



September 28, 2024

Greetings Fellow Reader!

Remember that I'm eager to hear your thoughts, so don't hesitate to hit reply or click the buttons below to write me back.

Life Stuff

It's been a strange experience, stepping into the world with the assumed identity of my pen name, Kady Ambrose, while striving to be deeply authentic. Especially when the classic interview question, "How would you describe yourself?" stymies me. Responses popcorn. Mother. Wife. Writer. Small business owner and business partner. Former corporate banker. Teacher. Coach. History nerd. Story addict. These are descriptive, but are they who I am? Perhaps curious, introverted and sensitive about causing others pain, sometimes to a fault, might be closer, but how does that relate to that deep, resonate truth of me? Or how I dress? Or my choice of color palette and font for my web site? So many stories encourage us to embrace our true selves, yet first we must discern who we actually are. As I grapple with these issues, I focused on the theme of identity in this month's issue. Enjoy!

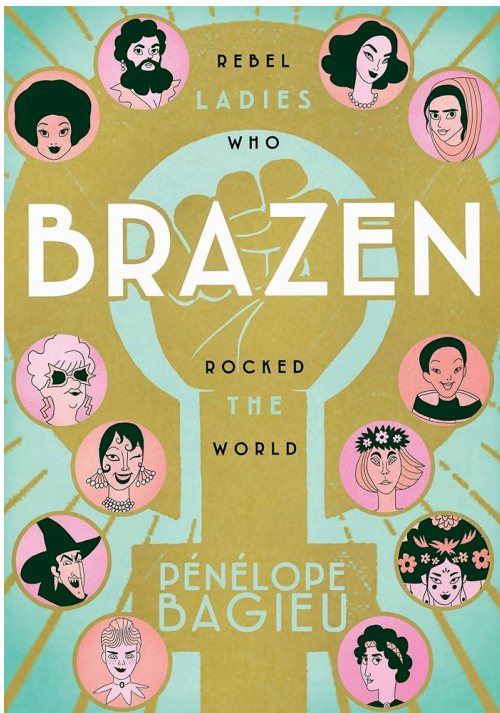
Do you have a good handle on who you are?
Or are you still on the journey?
Click here and share your thoughts.



Saylie spends zero time wondering who she is.

Photo by *Emily Hafale*

Historical Yummy



Though I live in France, I discovered the fascinating Frenchwoman *Clémentine Delait* while browsing the book “Brazen: Rebel Ladies Who Rocked the World” by Pénélope Bagieu in the Getty Museum bookstore in Los Angeles. “Brazen” is a delightful graphic novel celebrating nonconforming women throughout history. I highly recommend it, and will likely be sourcing more Historical Yummies from its pages in the future. ;-)

But on to Clémentine. Born in 1865, she came from a family of farmers in rural France. Though she started shaving as a teenager and married the local baker, she came into her own as a bearded lady when her husband became too ill to keep working as a *boulangier*. She stopped shaving her face and they opened a cafe together called “The Bearded Lady’s Café.”

They even gave out signed postcards with images of Clémentine in feminine attire sporting her big, fluffy beard. Adding variety to the images, she was awarded the extremely rare privilege in that era of being allowed to wear men’s clothing during a photo shoot. The café was a smash, inspiring a brand of fabric and her opportunity to expand their business with a lingerie store.

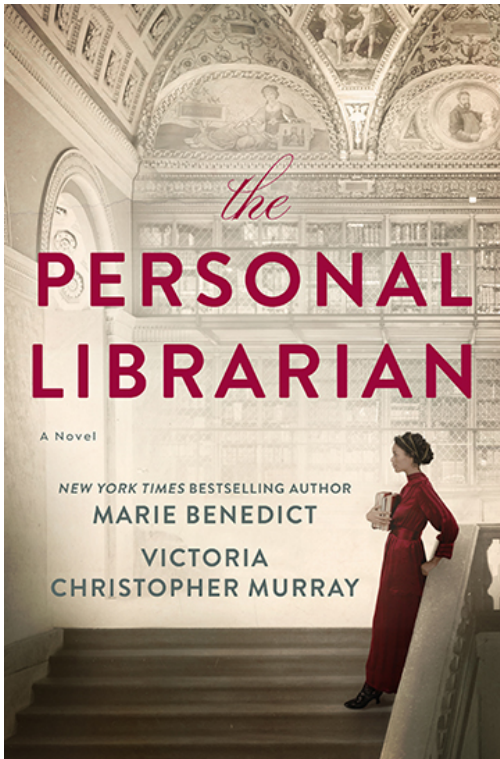


She was fêted by European royalty and during World War I, became a mascot of the “*Poilus*” or “Hairy Ones,” French slang for tough, rugged soldiers in the trenches. After the war, she and her husband adopted a war orphan. Not surprisingly, the circus attempted to lure Clémentine into their traveling show, but she refused their lucrative offer. At 63, her husband’s death left her a rich and famous widow with plenty of options. She chose to return to her home town, where she revived her cafe, this time with her adopted daughter at her side—and sometimes atop the bar doing a cabaret show with a parrot. She also remarried. In 1939, she died of a heart attack and was buried under a tombstone with her chosen epitaph, “Here lies Clémentine Delait, the Bearded Lady.”

