

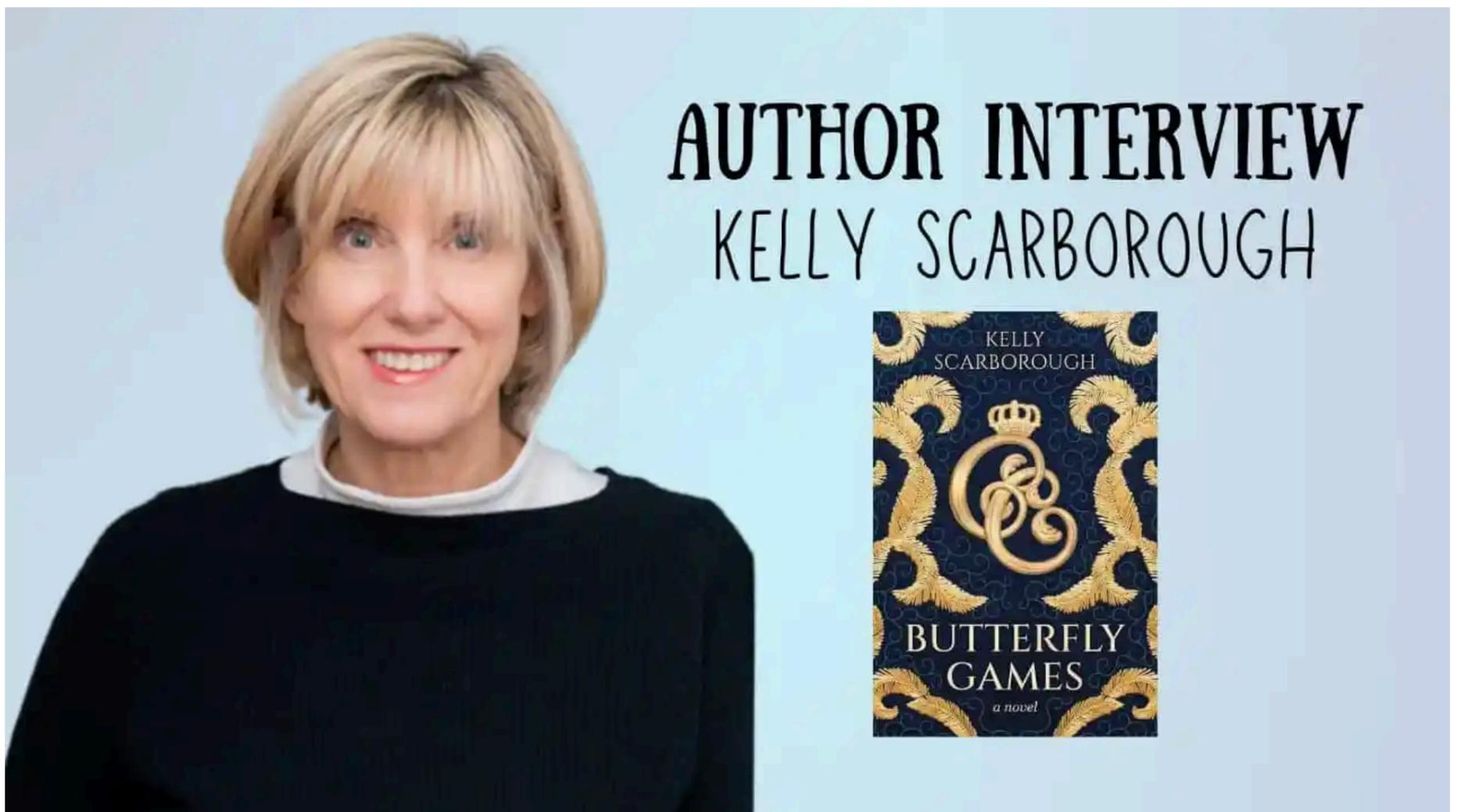
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AUTHOR INTERVIEWS FICTION INTERVIEWS

Author Interview – Kelly Scarborough – Butterfly Games

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On The Table Read Magazine, "[the best arts and entertainment magazine UK](#)", author Kelly Scarborough discusses her 12-year journey writing *Butterfly Games*, a historical novel inspired by a real-life forbidden romance in the 19th-century Swedish court.

