

FEBRUARY MUSINGS

SHARON VIRTS



When Winter Refuses to Behave

**From Volcanoes to Climate Change: Snow falls where it shouldn't—
and history reminds us it's happened before**

Winter has been unforgiving this year. Blizzards. Extreme cold. Arctic blasts. Ice that just won't melt. Snow in places unaccustomed to it. Florida, of all places, waking to frozen iguanas and frosty landscapes.

Whatever our theories about weather, moments like these have a way of reminding us how thin our assumptions really are. We tend to think of climate as something in the background— stable enough to plan around, dependable enough to ignore.

History suggests otherwise.

In April of 1815, Mount Tambora erupted on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa with a force so immense it altered global weather patterns. Ash and aerosols circled the earth, dimming sunlight and cooling temperatures far from the eruption itself and for

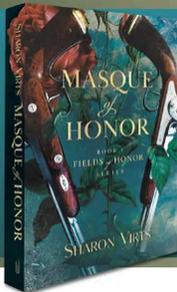
far longer than anyone ever anticipated. The following year became known as *the Year Without a Summer*.

In 1816, snow fell in June across New England. Frost destroyed crops in July. Harvests failed across Europe. Food shortages, migrations, and unrest followed. None of this was caused by human industry or policy. It was the consequence of a single, distant natural event—unseen by most yet felt by millions.

In Virginia, even Thomas Jefferson meticulously noting seasonal conditions in his Monticello farm books, recorded a spring and summer that defied every expectation. By May 1816, average temperatures were well below normal, frequent frosts had already damaged fruit and young crops, and Jefferson forewarned that *“the crops of wheat and tobacco will be poor.”*

The bizarre weather did not relent with the calendar. Across the eastern United States, frost lingered deep into the late summer. Frost was reported in Virginia in late August, and rivers and lakes remained ice-cold as far north as northwestern Pennsylvania long after summer had traditionally begun... [READ MORE](#)

“Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get.”
~ Mark Twain



Pre-Order
Masque of Honor Today!

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From My Writing Desk

As this winter drags on—its persistence, its disruptions, its chill—I’ve found myself returning to 1816, the so-called Year Without a Summer. This is the atmosphere in

which ***Masque of Honor*** is set: a period when people could not rely on the calendar, the harvest, or even the coming of spring to behave as expected.

When we read or write about the early nineteenth century, it's tempting to only focus on manners, politics, or social codes. But beneath all of that was an ever-present awareness that nature could intrude without warning. Plans were provisional.

Fortunes fragile. Honor, in many ways, was shaped by how one responded when circumstances refused to cooperate. Even the outcome of a duel can be affected by the weather as you will see when Armistead and Jack met on the field of honor in early February 1819.

Like the weather of 1816, the characters in ***Masque of Honor***—and the real people who inspired them—refuse to behave predictably. They respond to pressure, disruption, and uncertainty in human ways—sometimes nobly, sometimes not. That friction, between intention and reality, is what drew me to their story in the first place.

As ***Masque of Honor*** returns on March 24, I've been struck by how closely that world echoes moments like this winter. The past was not quieter or easier. It was simply less insulated.

Check Out the Masque of Honor Pre-Order Goodies Here!





WMAR Midday Maryland Monthly Segment

Between the Lines

On February 19, I will debut my newest venture into TELEVISION on Baltimore's WMAR Midday Maryland! Each month, I will discuss with Elsa the behind-the-scenes world of writing, publishing, and all that goes into writing best-selling books. If you can't catch me live, I will post links on my social media and on my website so you can follow along from wherever you are!



HGTV House Hunters

in Paradise

Dogs Go Coastal in Grassy Key Florida with Scott & Sharon

On Saturday Feb 14, 2026 at 10:30pm ET/PT, my husband's and my search for our Florida winter home will be featured on HDTV. It is a long story as to how this came about, but if you love dogs and houses as much as we do (and want to get an inside look at some of the properties in our search) tune in Saturday night (or record it to watch later). I have no idea how the episode turned out (the network has not shared it with us). All I know is that I was nearly forty pounds heavier (yikes!) during filming. But it was a fun experience and I hope you all enjoy watching!



The worlds of my novels are rooted in moments when history had not yet made up its mind. In this monthly column, I explore the real events and figures who lived in that uncertainty, and whose choices still echo through my stories.

