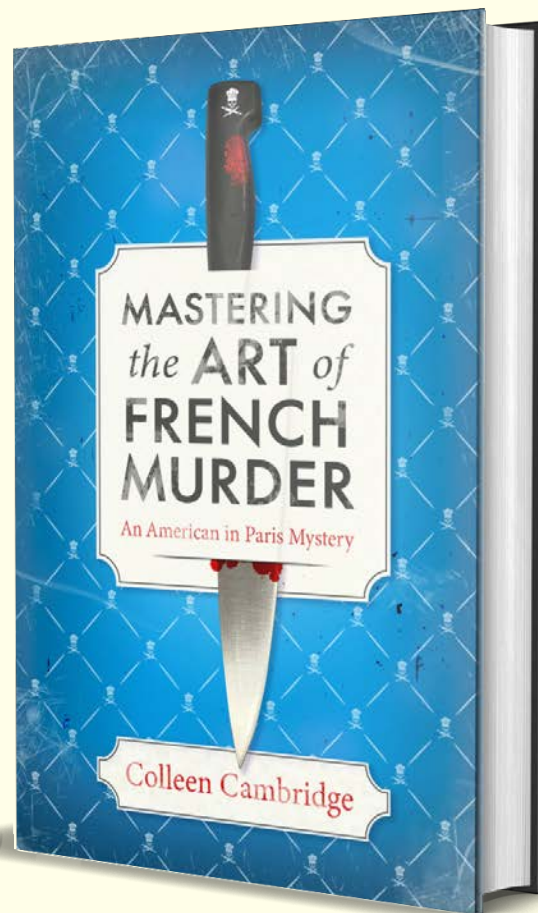


MASTERING
the ART of
FRENCH
MURDER



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A CONVERSATION *with* COLLEEN CAMBRIDGE, AUTHOR of *MASTERING the ART of FRENCH MURDER*

Why did you decide to write a mystery featuring Julia Child?

Well, first of all...Julia Child! She's an amazing person to write about. Her story is so exciting and fun and energetic...and groundbreaking. She's an American icon (though outside of America, she's not nearly as lauded or even well-known) with a fascinating life. Aside from that, the mother and father of a very close family friend knew Julia personally because they were also diplomats in France and Germany, so I knew I could always get a personal perspective on her from someone who'd been her friend. (They actually received the infamous in-the-bathtub Valentine Julia and Paul sent one year!)



But also, the setting of Paris in the 1950s and cooking and murder mysteries? All of those things are topics of interest to me personally, so it was a natural fit for me to say: "I'm absolutely going to do this!" And what fun it was, truly, from the very beginning of my research to writing the final scene. I enjoyed every minute of it.

Can you share with us some of Tabitha's backstory? For instance, why did you decide to make her a "Rosie the Riveter" who had worked at a bomber plant before moving to France? Why was it important for her to have come from Detroit?

Tabitha Knight is the daughter of a Parisian woman and an American man who met during WWI. They married and moved back to a suburb of Detroit, and Tabitha's maternal grandmother (obviously also Parisian) came with them, leaving her husband behind. (It was a mutual and friendly separation between the grandparents.) So, Tabitha is half French and fluent in the language, which gives her an edge as an American ex-pat in Paris.

As for why I decided Tabitha was a Rosie the Riveter...for several reasons, this really seemed to fit. She's an active person with a mechanical and engineering mind, and as we know, many women worked "men's jobs" during WWII. Now that she is no longer "needed," she feels at a loss—something many of us have experienced in our lifetimes. A "Rosie" is the most familiar of the types of jobs women did during the war, and I chose to go with that because, one, my Great-Aunt Rosie was a real Rosie the Riveter; and, two, she worked at the Willow Run Bomber plant (which is where Tabitha worked). I grew up within two miles of Willow Run airport, and so the history has been part of my life forever. It felt like a fun, personal touch for Tabitha and me to have this connection. Plus, the fact that Tabitha is from a suburb of Detroit actually helps her to put the pieces of the mystery together...

How much did you know about French culinary arts before writing *MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH MURDER*? What kind of research did you have to do for this book? Do you have a personal favorite recipe from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*?