Written by JJ Barnes



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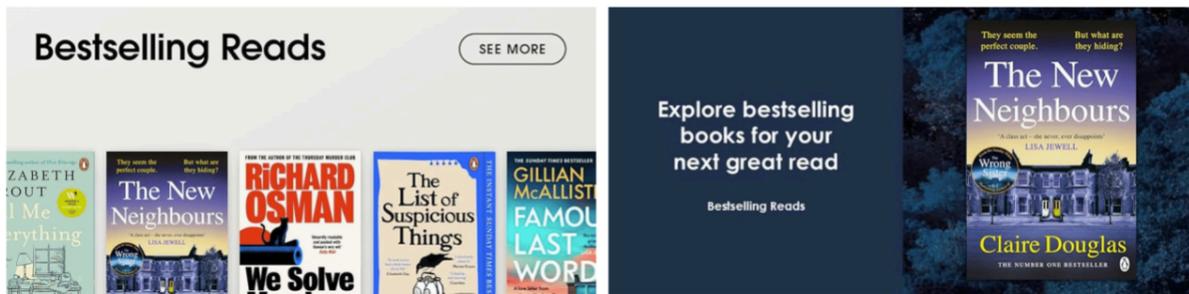
I interviewed Kelly Scarborough about her life and career, the inspiration behind her new historical fiction book, Butterfly Games, and her creative writing process.

Tell me a bit about who you are.

For me, home is where my books are. Next month, I'll fill the car with the essentials—some dusty Swedish memoirs published a century ago, some great historical novels from my shelves, and a Kindle stuffed with historical romance classics—and set off for the Lowcountry of South Carolina, where my mother lives. It's near Savannah, Georgia, which is a fascinating place, the subject of some great historical novels. Patti Callahan Henry is a local Lowcountry celebrity, and I love how she captures the essence of the place in her books.

My husband and I built a home there in the middle of the pandemic during all those shortages and price hikes—I wouldn't recommend doing that—and I live there for part of each year. I'm much more likely to panic if I forget to bring Queen Charlotte's diary than I if I neglect

to pack my dress for a bookstore event. When it's time to return to New England in June, I'll reverse the process, unload the car and get back to work. I've lived in New Jersey, New York, Arizona, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, and South Carolina, and if I have space and quiet to write, I'm home. No favorites, no regrets.





Kelly Scarborough



When did you first WANT to write a book?

From childhood, I loved reading, languages, and history. My career as an attorney satisfied those passions for a long time, about twenty years. I left my job in 2014 when my son, who has autism, was in high school. I knew then that it was time to get started writing a novel, which is something that had always been in the back of my mind.

When did you take a step to start writing?

My family used to spend summers in a little post and beam house on Martha's Vineyard. While there in 2014, I opened an email about a writing contest being offered by one of the major London literary agencies. The deadline to submit 5,000 words was only five days away. I had just left my job in law, and I wanted nothing more than to win that prize, which was a year-long novel writing course. I banged away at my laptop nonstop and ended up with a frozen shoulder, but I did manage to enter that contest. Of course, I didn't win, but I was hooked, and I signed up for the course anyway.

How long did it take you to complete your first book from the first idea to release?

Twelve years. Enough said.



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What made you want to write *Butterfly Games*?

Like so many creative sparks, the idea to write *Butterfly Games* was born while I was reading. One of my earliest historical fiction favorites was a 1951 novel called *Désirée* by Annemarie Selinko, which I pulled off my mother's shelf when I was fourteen. That book introduced me to Désirée Clary, a woman who was famously dumped by Napoleon after he fell in love with Joséphine.

Years later, thoughts of that old novel came back to me and I stumbled across *Jacquette*, a Swedish countess with a life so compelling I couldn't look away. She met Désirée's son Oscar only months after he arrived from France, when he had just become Swedish royalty. Both vulnerable, the two fell in love, and their powerful bond threatened the shaky new dynasty. I adore stories about star-crossed lovers, and I knew *Jacquette's* was the one I had to write.

What were your biggest challenges with writing *Butterfly Games*?

Finding the real *Jacquette* was essential, and it took me on quite a journey. When I started writing the novel, I had never been to Sweden and did not speak a word of Swedish. *Jacquette's* biography had not yet been written, so the readily obtainable source material about her life was sparse. She had a Wikipedia page, which portrayed her as one-dimensional—just a countess who had an affair with Prince Oscar, a playboy royal who had other mistresses.

