



SHARON VIRTIS

Winter Musings



A Time for Reflection

Punxsutawney Phil predicted we'll have six more weeks of Winter, and so far he's been spot on! I'm just hoping that if March comes in like a Lion, it goes out like a Lamb! And while many of us groan about this time of year (me included), it's a great time for planning and resetting priorities.

Like using this time to get caught up on those indoor projects or tasks we ignore when the weather is warm. It's also the perfect time for planning and laying the groundwork for a new year and a new self. It's a time for introspection. There's nothing quite like gazing at the winter stars, landscapes covered in a blanket of pure, white snow, or the way the sun reflects off of icicles from an intense blue sky. And celebrations! In Winter, not only do we have the Christmas holidays, we have Ground Hog Day, Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday, Valentine's Day, President's Day, Black History Month, Women's History Month, and St. Patrick's Day; not to mention the birthdays of Martin Luther King, Washington, Lincoln, and Frederick Douglas, just to name a few.

Winter is a great time to immerse yourself in books – dive into the ones you've had in your "to be read" pile or revisit those classics that you love. Find a new author to

follow, join a book club, or try your hand at becoming an author yourself! Or you could find a new hobby, passion or idea as you reflect on the things that bring you happiness. Perhaps you'll find you are good at baking, develop an interest in gardening, or open a new business you've dreamed of starting.

In a few weeks, it will be time to put away the cold-weather gear, start our spring-cleaning, and watch as Spring washes away the lingering Winter. I hope you find time to reflect and enjoy what's left of the winter season in your own way.

Mara



Masque of Honor is a Best Seller!



Since its release, *Masque of Honor* made the **Best Sellers list in Fiction and Literature** on Amazon! It's also claimed **#1 New Release** on Amazon Kindle in:

- **Political Fiction**
- **Historical Romance**
- **Biographical Fiction**

I couldn't be more thrilled! If you haven't bought your copy, the price on the hardcover has just dropped about 30% on Amazon. Grab yours now!

[Buy Now](#)

RECENT INTERVIEWS

It has been a whirlwind launching my first novel, *Masque of Honor*. My plans to have celebratory parties and book signing events had to change due to the pandemic, but that hasn't stopped me! From posts on social media and interviews with book critics, podcast hosts, and local media, I have had a blast sharing the story of Jack McCarty and Armistead Mason as well as sharing my own journey as I

wrote *Masque of Honor*. Check out my interviews with [The Bookreporter](#), [The Inside Flap](#), and [Loudoun Now](#).



WINTER READING

Winter is a fantastic time to read those books you've been meaning to start (or to finish!), revisit old favorites, or discover the classics. It's also a great time to read stories that feature Winter. Check out these suggestions from [RealSimple](#) as well as my list below to explore literature that features the coldest season. So grab your favorite warm beverage, settle in your favorite chair by the fire, and lose yourself in a winter classic.

Poetry

[*Poem 311: It Sifts from Leaden Sieves*](#) by Emily Dickinson (c. 1862): Reflections on a snow-covered world

Biography, Nonfiction

The Worst Journey in the World by Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1922)

Memoirs from one of the survivors of Scott's doomed 1910 Antarctic expedition

Short story

Snow by Ted Hughes (c. 1956)

Story of a man stumbling through a landscape of snow after a plane crash

Autobiography

Walden by Henry David Thoreau (1854): Memoir with vivid descriptions of the season in the chapter "The Pond in Winter"

Fiction

Native Son by Richard Wright (1940)

Vivid descriptions of a hunted man in the cold

Winter's Bone by Daniel Woodrell (2007) Paints a frigid picture of the crime-riddle Ozarks.

Science Fiction

The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin: Set on a planet called Winter, what if there were no summer?

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep."

—Robert Frost *On a Snowy Evening*

THE LONG WINTER OF 1816



In April of 1815, Mount Tambora erupted on the island of Sumbawa, near Bali, Indonesia. The effects of the massive amounts of volcanic ash carried around the world by the jet stream would be catastrophic. In 1816, the "clouds of smoke" trapped in the atmosphere essentially blocked the Sun – and wreaked havoc on the

agricultural industry in many parts of the world. When the Sun did appear, it shed little warmth and appeared red. In the United States, New England was hit particularly hard with wild weather and extensive crop damage. The unusual cold is blamed for food prices increasing, famines, riots and disease epidemics around the world during that time. It also served as a backdrop to the political frustration seen in *Masque of Honor*.

Notable weather events of “The Year Without a Summer”:

MAY

Frosts kill crops in Northeast US

JUNE

Heavy snow fell in New York and Maine on June 6

Extensive crop damage was reported after five nights of frost in New Jersey

A Vermont farmer froze to death in his fields on June 17

JULY

Lakes and rivers were still covered in ice as far south as Pennsylvania

Heavy frosts and ice storms were common

A town well in Lyman, New Hampshire was frozen over from July 4-25

AUGUST

A 120-day drought began that created catastrophic forest fires

Sheep froze to death in their pastures

The eruption of Tambora was the deadliest in human history – and was so powerful it changed the world’s climate and dropped global temperatures by as much as 3 degrees.

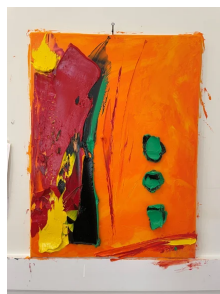
Sharon's Southern Cooking Series

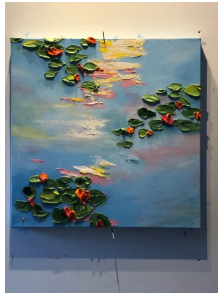
There is nothing like Shepherd's Pie in the dead of winter. I learned to make it "the proper way" thirty-five years ago when I lived in England for a short time. While I still remember how make it the [traditional way](#), today I opt for a [Keto friendly version](#). I think you'll find it just as amazing!



Rotating Crops

One of the best things to do when you are in a creative funk is to try your hand at something else. No better way to jumpstart your motivation and get those creative juices flowing! Just after New Years, I was in an abysmal funk. I couldn't write a thing! So I picked up the palette knife, hit the studio, and started painting again. And in no time, I was lifted from whatever was holding me back. Try it! You'll be amazed at how quickly you regain your mojo!





Author Spotlight: Maya Angelou (April 4, 1928 - May 28, 2014)

So often great artists and authors are overlooked when we celebrate Women's History and Black History. One of the greatest poets of our times – in my opinion – is the wonderful Maya Angelou.

She is one of the world's most influential black women authors with international acclaim for her pivotal and unique writing. She published the honest and heroic memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, in 1970 – defying cultural taboos and writing about having been sexually abused as a child. It was controversial and resulted in the book being banned by many schools but went on to become a world-wide bestseller.

Until her death in 2014, Angelou published a total of 36 published books – more than 30 of which are bestselling titles. Yet she was not only known for her writing – Angelou was a brilliant Tony and Emmy nominated actor, civil rights activist, university professor and a renowned cook.

Her legacy lives on through the Dr. Maya Angelou Foundation which aims to improve the quality of life for all human beings and support educational excellence and healthcare equity initiatives for all.

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”
– *Maya Angelou*

The Lady Wears White

We've had quite a few snows at Selma this winter and the Grand Lady looks especially regal in her cloak of white.



Don't forget to check my [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) page for

details on my #ReadWithSharon reading selections.

My book club members recently read and discussed *The Night Watchman* by Louise Erdrich and *The Invisible Life of Addie La Rue* by V.E. Schwab. In March, we are reading *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah. Become a member! It's free (and fun!). Sign-up [HERE!](#)





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