THE BRICK HOUSE CAFE



TITLE: The Brick House Cafe

SERIES: Haven Ridge (prequel novella)

AUTHOR: Carla Laureano

GENRE: Contemporary Romance

(Clean & Wholesome)

ISBN: 978-1-960079-01-5 (softcover)

978-1-960079-00-8 (e-book)\*

FORMATS: Trade paperback, e-book

TRIM: 5.5” x 8.5”

PUBLISHER: Laureano Creative Media LLC

PUB DATE: February 23, 2023

\*E-book is only available to subscribers at carlalaureano.com

BACK COVER COPY:

**Welcome to Haven Ridge, Colorado—a fading town that might just have a little magic left to offer the world...**

Travel writer Mallory Adams accepted her latest assignment on the mountain towns of southern Colorado in the hopes it would offer an escape from all the recent failures in her life—quitting her history graduate studies, losing her apartment, being dumped by her boyfriend for another woman. So when a series of strange and unexplainable mishaps lands her in the dying town of Haven Ridge, it feels more like a punishment than an opportunity.

Thomas Rivas returned home after a crushing personal tragedy to find Haven Ridge much diminished in his absence. But when a plucky and beautiful writer blows into his family’s cafe—something that his mystic-minded Granny Pearl claims is no accident—it seems like the chance the town has been looking for to get back on the map. Quickly, Thomas makes it his mission to make Mallory fall in love with Haven Ridge and its fascinating, forgotten past—he just doesn’t expect to lose his own heart in the bargain.

With its quirky cast of characters, sweet love-after-loss romance, and small-town mystery, *The Brick House Cafe* reminds us that it’s never too late to believe in the magic of second chances.

**Q&A WITH CARLA LAUREANO**

(Select as many or as few as you like.)

*(Use Control+F (Windows) or Command+F (Mac) to see a full list of questions in the navigation pane)*

*QUESTIONS ABOUT CARLA*

Who or what inspired you to be an author?

I honestly can’t remember when I decided I wanted to write books. I was an early reader (according to my parents, I was reading at three and rather proficient by the time I started kindergarten) so I think the love of books was just kind of intrinsic to my personality. Making up stories was a natural pastime, and I’m sure the encouragement I got from my parents and teachers helped, particularly my eighth-grade English teacher, who helped me get a short story published in a small fiction newsletter. (She and I are still in contact—how fun is that?) By the time I was in high school, I knew there was nothing else I’d rather do with my life. It just took another twenty years or so to make that a reality!

What’s your writing process? How has it changed over time as you come up on ten years of publishing?

I used to be a dyed-in-the-wool pantser who just followed wherever the story took me and then revised in successive drafts, sometimes as many as nine or ten. It worked for me (my debut novel won an RWA RITA® Award!) but I soon learned that it took much too long and was far too unstructured when writing under contract with deadlines. Over time, I’ve turned myself into a hard-core plotter, using questionnaires and plotting tools that combine the best of my favorite plotting methods in one process. By the time I start writing, I know exactly where the story is going to go, and it normally takes me a first draft and one revision to get the book ready to go to my beta readers. After they’ve had a chance to read and comment, I do another draft to incorporate their suggestions or fix mistakes they’ve caught, and then it goes to my editor.

How long does it take you to write a novel?

It really depends on the book and the genre. For contemporary romance, since the world-building and research are less involved than something like fantasy or science fiction, I can have the book done from premise to written (not counting professional editing) in about eight weeks. That doesn’t count a few weeks here and there to incorporate editorial comments.

Compare that to a fantasy series I’ve been tinkering with for the last two years, and you can see why I publish way more romances than I do fantasy!

What’s a typical day like for you?

I get up relatively early (about 6:30) to get ready and make my younger son’s lunch. I then spend half an hour trying to get him out of bed once he’s ignored three alarms (teenagers!) and drive him to school, which is across town. By the time I get home, it’s closing on nine, so I eat breakfast and do my daily devotions, then get started on writing or editing my current WIP. At noon I take a break to work out (I alternate daily between Pilates and a walk around the neighborhood when the weather is nice or some time on the rowing machine when it’s not) and then eat lunch. I’m back to work at 1:15, where I work on marketing, book production tasks, or client work until it’s time to go pick up aforementioned son at school. After we get home, I try to squeeze in an hour or two of work on random tasks that don’t fit into the other categories, like returning emails, accounting, invoicing, etc. And then I move on to personal stuff like making dinner and spending time with my family! If I’m lucky, I might even be able to squeeze in an hour of reading before bed. My schedule is pretty packed, but because I’m strategic about how I approach my tasks, I can get a lot done each day.

You run an editing and coaching business on top of your writing. How do you manage your workload, especially with book deadlines?

I schedule every hour of my day. I’ve always been a list-maker and years of project management in my previous life as a corporate marketer gave me a good foundation for breaking down tasks (like writing and publishing a book) into achievable chunks under a deadline.