I'm an experienced cook, but I confess, I hadn't really spent any time looking at *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* before I started this research. But of course, once I dived in, I found her work not only easy to follow but very fascinating. There are so many basic cooking instructions there that can be used for anyone who likes to cook—even if they aren't strictly making French food.

As for a favorite recipe: well, I do like the way she describes how to make omelets. I'm a vegetarian, so many of her recipes aren't ones I would normally make, but I have cooked a non-meat version of her *Boeuf Bourguignon*. I've also made many of her sauces, and several of her vegetable and potato dishes. I considered making Tabitha a vegetarian in the book, just because I thought it would be entertaining and funny to have that sort of conflict between her and Julia ("What do you mean, you won't eat *Madame Poulet*?"), but I decided that might not be as fun as it seemed at first. After all, I want Tabitha to learn to cook!

WWII had only ended a few years before the setting of *MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH MURDER*. Based on your research, can you describe for us what the atmosphere of late 1940s/early 1950s Paris was like?

The City of Light was in "rebuild" mode; just after Tabitha arrives, the famed lights that gave the city her name were lit for the first time since the German Occupation. The rationing had just ended (coffee was the last item to be freed from rationing to everyone's great relief), and foodstuffs and other supplies were becoming more plentiful. The fashion industry, courtesy of Christian Dior, begins to take off once more. There are philosophers and Communists making their mark on the city as well. She's vibrant, exciting, and, yes, damaged. But she's still Paris!

Describe the relationship between Tabitha and Julia. How does it differ from the friendship that you created between Agatha Christie and Phyllida Bright, her Head of Household from the *Phyllida Bright Mysteries*?

Tabitha and Julia meet as equals—just as Phyllida and Agatha Christie did. In Tabitha and Julia's case, they are a few years apart in age and they become close friends as American ex-pats in Paris. Tabitha is helping Julia with her French, as well as any sort of little mechanical things that might go awry, and Julia is enthusiastic about teaching Tabitha how to cook so that she and her Grandpere and his partner won't starve. They live on the same street and go to the same market, and Julia is actively trying to match-make Tabitha.

Although the relationship between Julia and Tabitha has many similarities to that of Phyllida and Agatha (they're close in age, they meet as equals and have much in common), the relationship between the latter is slightly different because Phyllida is an employee of Agatha whereas Tabitha is not an employee of Julia. Still, Phyllida and Agatha continue to have a close, personal friendship despite the murky barrier of employee/employer relationship.

Your mysteries always include real-life people as characters. Why do you have historical figures in your novels?

I think having a historical figure as a supporting character in a historical-set mystery really helps to "set" the period and environment in the reader's mind. The reader can thus relate to a setting that might be unfamiliar to them by making that connection. I also think it gives a bit of "validity" to the story as well—with real people and (sometimes) real events happening around the story, I think it makes the tale seem more substantial and realistic. It's also fun researching these books because of the attachment of the historical figures. I get to play around with how someone like Julia Child could get involved—even peripherally—in a murder.

If you could go to Paris right now, what would be your first stop?

A *boulangerie* to get a baguette, then a *fromagerie* to get some gorgeous cheese, then a *cave à vin* to grab a bottle of wine...and then I would find a place along the Seine to enjoy a perfect picnic. And then I'd go to Sainte-Chapelle to see the most gorgeous stained glass you've ever seen in your life! And then I'd do a night time river boat cruise along the Seine...

Sigh. I can't wait to go back!

READER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *for* MASTERING *the ART of FRENCH MURDER*

