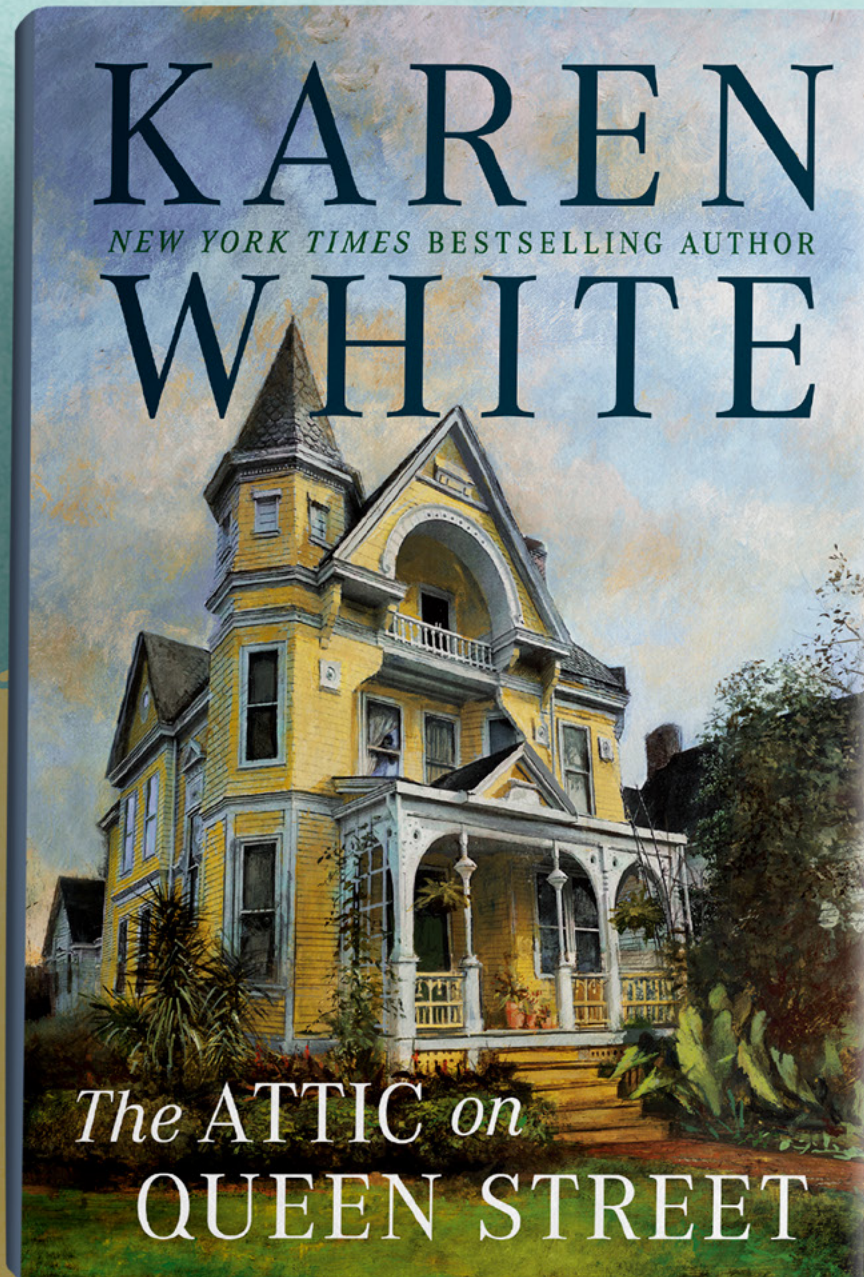


# Book Club Kit





# *A Conversation with* **KAREN WHITE**



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**Catch us up—what has Melanie been up to since *The Christmas Spirits on Tradd Street*?**

Since we last saw Melanie at the end of *The Christmas Spirits on Tradd Street*, her number one goal has been to reunite her family, which means finding a way to reconcile with Jack. She's willing to admit past mistakes, but she's beginning to discover that saying "I'm sorry" isn't enough, and that Jack will need to meet her half-way for them to find their way back to each other.