I find Clémentine’s story incredibly inspirational. How often we mistake our differences for weakness to be overcome or hidden. She tried that path and seems to have found happiness in marriage and working at the bakery with her husband. But it wasn’t until she leaned into her beard that her horizons really opened up, and her rheumatism-afflicted husband was able to switch to doing their books, enabling him to have a much better life as well.

What might our own lives look like if we simply lived fully as exactly who we are, whatever that looks like, without apology?

The Nightstand



This month's historical fiction recommendation is "**The Personal Librarian**" by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray, which tells the story of the real historical figure, J. P. Morgan's personal librarian, Belle da Costa Greene. Hired in 1902 to organize and catalogue Morgan's library, Greene went on to build a formidable collection of rare manuscripts, art and literature for him.

She was also a force for making the collection public, serving as the first director in 1924 when the Pierpont Morgan Library opened to the public. These were incredible accomplishments, all the more impressive because she was a woman in a deeply sexist era and while hiding her true identity in a deeply racist era.

Her birth name was Belle Marion Greener, daughter of the African-American couple Richard Theodore Greener, a prominent civil rights activist and Harvard graduate, and music teacher Genevieve Ida Fleet. "da Costa Greene" was a Portuguese name she assumed to explain the slight darkness in her complexion.



The ability to have an open relationship with her own father is just one of the many prices Greener paid to pursue her dreams. What might Greener's life have looked like if she had embraced her true identity? What would those costs have been? Her secret was only revealed after her death in 1950.

I really enjoyed this intimate and informative novel, a great example of how to make the telling of history deeply engaging. I also appreciate how the novel helps readers experience the psychic and emotional cost of having to navigate life while hiding one's true self in order to conform to the prejudices of those in power. How much we all lose as a result of this senseless diversion of human energy and intellect.

[Click here to tell me what you're reading.](#)

Fantasy Treat

I recently watched KAOS (Netflix) and have an entire book series in the works that includes Greek Gods. So, when I considered fantasy or mythological characters who took on multiple identities, I immediately thought of *Zeus*.

First among the Greek Gods, Zeus nonetheless assumed different forms in his tireless quest to seduce or rape women. His disguises included women's absent husbands, a swan, a shepherd, a bull, an ant, a satyr, a dragon and a shower of gold. He snatched women in the form of an eagle, and even disguised himself as his daughter Artemis to seduce a princess of Arkadia.



Zeus, above, as played deliciously on KAOS by Jeff Goldblum,
minus the shapeshifting.

It strikes me as ironic that almighty Zeus had to disguise his authentic self in order to take what he wanted from otherwise unwilling women. While his powers of deception are impressive, the need for them speaks more to his weakness than his strength. For those lower on the power pyramid, however, disguise might be necessary to obtain what is unjustly withheld.

*So when should we lean into our identity
and when should we obscure it?*

Exclusive Freebie

My Research Trip for ALL THAT SHIMMERS

Pretty Pix

From a visit to the *Marché Dupleix* in Paris, 2018.



Behind the Curtain

I'm excited to announce I've launched *Historical Fantasy Fridays* on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#). Check out your preferred platform to see weekly posts about Historical Fantasy books you might like.

I'm figuring out how to translate the concept to Pinterest, and am toying with adding TikTok, but worry about the effort taking too much time away from writing.

This month has been a little quiet as my editor works on copy edits for ALL THAT SHIMMERS and I learn all about what I need to do to help the book find its readers with the marketing consultant I've engaged. Then comes the fun stuff - cover design! I'll keep you posted. In the meantime, working hard to get the first draft done on my novel about Marie de Rohan, who I introduced in last month's newsletter.

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2) *Add kady@kadyambrose.com to your "safe senders" or "whitelist" so your newsletter doesn't get blocked as spam.*

Talk with you again next month!

Warmest Wishes & Happy Reading,

Kady

P.S. Full disclosure - some links in my newsletter may be affiliate links, which means if you purchase something using the link, your price won't change, but I might get a small commission. Sweet, huh?

Kady Ambrose

Writing in Paris, France



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