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Suburban SUSPENSE

Cate Holahan writes page-turner thrillers drawing on her experience as a reporter—and her local roots.



BY RAINA WALLENS

Tenafly resident and USA Today bestselling thriller/suspense author and screenwriter Cate Holahan wasted no time kickstarting her writing career.

The Teaneck native got her first journalism gig at 14 working for The Record newspaper, where she cut her teeth writing obituaries. Her first article covered the best places to go in the Hamptons. “I’m calling up all these places, saying, ‘Um, what are the unique features of your bar, because I’m not allowed to walk in there,’” Holahan laughs.

Following high school, Holahan attended Princeton, where she wrote for the college newspaper and local town papers. Post-college, Holahan worked for the Boston Globe and then BusinessWeek magazine, where she covered technology.

After having her first child, Holahan pivoted to writing for television at CNBC because, she jokes, “I needed to make more than my nanny.”

In her own time, Holahan was always writing fiction, but it never really landed anywhere.

Then she attended a conference where an author addressed the room of part-time writers, explaining that there were only so many books published a year, and the part-time writers were up against authors like him, who wrote eight hours a day.

“That was sobering,” Holahan says. So, though some parents of newborns choose to sleep when their infant does, Holahan pushed herself to write while her baby dozed during maternity leave after her second child was born.

It was worth it. The novel Holahan wrote during that time—her first—was “Dark Turns,” published in 2015. She’s had five other novels published since then. A seventh, “The Kidnapping of Alice Ingold,” is set to be published in September 2025.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS MARKSBURY



New Directions

Those seven books are Holahan's solo novels, but she's also a co-author of the No. 1 Audible bestselling series "Young Rich Widows," which is a result of the COVID-19 shutdowns.

"Bookstores were closed, and that's how we sell our books, so everyone was freaking out," Holahan explains.

Another suspense author, Vanessa Lillie, pointed out that Audible was acquiring audiobooks, and suggested that she, Holahan and two other suspense authors write a book proposal together. They did, and Audible loved it. "We wrote the book, and it took off," Holahan says. "In a few weeks it

had, like, 27,000 reviews."

Holahan's screenwriting career is another result of COVID. Once again because of the closed bookstores, Holahan figured it would be a good idea to expand her writing tangentially.

She enrolled in NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where she received her MFA in dramatic writing. "That was humbling," she says. "Going back to school with all these books under my belt and someone's tearing apart your plot, and you're like, 'I do get paid for this.'"

Turns out she got paid to do her homework as well. Holahan sold two screenplays, "Deadly Estate" and

"Midnight Hustle," while she was in graduate school. Both are streaming on Fox's Tubi. She has two television shows in development, and has sold options and shopping agreements for other scripts—all based on her books.

Fiction, Meet Journalism

Holahan's second novel, "The Widower's Wife," is set in a suburb based on Tenaflly. The book actually takes place in the house where she lives.

"Somebody once wrote in a review, 'Oh, this town wouldn't exist,'" says Holahan. "As if you wouldn't have [someone] like me—I'm Jamaican and

Irish—or ‘Oh, you wouldn’t have in the suburbs a mixed-race woman living next to an Indian couple,’ and I’m sitting there, like, ‘What?’”

Whether or not reviewers find it believable, Holahan appreciates Tenafly’s diversity. She, her husband and two daughters have lived here for 11 years. “I love that you learn different things about different cultures, and I also think it’s interesting the way that people melt together, what people have in common,” she says. “I use that in my books all the time.”

When asked where ideas for her many stories come from, Holahan doesn’t skip a beat. “My anxiety,” she says, smiling.

Case in point: The book she’s completing now is about a kidnapping but is set against the backdrop of AI. Holahan explains that her interest in AI stemmed from anxiety about all the careers that AI might eradicate.

“That’s all my anxiety of what will happen for my kids’ careers, and of course, AI can write,” Holahan explains.

“One of the ways I solve my anxieties is that I do a lot of research for my books,” she continues. “It allows me to delve pretty deeply into something that’s bothering me and then kind of create a narrative.”

The complementary mix of Holahan’s talent at writing fiction and her journalistic background is what makes her stories so compelling. “We all try to create, at the end of the day, a fun story,” she says, “but the engine of the book is something we need to take a look at.”

Holahan’s solo novels can be found in bookstores, and “Young Rich Widows” can be purchased on Audible or in print nationwide.

Raina Wallens is a writer living in Tenafly.



Cate Holahan has written numerous screenplays and novels, with much of her published work taking place in suburban or well-to-do settings similar to those she knows from her own life.

