



A conversation with Karen White, author of *The Attic on Queen Street*, on the end of the Tradd Street series

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 halfway 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 the choice?

When I was a young girl, I visited the 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 all 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 occupied 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 that this was originally only contracted to be 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 write 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 where they 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 these 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 all 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?

Besides the characters, 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 series book and have things already in place 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 in 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

have grown exponentially with each book. Introducing each new character and exploring their relationship with Melanie and the other members of the cast has been nothing short of fun. But if I had to pick a favorite, 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 the best way she could. Sure, she’s a bit 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 that you learned in 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 have 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 it 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 historic homes that held my interest. Maybe it was due to my fascination with ghosts (sparked by my father telling my brothers and me ghost stories on a regular basis), but 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 goodbye, 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).