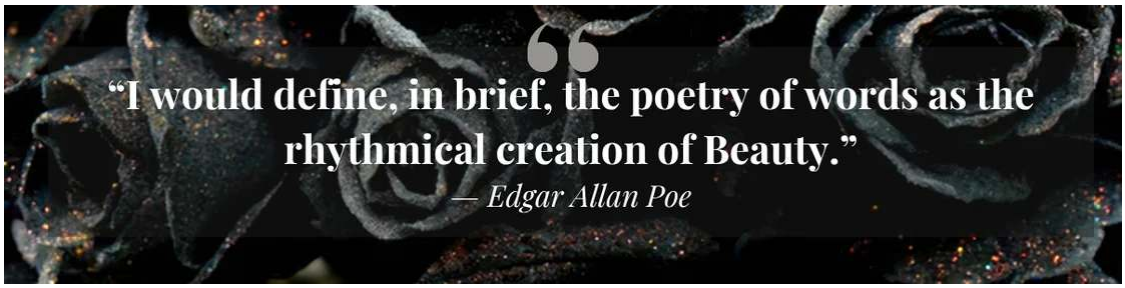
The paint itself becomes part of the language. I work in oils, applying much of the paint heavily with knives and trowels. Ridges cast shadows. Metallic passages catch the light. Black disappears into midnight blue. Bruised violet collides with oxblood. Turquoise rises through gray. Tarnished gold glimmers and vanishes again.

Color becomes emotion.
Texture becomes atmosphere.
Light becomes reflection.

And suddenly I find myself doing with paint something very similar to what I try to do with words. When I write about grief, I can't simply tell a reader that a character is grieving and expect them to feel it. I have to build the world around that grief—the empty chair, the remembered voice, the letter that should have been thrown away, the place that looks exactly as it did when someone was still there.

Poe knew that instinctively. He built worlds in which we begin to feel those things ourselves. Perhaps that is what I am trying to capture on canvas. Not the raven, but what it feels like when the raven says *Nevermore*. Not the ruined house, but the sensation that something beautiful is disappearing before our eyes. Not the tomb, but the unbearable human desire to keep loving someone who is no longer there.

Writing and painting seem like very different ways of telling a story. Lately, I'm not so sure they are.





A Hauntings Evening in Leesburg

Annual Loudoun Museum Spooky Fundraiser

There's something especially thrilling about watching a story you've spent years researching come to life. This October, the **Emily Lloyd** case at the heart of my novel ***Veil of Doubt*** will once again take center stage during Loudoun Museum's annual Leesburg Hauntings tour, and I hope you'll join us!







Scheduled for **October 22, 23, and 24**, this 80-minute evening walking tour takes you through historic downtown Leesburg, Virginia. Guides lead groups from stop to stop, sharing local ghost stories and tales from the town's past. Costumed volunteers perform mini-plays along the way, giving voice to the people behind the stories. It's a wonderful mix of history, theater, and spooky fun.

The tour ends at the Leesburg Courthouse, where **volunteers reenact the Emily Lloyd trial**. For those who have read *Veil of Doubt*, it's an opportunity to see the case unfold beyond the page. For those who haven't, consider it an intriguing introduction!

I'll be on the courthouse steps signing books, and I'd love to hear what you thought of the performance. Bring your questions and your curiosity... we'll have plenty to talk about.



You can reserve your Leesburg Hauntings tickets through Loudoun Museum.

Buy Now!

SHARON'S Bookshelf

9 Nail Biters to Keep you up at Night

I'm not an "all-out horror" kind of girl. You won't find buckets of blood or gratuitous gore on this list. What you will find are beautifully crafted gothic novels that build suspense page by page, where the mood matters as much as the characters, and the greatest terror often comes from the ghosts we carry with us rather than the ones lurking in the shadows. Better still, every book here is a recent release, proof that gothic fiction is having quite a moment.