What really turned things around for me was a book I stumbled across thanks to a Facebook ad, called *Winning the Week* by Demir and Carey Bentley. Unlike other productivity gurus, they acknowledge that there will always be too much work to accomplish in any given time period, whether it’s a day or the year. The key to success is to determine what tasks will get move you forward to achieve your goals and prioritize those, while scheduling time for the urgent things that have to be done to keep your business and life moving forward. For me, those two priorities are writing good books and delivering value to my editing and coaching clients. So in the morning, the first thing I work on when sitting down at my desk is my word count, and in the afternoon, it’s one of my current client projects, whether that’s editing a novel or coaching an author through the publication process.

At the end of every week, I take an hour to plan out and schedule my next two weeks based on deadlines and current/upcoming projects. Knowing what I’m supposed to be doing every hour of the day cuts down on all that wasted time trying to figure out to tackle next! I thought I would find it stifling, but surprisingly it’s been very freeing to my creativity. I guess it’s a bit like wearing a “uniform” so you don’t have to waste precious decision-making power on choosing your wardrobe.

What comes first when you start a book: plot or characters?

It’s different with every single book! In the case of the Haven Ridge series, I actually started out with all the book titles in the series and then created the characters from there. But in almost every case, the characters come before the plot. I decide who they are, what they want, and who their love interests will be, and then I develop the plot points that will make them grow most as people (and pose as many challenges to reaching their goals as possible!). That probably sounds really unromantic, especially to writers who like to discover their characters as they go, but I definitely “construct” my books rather than let them happen on their own. The joy and the artistry come in on the detail level as they come to life on the page. I feel like having the framework of the story already laid out gives me the freedom to focus on character development and emotion, whether it be humor or drama.

What’s your favorite thing about writing?

I love that first delicious inspiration of an idea, when all the various possibilities are spread out before me. I know the hard work comes after, so it’s really fun to just daydream and consider all the different ways the story could unfold.

What’s the hardest thing about writing for you?

I always say whatever aspect I’m currently in, but right now I think it’s the final editing passes. I like the first draft, I like the first edit, and I don’t even mind incorporating the changes from my beta readers! But by the time I get to the final draft from my editor(s), I’ve read the book so many times I just want to move on to the next one. Persevering to get it that last 10% toward readiness is always a challenge. (Though, when I think about it, that’s *always* my challenge… even with home improvement projects, I tend to get distracted and bored before I put the very final finishing touches on them!)

What advice do you have for someone who wants to write a novel for publication?

My best advice is to write the novel, put it in the drawer, and then write another one. Maybe even another one after that. Novel-writing is a skill—a teachable, achievable skill—but one that takes practice to master. There’s such an emphasis on the business aspect of selling a novel, especially with self-publishing being such a viable option, that new writers are often worried about covers and readers and advertising before they ever have a finished draft! Consequently, I think they’re missing out on the apprenticeship period we pre-internet old timers got: writing books, sending out physical copies to agents and editors, and working on new projects while we were waiting for responses by snail mail! I’m grateful for the modern convenience of email (and even more grateful for tools and platforms that allow us to publish ourselves, if desired) but there’s something to be said for that slow development of skill from necessity. We couldn’t rush things because we didn’t have the option. Give yourself time to become really, really good at writing novels before you start worrying about the rest.

What’s the best writing advice you’ve ever been given?

I was considering a creative writing minor in college, but my faculty advisor dissuaded me from it. He told me that I already had a distinct, recognizable voice, and my time was better spent learning to hone that through reading good books and writing new works than in learning how to write like someone else. While I do think creative writing classes can be useful to teach the mechanics of novel-writing (and grammar! don’t forget grammar!), I definitely appreciate the reminder to hone my own unique voice rather than waste time wishing I wrote like someone else!

Have you ever traveled as research for your book?

Yes! We actually took a family trip to Salida, Colorado a little over a year ago as research for this book series… and a few years ago I seized the opportunity to meet my husband in London (he was in Europe on business) so I could do some research for my novella *Starstruck*. To be honest, I would have gone anyway, but being able to do double-duty for research just made it better.

What’s your favorite writing snack or drink?

I try not to snack too much while I’m writing, but I typically have a cup of tea at hand for most of the day.

How do you celebrate when you finish your book?

Oh, I really should do that, shouldn’t I! I’m very task-oriented in my daily life, so I usually forget to celebrate the completion of a first draft or publication day. I need to schedule those special treats into my calendar!

Do you have a writing mascot?

Our eight-year-old cat, Willow. She’s a blue-cream dilute tortie with every bit of personality you would expect from that breed. She’s starting to get older, so she spends the morning sleeping in one of the kids’ rooms, but she’ll come visit me in my office each afternoon to walk across my keyboard, knock things off my desk, or wiggle her way into my lap. Sometimes I end up typing with her draped across one arm.