- Have you ever used Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*—or any of her cookbooks? Have you ever watched her on a cooking show?
- Before reading this book, what did you know about Julia Child? What was a surprise for you to learn about her?
- How do you feel about cooking? And how skilled are you in the kitchen? More like Tabitha or more like Julia . . . or somewhere in between?
- Tabitha always carries a Swiss Army knife in her pocket. What's a tool you never leave home without? (*House keys don't count!*)
- Tabitha reflects on the fact that in America, one just runs into the grocery store, gets what one needs, and runs back out—a very impersonal and hasty experience in comparison to going to the market in France. How do you feel about shopping in the grocery store, as opposed to visiting street markets like farmers' markets? Would you want to have to shop like Julia and Tabitha did in Paris and make it a social event?
- Before reading this book, what did you know about Occupied Paris and post-World War II Paris? What was a surprise or new information to you?
- What do you think about the relationship between Tabitha's grandparents, with one of them living in America and the other living in Paris? What do you think about the relationship between Tabitha's grandfather and *Oncle Rafe*?
- Would you have accepted a ride home from the theater with Mark Justiss, knowing that he was one of the suspects?
- Tabitha gets thrown into working at the coat check counter, and that ultimately helps her to solve the murder. Have you ever been thrown into a situation where you're stepping in to help out like she did at the theater? How did it go?
- Have you ever been backstage at a theater—either during or outside of a show? How does that environment contribute (or not) to the suspense in *Mastering the Art of French Murder*?
- Did you know that it was illegal for women to wear trousers in Paris unless they were riding a bike? What do you think of this? Have you ever had to deal with dress codes? How have dress codes for women changed over the years? If you were a woman, would you have worn trousers in Paris, even if you weren't riding a bicycle or a horse?
- Tabitha lets herself into Thérèse's apartment. Would you have done the same?
- What do you think about the interactions between Tabitha and Inspector Merveille? She provides him with several clues and information, and he accepts the information but responds to her only with cautions and warnings.
- What do you think about Tabitha and Julia's relationship?
- Have you ever thought about living in Paris? What do you think it would be like?
- If you were in Tabitha's shoes, would you have done all of the same things she did to solve the crime, or would you have followed Inspector Merveille's orders and stayed out of it?
- What do you think it would be like to have Julia Child as a friend?
- Tabitha mostly stumbles upon the clues that help her solve the mystery, and she doesn't really know who the perpetrator is until she overhears them speaking at the theater. Does this ring true for her character as a first-time amateur sleuth, or do you think she should have been more proactive and figured it out sooner?

MASTERING *the ART of FRENCH MURDER* MUSIC PLAYLIST

Set the mood for your *Mastering the Art of French Murder* book club discussion with a playlist inspired by the book!

1. "An American in Paris" from the *An American in Paris* soundtrack
2. "Florence Sur Les Champs-Élysées" by Miles Davis
3. "La Toison D'or" by Jean Cocteau
4. "St. James Infirmary" by Bill Coleman
5. "La vie en rose" by Edith Piaf
6. "Bag's Groove" by Eddy Louiss
7. "C'est Si Bon" by Yves Montand
8. "Evening in Paris" by Zoot Sims
9. "La mer" by Charles Trenet
10. "A Night in Tunisia" by Buddy Banks
11. "Farewell Blues" by Benny Carter
12. "Convulsions" by James Moody
13. "The Hucklebuck" by Paul Williams
14. "Swing 42" by Stephane Grapelli
15. "Confessin'" by Rex Stewart
16. "Venez Donc Chez Moi" by Henri Renaud Et Son Orchestre

You can also listen to this playlist on Spotify, at: bit.ly/SpotifyFrenchMurderBookClub

WHO *was* JULIA CHILD?

If you have your TV connected to the internet, click on this link [Julia Child - Favorite Moments from The French Chef \(on Vimeo\)](#) to get an understanding of the iconic chef's personality!

(You can also type in vimeo.com/338973517 into your internet browser to view.)

COCKTAIL and SNACK RECIPES for MASTERING the ART of FRENCH MURDER

Cocktail: The French Murder 75

A take-off on a French 75

Recipe is per drink.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 oz gin (Preferably one with less juniper. Hendrick's Neptunia or Castle & Key's Rise are both good options; but any gin will do.)
- 0.5 oz Mike's Hot Honey
- 0.5 oz Crème de Cassis (Can substitute Chambord.)
- 3-4 oz Sparkling wine (If you can find a rose/pink champagne or Prosecco, that would give it just a little more red color.)
- Cocktail cherries, for garnish (Luxardo, if possible.)

Shake in shaker with ice; then strain and pour into a champagne flute.

Top with the sparkling wine.

Garnish with a cocktail cherry speared with a plastic sword.

If you like, mix a little bit of crème de cassis and Mike's Hot Honey together, then drip a little bit of the mixture on the inside edge of the glass rim to make it look like just a bit of blood dripping there. (Make sure it's on the inside, otherwise the outside of the glass gets sticky and messy!)