**In *The Attic on Queen Street*, Melanie's newest historical mystery revolves around the infamous Hope Diamond and a Civil War-era ghost. What inspired these choices?**

When I was a young girl, I visited the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, which houses the Hope Diamond. My best friend and fellow bookworm, Suzy Dorf (whose name you might recognize as the nosy reporter in the series), and I had read a book about the legend of the Hope Diamond and were obsessed with it and its history—and I still am! It was a natural choice to be part of yet another hidden treasure for Melanie and Jack to uncover.

Charleston is steeped in Civil War history, and since Melanie's house on Tradd Street was oc-

cupied by the Vanderhorst family before and during the war, it was a natural progression to embroil the family in the city's history as well as continue the saga of Confederacy-era treasure originally introduced in the first book in the series, *The House on Tradd Street*.

**This is the final installment in your Tradd Street series. Have you always known where you would leave the characters? How does it feel to bring the series to a close?**

Considering this was originally contracted to be only a two-book series, I'm thrilled that my readers loved the books and the characters so much that it evolved into seven books! Since I never know the endings of individual books until I'm writing them, it was almost impossible to predict where this series would end. The only sure thing was that I knew I wouldn't leave any loose ends, and that the characters would be in a better place physically and emotionally and could live their happily-ever-afters without my interference.

I've been with these characters since 2008 (the year *The House on Tradd Street* was published), so the characters feel like family! Not having them live in my head will feel like a move to the other side of the world, leaving behind things beloved and familiar. I love that so many of my readers feel the same way.

**What will you miss most about writing the series?**

I think I will miss the continuity of revisiting familiar places and seeing my characters learn and grow. There's something so lovely and familiar about starting on the first page of a new book in a series and having already in place things such as characters, setting, and story arcs. Starting a single-title book is really a lot like stepping into a black hole, with nothing familiar on which to grab hold. Not that writing a series is any easier—it's more like joining a big party where you know no one and then recognizing a friend.

I will also miss my frequent "research" trips to Charleston. I guess this means that I will just need to write another book set in the Holy City so I can feed my habit.

**Which was your favorite Tradd Street book to write? Who is your favorite character in the series?**

I have adored writing each and every book. Since each one allowed me to explore another facet of Charleston's history, they've all been exciting to write. Plus, I love Melanie and Jack and the extended cast of characters that has grown exponentially with each book. Introducing each new character and exploring their relationships with Melanie and the other members of the cast has been nothing short of fun. But if I had to pick a favorite book, it would be *The House on Tradd Street*, the book that started it all and introduced my readers to Melanie and Jack and the residents of Charleston, both past and present.

My favorite character in the series (although there are several close seconds) is Melanie. She came



from such a dysfunctional childhood—abandoned by her mother when she was a young girl and then raised by an alcoholic father—that I admire her for coping in the best way she could. Sure, she has a bit of OCD, but that’s how she taught herself to control her uncontrollable life. What I love most about her is her ability to fail and then try again. And I find her labeling habit rather adorable, a quirk that may have been inspired by the author.

**Are there any interesting historical facts you learned through your research that you had to leave on the cutting-room floor?**

Over the course of the twelve years I spent writing the series, I accumulated more than one hundred books about Charleston—its history, architecture, people, and legends. I wish I could have included everything I read, but then the series would be forty books instead of seven. I don’t recall anything specific, but I will admit to being disappointed that I never found room in the series to more deeply address the Charleston earthquake of 1886. A plot-line in *The Girl on Legare Street* touched on it, but I think the subject lends itself to an entire book. Definitely something to ponder for future books!