Your past couple of books have been clean contemporary romance instead of Christian. Why did you decide to make the change?

I’ve always been on the border of clean and Christian; because my first ten books were with Christian publishers, I naturally chose to write stories that had a clear, if light, spiritual message. But not all the ideas I’ve had neatly fit into the Christian fiction mold, and at times I’ve wanted to tackle issues or write stories that didn’t lend themselves to an overt Christian message. I’m writing those stories now. That doesn’t mean I won’t continue to write Christian fiction in the future, but for now I’m focusing on stories with a positive message to reach readers who might bypass Christian fiction strictly because of the label.

Up until now, you’ve published your books with a traditional publisher. Why did you decide to indie-publish this time around?

I don’t think there’s anyone in the world that can’t say the last three years have been difficult, but for me, the last decade has been especially difficult because of health problems and life changes and family challenges. It’s been a constant state of feast or famine: I’ve felt like either I have time to write a lot more books than my publishers can/want to publish or I’m struggling to even meet the deadline for one. It made sense to pursue indie publishing for the flexibility. And I really love the business aspects of publishing, so it’s fun to take on everything from book design to marketing plans myself.

*QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BRICK HOUSE CAFE AND THE HAVEN RIDGE SERIES*

What is the Haven Ridge series about?

The Haven Ridge series is a small-town romance series with a magical realism twist: the town has gotten away from its founding mission to provide a haven for people who needed a fresh start and a community, and as such, it’s slowly dwindling away. Each book shows how the town draws people together and how the people in it contribute to the new life of the town!

What is *The Brick House Cafe* about?

Travel writer Mallory Adams accepted her latest assignment on the mountain towns of southern Colorado in the hopes it would offer an escape from all the recent failures in her life—quitting her history graduate studies, losing her apartment, being dumped by her boyfriend for another woman. So when a series of strange and unexplainable mishaps lands her in the dying town of Haven Ridge, it feels more like a punishment than an opportunity.

Thomas Rivas returned home after a crushing personal tragedy to find Haven Ridge much diminished in his absence. But when a plucky and beautiful writer blows into his family’s cafe—something that his mystic-minded Granny Pearl claims is no accident—it seems like the chance the town has been looking for to get back on the map. Quickly, Thomas makes it his mission to make Mallory fall in love with Haven Ridge and its fascinating, forgotten past—he just doesn’t expect to lose his own heart in the bargain.

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The characters in *The Brick House Cafe* have a lot of tragedy in their pasts. Why did you choose those to write about?

The older I get, the more I’ve come to realize that it’s impossible to live on this earth without being touched by some sort of tragedy, and so many of us read to find hope in our own circumstances. I like to write characters who have been bruised by their trials, but never give up hope … and ultimately find love and community as a reward for their perseverance. It’s easy to think that we’ve missed our chance of happiness or that past bad decisions mean we don’t deserve it in the first place. I want to encourage readers by showing how love and life after tragedy might look.

What was the easiest scene in *The Brick House Cafe* to write?

I had a blast writing the opening scene where Mallory is being sent in circles by a GPS gone haywire. Something similar happened to me where my phone app malfunctioned and at the last minute sent me to a totally different address, even though it still showed the right destination. Clearly it was a mistake, but that inspired the idea that a greater power might use technology to get Gemma to a town that was definitely not her destination!

What was the hardest part of writing *The Brick House Cafe*?

I had two goals with this story: to introduce the town that plays such a large part in the rest of the books and to create a full and satisfying love story! That’s not so easy to do in a novella that’s less than half the length of my regular ones, so I had to find a way to pack a lot of emotion in a short period of time. It helped that Mallory and Thomas have so much in common; it made sense that there would be not only sparks but a real sense of connection between them because they understood each other so well.

What is your favorite scene in *The Brick House Cafe*?

Any of Granny Pearl’s scenes with Thomas! She was a kick to write—a spunky old lady with a quirky fashion sense and the absolute belief that the town had a mind of its own. Every time she showed up on the page, she stole the show.

Which character was the hardest to write?

Thomas wasn’t all that easy—he comes off as gruff and abrupt, but he’s really just shy and determined to deny his instant attraction to Mallory. When he gets to know someone, he opens up, but it was tricky to balance those two sides of his personality.

Which character was the easiest to write?

Granny Pearl! She was the first character who was fully formed and she serves as both comic relief and the Greek chorus, telling us what we need to know about the town.

Did anything surprise you as you were writing the book?

When I started out, I had in mind a light and fluffy, cute and cheerful sort of story. But once I started writing them, it turned out that Stephen and Mallory’s pasts were sadder than I’d initially even intended. You’d think I’d realize by now that these are just the types of characters I write. Once I saw the way it was going, I really leaned into it and realized this was *exactly* the story (and characters) I needed to introduce Haven Ridge.