NOTE: Don't worry about the Mike's Hot Honey being...well, hot. It's not. It's more "warming."



Snack: French Crepes Suzette

A beautiful French crepe can be filled with nearly anything you like, but the classic (in my opinion!) is a la Suzette, meaning it is filled or drizzled with a bit of citrusy syrup.

It's important to make certain the batter is not too thin and not too thick. Some people suggest adding sparkling water to the batter to make it lighter, but then you run the risk of having the batter too thin and then your crepe isn't perfect.

I strongly suggest after making the crepe batter that you allow it to sit for at least thirty minutes. It's not necessary, but, again, it will help you get to the Promised Land of a perfect crepe, which is light, fluffy, barely brown, and has gorgeously frilled edges.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3.5 Tbsp unsalted butter (you will need a little more for cooking)
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 3/4 cup plain flour
- 12 oz whole milk or cream
- One whole egg
- One egg yolk

For Finishing:

- Orange marmalade (or another citrusy jam, jelly, or syrup)
- Powdered sugar
- Cointreau or cognac (optional)
- Orange or lemon peel, plus mint leaves, for garnish (optional)

Melt the butter in a good, heavy omelet pan. When it's nearly completely melted, turn off the heat so it can cool a bit.

Sift the flour and a generous pinch of salt in a large bowl. Make a well in the center of it and add the egg and egg yolk. Whisk well, then add the milk a little at a time, whisking. Finally, add the butter and whisk gently.

Not required, but highly recommended: let the batter sit for at least thirty minutes. It should be the consistency of thick cream. Add a touch more flour if it isn't; a touch more milk if it's too thick.

When you're ready to cook, heat the omelet pan with a small pat of butter. Slow heating to a medium temperature is best. Measure about two ounces of batter and, working quickly now, pour it into the pan. Then tilt the pan to spread the batter evenly over the bottom, completely covering it. The batter shouldn't be so thin that you can see through it.

Cook for a minute or so, checking beneath the crepe to see when it starts to show light golden patches and is easily lifted. Then carefully flip it over and allow to cook on the other side—it'll take less time than the first side, and it won't turn golden brown all over. So don't worry about it because you don't want to overcook it!

Remove the crepe and place on a plate, then work quickly to use the rest of the batter, adding a brush of butter in the pan between each crepe.

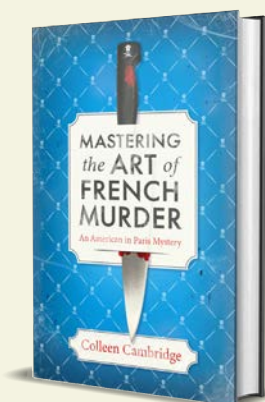
Quickly heat the marmalade in a small pan and add the Cointreau (if using) to taste. Heat it until it becomes a little runny.

To serve: Roll up each crepe and drizzle the marmalade over the top. Then, using a flour sifter or fine mesh strainer, sprinkle on the powdered sugar. Garnish with the orange or lemon peel and mint leaves.

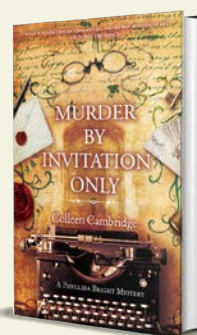
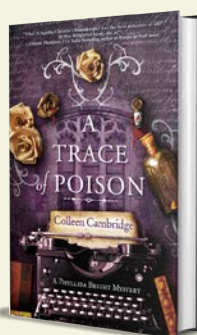
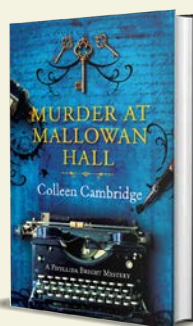
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION *for* MASTERING *the ART of* FRENCH MURDER

Colleen Cambridge will be on tour to promote *Mastering the Art of French Murder*!

To find out if she will be in your area, please visit www.ColleenCambridge.com and sign up for her e-newsletter for updates.



And don't forget to check out the Phyllida Bright Mysteries by Colleen Cambridge, featuring Agatha Christie's housekeeper as an amateur sleuth!



On sale 9.26.23

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