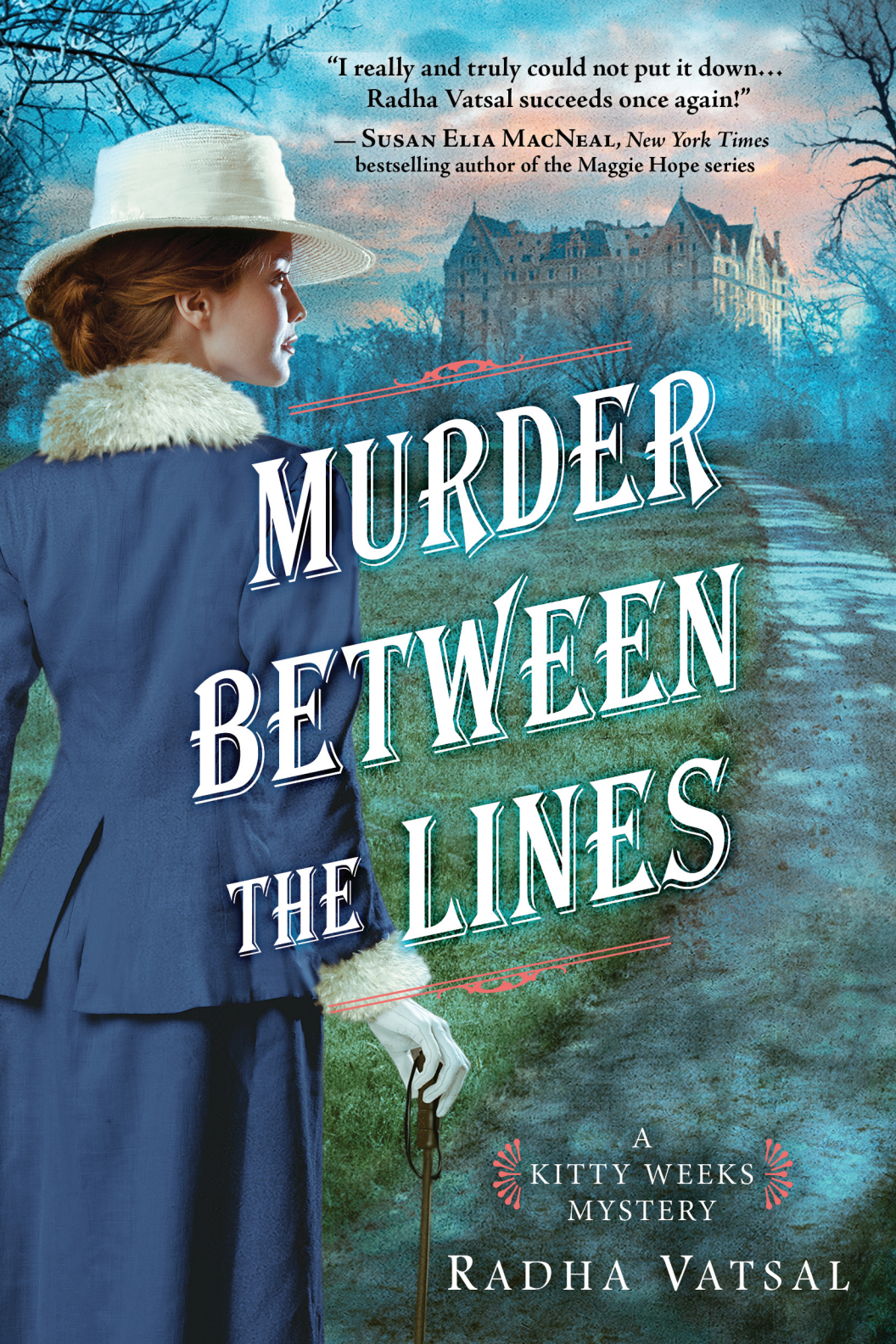


"I really and truly could not put it down...
Radha Vatsal succeeds once again!"

— SUSAN ELIA MACNEAL, *New York Times*
bestselling author of the Maggie Hope series



MURDER BETWEEN THE LINES

A
KITTY WEEKS
MYSTERY

RADHA VATSAL

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Kitty Weeks? How do those words fit her?
2. What draws Kitty to Elspeth Bright and keeps her going when everyone else says that Elspeth's death wasn't a crime?
3. If you have read *A Front Page Affair*, how do you think Kitty has changed since the first book, and how does that influence how she handles situations in *Murder Between the Lines*?
4. What obstacles and choices does Kitty face in terms of her work? In what ways have things dramatically changed for women in the past hundred years, and in what ways have they not?
5. Describe Julian Weeks as a father and his relationship to Kitty. Does Sylvia Lane fit the bill as a potential spouse for him and good mother for her? Is Kitty right to be nervous about her father's relationship with Miss Lane and its effects on her?
6. What would you think of a president marrying in office today? What does Miss Busby's response to President Wilson's remarriage tell you about her?

7. Miss Busby is described as running the Ladies' Page with an "iron fist." Elspeth Bright says Miss Howe-Jones runs Westfield Hall like her "fiefdom." What parallels do you see between the two women? In what ways are they different?
8. What sense do you get of the life of a working woman in the newspaper business based on Kitty, Jeannie, and what we know of Miss Busby's experiences? Is Kitty wrong to advise Georgina Howell to be cautious? If not, how should she have advised her?
9. How would you characterize Dr. Clarke's theory about women's health and how it affects their education? Do you see any vestiges of that kind of thinking today? Are there similar theories today that you think might be debunked in the future?
10. What do you think motivates Mrs. Howe-Jones to shield Prudence Marquand from the law? What arguments does she use? Do you think she was correct? Should Kitty have taken matters into her own hands and gone to the authorities herself? Why do you think she didn't?
11. What are the reasons that President Wilson gives to put off promoting an amendment to the Constitution that would give women the right to vote? What arguments do the women at the meeting at the Waldorf use to counter his stance? Do you think their points are effective?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

What inspired you to write *Murder Between the Lines*?