Where did you get the idea for this book?

I actually wrote the first full length, *The Broken Hearts Bakery*, first, intending it to be the prequel novella for this series. But it took on a life of its own and quickly spiraled out of control into a full-length novel! That meant I had to come up with another idea for a prequel … and the Brick House Cafe had already become an important location in the series. That gave me the opportunity to really expand on the history and the magic that is only hinted at in the later books. It’s a totally backwards way of doing things, but it worked out well because I could go back and forth between both manuscripts. You don’t have to read *The Brick House Cafe* first, but it gives the later books a lot more background depth.

What kind of research did you do to write this series?

The majority of my research involved the setting: Haven Ridge is set rather vaguely in a real area of southern Colorado, between Salida and Buena Vista. It has a colorful and interesting history, so coming up with a founding story that was plausible and fit with the actual history of the area was my first priority. From there, it was getting the architectural and topographical details right. The rest were just little details about the academic worlds that both Thomas and Mallory come from, though I admit that I did twist a few things to my own purposes.

Why did you choose to make your characters academics?

For one thing, I was one of the only people who graduated from my college honors program that didn’t go into the academic world in some way (or at least go on to get an advanced degree). I always loved school, and I have somewhat regretted that I didn’t go on to get a master’s degree or Ph.D. (At different times, I had the opportunity to do an MA/Ph.D. in English literature and then later, a Master’s Degree in Public Policy. At one time I was even looking at a sociology program.) So I guess this was my way of living vicariously. Or maybe sharing my disappointment with my characters, since when the book opens, they’ve both left their academic dreams behind.

Most of your books are set in Colorado. Is Haven Ridge based on a real place, or is it made up?

Haven Ridge is completely made up, but it’s heavily based on Salida, Colorado, which is in the same area. Given the fact that they were founded about the same time and sit in the same general location, it made sense to model the architecture and hot springs on the real place.

What can we expect next from you?

The Haven Ridge series is planned for at least four full-length books, not including this prequel novella. *The Broken Hearts Bakery* will be available shortly after *The Brick House Café*, and then the second full-length in the series will be releasing in fall of 2023.

What can you tell us about the next book in the Haven Ridge series?

The next book in the series is *The Broken Hearts Bakery*, and it tells a story that was alluded to in the novella—a girl who was shunned by the town after her mother divorced the town doctor. But she will return to find that things have been changing for the better… and that maybe stepping back into the past is just what’s needed to heal her broken heart.

LIGHTNING Q&A WITH CARLA LAUREANO

(Select as many or as few as you like.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Texting or talking?** | Texting |
| **Letter or email?** | Email |
| **Favorite city besides the one you live in?** | London |
| **Favorite holiday?** | Christmas |
| **Favorite season?** | Autumn |
| **Favorite day of the week?** | Friday |
| **Dogs or cats?** | Cats, because I’m allergic to dogs |
| **Climb a mountain or jump from a plane?** | Climb a mountain |
| **Favorite junk food?** | Any Starbucks drink |
| **Guilty pleasure food?** | Laffy Taffy |
| **Coffee, tea, or hot chocolate?** | Tea |
| **Cake or pie?** | Pie |
| **Favorite ice cream flavor?** | Coffee Heath Bar or Butter Pecan |
| **Favorite muffin flavor?** | Blueberry |
| **What type of milk do you put in your cereal?** | Whole cow’s milk from our local dairy (though I don’t eat cereal) |
| **What’s something you could eat for a week straight?** | Tacos |
| **Dark chocolate or milk Chocolate?** | ALL THE CHOCOLATE |
| **Polka dots or stripes?** | Stripes |
| **Paper or electronic calendar?** | Electronic |
| **Movie or book?** | Book |
| **First romance novel?** | *The Conquest* by Jude Devereaux |
| **Favorite author?** | Naomi Novik |
| **Favorite Harry Potter character?** | Luna Lovegood |
| **Favorite Star Wars character?** | Han Solo |
| **First concert?** | Prayer Chain (Christian rock) |
| **First CD/album?** | *Tell It To My Heart,* Taylor Dayne |
| **Lipstick or Chapstick?** | Chapstick |
| **Jeans or skirts?** | Jeans |
| **Early riser or night owl?** | Early riser by necessity, night owl by nature |
| **East coast or west coast?** | West coast |
| **Europe or Asia?** | Both |
| **Walk or bike?** | Walk |
| **Plane or train?** | Plane in the US, train in Europe |
| **Campground or vacation rental?** | Vacation rental |
| **Mountains or beach?** | Beach…no, mountains…no, beach! I’d take either. |
| **Bowling or miniature golf?** | Bowling |
| **Museum or concert?** | Museum |
| **Theater or ballet?** | Ballet |