**Historic homes and architecture play an important role in the series. How did you become interested in historic homes?**

Although from whose influence this originated is unknown, since I was a young girl I’ve always been drawn to architecturally interesting homes. They didn’t have to be big or opulent, but if they contained fluted columns, carved embellishments, or anything resembling a peaked roof or widow’s walk, I’d ask whoever was driving to pull the car over so I could have a better look. Because most modern homes lack these embellishments, it was the his-



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toric homes that held my interest. Maybe it was because of my fascination with ghosts (sparked by my father telling my brothers and me ghost stories on a regular basis), and even then I knew that my best bet of ever seeing a ghost would be inside a house with creaky stairs and a long history.

When I was twelve years old, my family moved to London, England, where we moved into an Edwardian building built in 1904. The building, Harley House, is actually the setting for my 2020 book, *The Last Night in London*. With its thick mahogany doors, leaded glass windows and transoms, elegant carved fireplace mantels, and creaky floors, I was in my element. Alas, no ghosts (that I could tell).

I have yet to live in a historic home in my adult life, but I will keep looking.

### **What's next for the Trenholms? What's next for you?**

Because it really is hard to say good-bye, I couldn't completely leave the Trenholms behind. I feel I left the adults in a good place at the end of the Tradd Street series, but what about the children? The twins, Sarah and JJ, are only two years old, and Nola is seventeen. I figured there had to be a book (or at least two!) waiting to be written.

In the spring of 2022, the first book in a two-book Tradd Street spin-off series, *The Shop on Royal Street*, will be published. It will be set in New Orleans and take place ten years after *The Attic on Queen Street*. It will feature Nola and a new character, Beau, whom readers will meet in *Attic*. Not to give anything away, but characters from the Tradd Street series will most definitely be making cameo appearances.

And if readers love these books as much as they loved the Tradd Street series, it might turn into more than just two books! (Fingers crossed.)

# Questions for Discussion

1

Melanie's growth is a running theme throughout the book. Do you think she has changed? If so, how? Do you think her growth is related to newfound confidence and trust in herself, and less reliance on Jack?

2

Do you think Jack and Melanie are a good match? What do you think they learned about themselves and about their relationship?

3

Nola has been an important character in the series and has a pivotal role in this book. How do you think she serves as a foil for Melanie? And as a complement to Melanie?

4

This is the final novel in the Tradd Street series but a beginning in many ways for the primary characters. What do you think will happen next for Melanie, Jack, Nola, and the rest of the family?

5

The city of Charleston has played a huge role in this series, with the author using real bits of history, local lore, and real places that ground the series in authenticity. What are your favorite bits of knowledge you've learned about Charleston through the series?

6

Melanie isn't familiar with the actors who have been cast in the film adaptation of Marc Longo's book, though she has her own opinions on who would've been appropriate to play her and Jack. Who would you fancast to play Melanie, Jack, Nola, and the rest of the characters in *The Attic on Queen Street*?



# Take a Virtual Tour of CHARLESTON

Did you know that the houses and some of the locations in all of the Tradd Street books are actually real-life places? Go to [bit.ly/traddstreetmap](http://bit.ly/traddstreetmap) and you'll see a list of places mentioned throughout the series, as well as inspiration for the houses!

Two of the houses are not based on any real-life houses; those are *The Strangers on Montagu Street* and *The Attic on Queen Street*. Looking at the map, where do you think those houses would be located?

And if you've been to Charleston, how many of the real-life places have you been to? Which ones would you like to go to?

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White Point Garden   | <input type="checkbox"/> Charleston Historical Society Archives (Addlestone Library) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterfront Park      | <input type="checkbox"/> The Finicky Filly, 303 King Street                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Dog Deli       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ashley Hall   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Husk                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Gibbes Museum of Art  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Grocery          | <input type="checkbox"/> Nathaniel Russell House                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Queen Street Grocery | <input type="checkbox"/> Charleston Library Society, 164 King Street                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gaulart & Malicet    | <input type="checkbox"/> College of Charleston, 66 George Street (Randolph Hall)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buxton Books & Tours | <input type="checkbox"/> Berlin's  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charleston Museum    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aiken-Rhett House    |  |

# *Check out the entire* **TRADD STREET SERIES**



*And get ready to explore more  
adventures, starring Nola!*