I knew I would like *Murder Between the Lines*, which is the second novel in the Kitty Weeks mystery series, to start a few months after the events of the first book, *A Front Page Affair*. I also thought I would anchor it to President Wilson's second marriage, which took place in December 1915. As I was browsing through the papers to see what else was going on at the time, I came across the headline "Girl Somnambulist Is Frozen to Death," and it caught my eye at once. I immediately thought that this was an occurrence that would fascinate Kitty.

That article described a situation similar to the one that takes place in the book—the girl, said to be a sleepwalker, goes out at night lightly clad and is found the next morning frozen to death. If I recall correctly, she was also a boarding school student and her sleepwalking was put down to too much stress on her nerves caused by studying, and that was it. There was no crime—it was just an incident that happened.

So, I asked myself, what if foul play had been involved? And I built the character of Elspeth Bright around that and gave her her own backstory. She's a completely fictional character inspired by a death, and an explanation for that death,

that I thought Kitty would find very unsatisfying and would motivate her to dig deeper.

As an aside, when I was reading about suicide reports of young women during the 1910s, I noticed that whatever stress they were facing was often attributed to too much time spent reading and/or studying.

How has Kitty grown between *A Front Page Affair* and *Murder Between the Lines*? Will she change over the course of the series?

In *A Front Page Affair*, Kitty is new at the Ladies' Page. She's an apprentice, like an intern today. Over the course of the first book, Kitty learns a lot—she learns that she's able to investigate situations that trouble her and that she's willing to take risks for what she believes in. She continues to build on those traits in the second book. As we see from the way Georgina Howell reacts when they first meet, Kitty's work is now well-known, even though she isn't personally known by name. She becomes someone other girls look up to—but that's a problem, because while she appears to be independent (and in many respects, she is independent), she relies on her father financially and emotionally. When Georgina approaches Kitty for help, Kitty realizes there's not much she can do if some trouble should befall Georgina.

As the series continues, she will continue to evolve. (She's still just nineteen years old in this book.) We'll see how she balances her ambitions for her career with her relationships. As her understanding of the society and politics around her deepens, the problems she has to solve become more complicated. It's all

part of her coming-of-age story, which mirrors the more general coming-of-age story of women at this time. Women were fighting to be taken seriously, to be considered full citizens, and to be given the right to vote.

You attended boarding school in Connecticut for two years. What was it like? Did it influence how you conceived Westfield Hall?

I grew up in Mumbai, India, and came to boarding school in Connecticut for the final two years of school. One thing led to another—I went on to college at Chapel Hill in North Carolina, then to graduate school at Duke, where I met my husband.

Coming to the United States so young, on my own, was definitely a life-changing experience in more ways than one. I was sixteen when I arrived. I'd had what I would say was a privileged upbringing in India, and then suddenly, I was in a new environment away from the support of my family. What I saw was a situation that in fundamental ways was the same as the one I'd left—there were “insiders” and “outsiders,” but in India, I was on the inside, and here, I was on the outside. And, like Kitty, I think it made me a better observer, and it taught me not to take anything for granted.

I wasn't aware of any kind of hazing going on at school, but what I did draw on in terms of conceiving Westfield Hall was the sense of the small, enclosed world that a boarding school creates. Everybody knows everyone's business, it's hard to hide, problems can get magnified, and because you live there, there's no place to escape.

The sense of Westfield being its own world is also reinforced

by its general layout, which is similar to the boarding school I attended. We had a low stone wall surrounding the campus, a pond, a main building, and some separate buildings, but basically, the school wasn't part of the town—it stood apart from it.

Can you say more about the strong female characters in this book?

Well, there's Kitty, Miss Busby, Miss Lane, and Mrs. Belmont, for starters. Growing up, my family was very female-dominated, and my great-aunt especially was a petite, fearless woman who was very much involved in culture and politics. Watching her be herself without any self-doubt made a huge impact on me. The women I read about from the 1910s—like Anne Morgan, who appears in *A Front Page Affair*, and Alva Belmont here—remind me of her in that they never seemed afraid to speak their minds, they set lofty goals, and they certainly don't seem to apologize for being who they are. I find those characters very refreshing, and we see them in different ways reflected in Miss Busby and Miss Lane and, of course, in Kitty. But Kitty is coming of age in a rapidly changing world, and she does have doubts about her place in it. What's fun is seeing how she responds to her doubts and everything else that's thrown at her.

Do you have the entire Kitty Weeks series plotted before the books are written, or does it unfold with each book separately?

I've had the general arc of the series planned from the beginning, with three parallel but related tracks: it's a coming-of-age

story for Kitty; a coming-of-age story for women, who win the right to vote in 1920; and it's a coming-of-age story for the country, which goes from being essentially a second-tier nation at the start of World War I to a leading player at the end of it. The series feels Edwardian when it starts, and modernity starts creeping in as it progresses. I haven't plotted each book down to the last detail, but I have a rough idea of how the books will all play into the larger narrative.

Do you hear back from readers? How do you stay in touch?

I do—and I love hearing the feedback. It ranges from people who have really enjoyed the working girl and journalism angle, to suggestions of books set in the period that I might be interested in, to questions about what will happen to Kitty in the future. Readers mostly connect with me through my website, www.radhavatsal.com, and sometimes via Facebook. I always try to answer every message I receive, and I enjoy staying in touch. I also send out a newsletter with historical trivia and updates. Staying in touch with readers keeps me going!