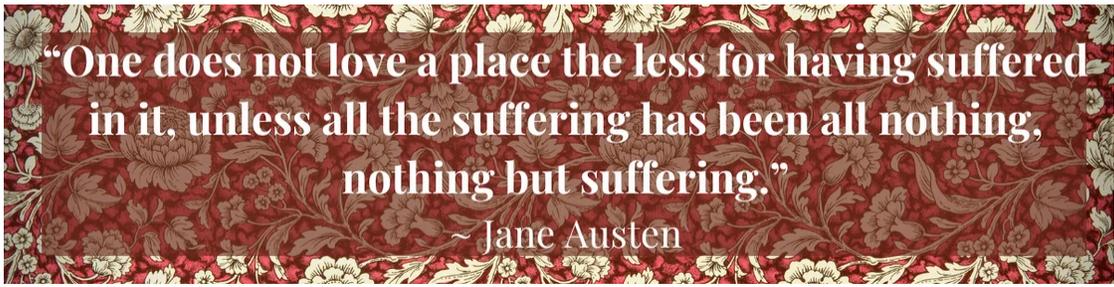
Love, Separation, and Survival in the Early 19th Century

Valentines Written in Ink, Faith, and Endurance

In the early nineteenth century, love was shaped as much by circumstance as by feeling. Distance, weather, illness, and war were not occasional interruptions to daily life—they were its conditions.



Between 1812 and 1830, Americans lived through overlapping disruptions. The War of 1812 separated couples and scattered families, while travel remained slow and uncertain. In rural communities—where farms sat far apart and winters could cut people off for weeks—“being together” often depended on weather as much as intention. Add unpredictable sickness (a “terrible sickness in 1815, and a “plague” in 1826) and the volatile weather, and you get a period in which affection was frequently practiced at a distance... [READ MORE](#)



Worth Keeping: Holding on to fragments from the Past



A Clipping Found:

This newspaper clipping was among my mother's things. I have walked past this building countless times and had no idea that it was originally a bank--most likely the bank that my characters used in real-life in the 1820s.



Be my Valentine: It is believed that in the late 3rd century (c. 269), the Christian martyr Valentine was executed in Rome on February 14th. Valentine was canonized after his death, and since the late 400s February 14 has been recognized as the Feast of St. Valentine. The story of his miracles has changed over the years, but the most popular and best known in the United States tells of St. Valentine healing his

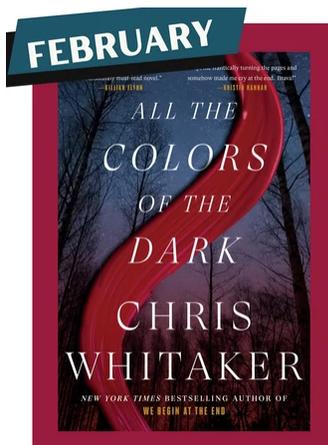
Roman jailor's daughter who was blind. Upon the day of his execution, he wrote her a letter of love, reportedly signed "Your Valentine".



#ReadWithSharon

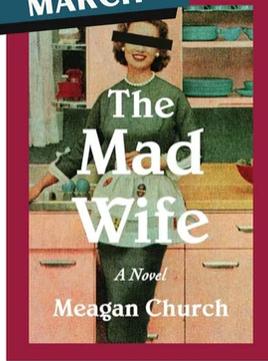
Historical Fiction Book Club

Get ready for an awesome 2026 line up in my [#ReadWithSharon](#) book club! Our next meeting is Thursday, February 26th at 7pm eastern, we will discuss, *All the Colors of the Dark* by Chris Whittaker. This book is one of the best reads I have had in a very long time. Though nearly 600 pages, I read it cover-to-cover in a single day--it was that good!

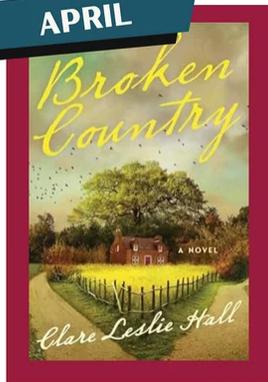


The #ReadWithSharon book club only reads current release historical fiction, and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the pick. Most months, the author joins us via zoom and you are able to ask questions during the discussion. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm EST. You can sign up for free [HERE](#)

MARCH



APRIL



A Question to Leave You With

As we examine how relationships endured during the winter months two hundred years ago, how do YOU maintain connection with loved ones when today's world slows or shuts down?

Click here to send me your thoughts.
I'll share them in next month's newsletter.

“In February there is everything to hope for and nothing to regret.”

— Patience Strong

P.S. I wrote this from our winter home in Florida where my only (real) obligation (beyond walking the dogs) is to *write!*



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