ENTER TO WIN NINE NAIL-BITING READS

Click here for full descriptions and ordering information



#ReadWithSharon

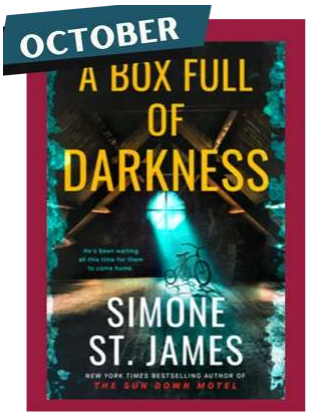
Historical Fiction Book Club

On Thursday, October 29, at 7 pm Eastern, we will discuss *A Box Full of Darkness* by Simone St. James.

What I loved about this book was how it kept me guessing right up until the very end. The story shifts between the viewpoints of the three Esmie siblings—Violet,

Vail, and Dodie—slowly revealing more about what happened all those years ago. When the truth finally came together, it was completely unexpected. And I loved the nods to another Simone St. James favorite of mine, *The Sun Down Motel*, since both stories are set in the same town. The ending is a little wonky. But I love the character development (and a good ghost story!)

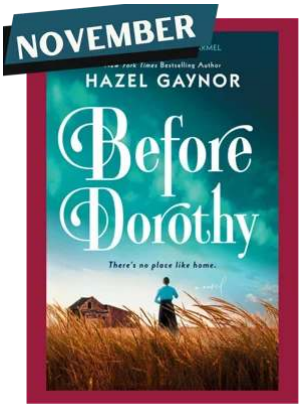
If you haven't got your copy of *A Box Full of Darkness* yet, you can **use this link** to buy it.



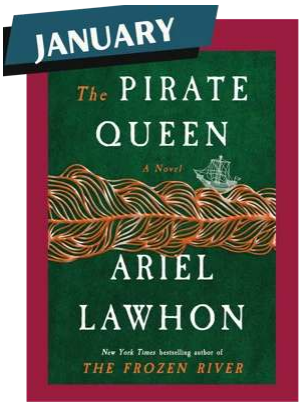
Enter to win a copy of A Box Full of Darkness and a signed copy of *Bargains of Fate*!

Enter Here!

The **#ReadWithSharon** book club only reads current-release historical fiction, and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the pick. Most months, the author joins us via Zoom, and you can ask questions during the discussion. If you're not a member already, you can sign up for free **HERE**.









Last month, I asked what books you loved most as a child...

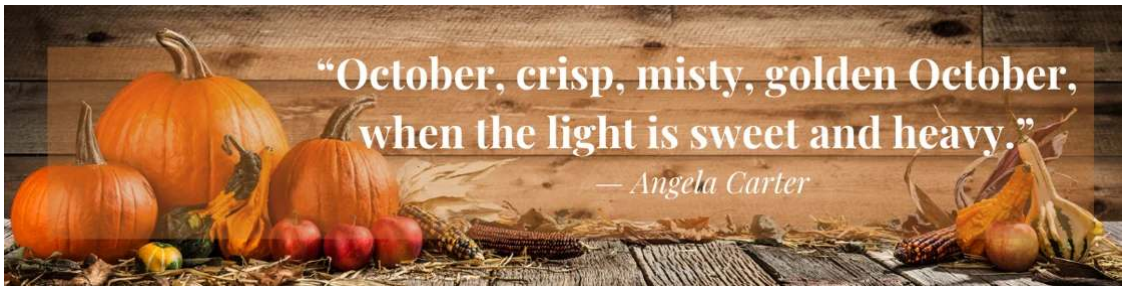
- Heather said, "*A Secret Garden.* My 5th grade teacher read it to us."
- Lesa said, "*Little Women* which started my love affair with books. And Nancy Drew."
- Anna said, "Harry Potter - the entire series from *Sorcerer's Stone* to *Deathly Hallows*."
- Teri said, "Dr. Seuss before I could read! Then *Charlotte's Web*."
- Britta said, "*Winnie-the-Pooh*. I loved every one of the characters."
- Claire said, "*Heidi*. I read it to my daughters and my grandchildren."
- James said, "*Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak."
- Kristine said, "Hans Christian Andersen's, *Fairy Tales*. I still think I am the princess in *Princess and the Pea*!"

- Jean said, "*The Secret Garden*. This was the first book I read on my own."

This month:

What was your favorite Halloween Costume?

Click here to send me your favorite.



My favorite color is October!



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