

A Portrait of Emily Price: Interview with Katherine

Where do you get your ideas?

For each writer, it is different. There are as many ways to get to that point of inspiration as there are stories to tell. But if you're stuck or looking for something new... Here is how I approach story.

I start with a question.

The idea for my new novel, *A Portrait of Emily Price*, came to me while reading C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*. There is a powerful scene near the end of the story when the main character, Orual, brings her case to the gods to justify all she has done. Yet, within the very act of articulating her case, she realizes she hasn't got one. It falls at her feet as she sees everything differently.

And that's where the questions began... I wondered, in our world and in our time, what might it look like for a young woman to be challenged by another way of thinking, believing, and living? What could be so enticing, and joy-filled, as to make her yearn for something new and perhaps something better? What might compel her to drop her guard, surrender control, and let in love? ... And there began *A Portrait of Emily Price*.

The questions for *A Portrait of Emily Price* led me to create a whirlwind that would knock Emily off her feet and entice her to experience something new before reason or fear scared her away from the adventure. It was those original questions that formed the tone and texture of the story – leading it to Italy. The setting was a very specific choice in answer to those original questions. I wanted a sensory country that would hold for Emily the promise of beauty, unknown, and a rich artistic history that would appeal to her and entice her – and entice all of us too.

1. Was there ever a moment while writing "A Portrait of Emily Price" that your character(s) and/or the plot surprised you and turned the story in an unexpected direction?

Yes, Joseph surprised me. He started as a small, ancillary character then took on so much definition and personality he needed a larger stage. The mural surprised me as well. Originally, it didn't have anything to do with Joseph, but, as he grew bigger in my mind and in the story, the mural and all its pain and implications became his.

2. If readers could only take away one lesson from this story, what do you hope it would be?

I hope they walk away with a feeling of joy – of something yet to be. For themselves. Like the C.S. Lewis quote at the beginning of the book. *All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still “about to be.”* I think, in our busy lives, we forget that some days. Joy is out there and I love reminders.

3. I love your book covers! If you had to pick a favorite, which would you choose? :)

While they sit well on a shelf, the covers are all so different and fit perfectly for each story that I can't choose! I can't choose a favorite book I've written either. Someone asked that once and I realized that I was a different writer for each and can't compare them. But so as not to sit on the fence here, I think I like the spine of *A Portrait of Emily Price* best. What a delight! I had no idea they were going to give that small space such detail and embellishment.

4. I read on your website that you've moved several times, including internationally. Has there been a particular place that really inspired your writing?

Not a particular place – the answer really is: All the places and what I've learned from them. Moving has taught me to notice the existence and importance of differing worldviews and perspectives. So for me – setting is a character in each of my books. I don't believe *Lizzy & Jane* could have been the same story set in Chicago. I needed the separation physically and metaphorically between Seattle and New York, and I needed the flavor of Seattle for Lizzy and her journey. In *A Portrait of Emily Price*, Emily needed the sensory experience of Italy – with its warm climate, deep history, art and espresso. Differences in “place” run deep and can bring amazing texture to characters and to their stories.

5. Do you have a word of advice for aspiring writers still on the edge of jumping in to publication?

Keep writing... It sounds trite, but it's true. If you want to be a writer, you have to get to the job of simply writing. There is so much to learn about the craft, but if you aren't writing each and every day, all the craft books in the world won't help you find your story, refine your voice, and stretch you to your limits. And then once you do that... Don't give up. It's not an easy journey, but so much is gleaned along the way. Do not give up!