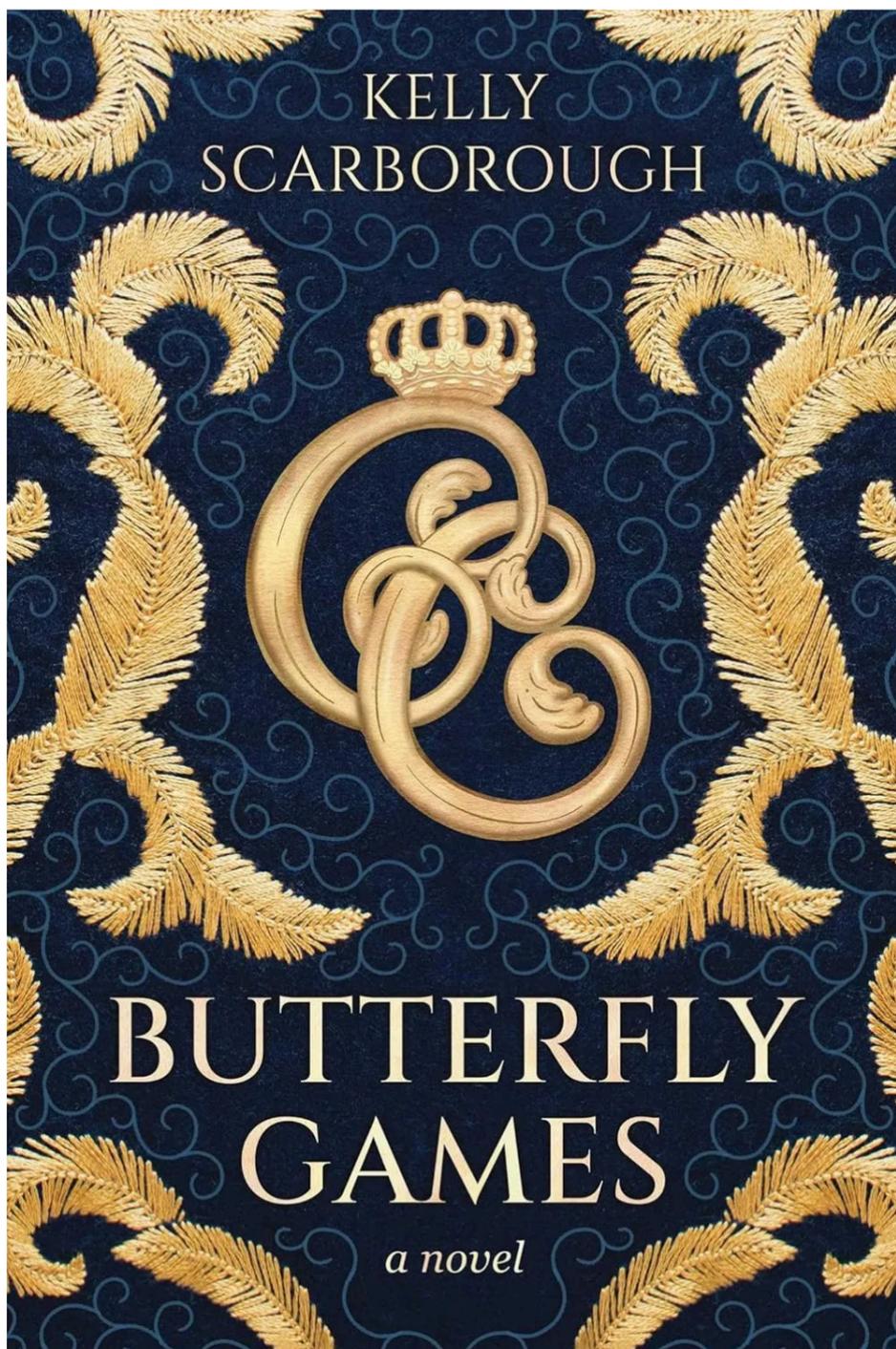
Convinced there was more to the story, I didn't give up. There were far fewer sources on the internet in those days, so I went to the New York Public Library, where I found a few Swedish history books in English. That was it. They all were written by male historians who dismissed the idea that *Jacquette* was anything more than a casual fling for Oscar. I knew that was wrong; I was sure that she made a difference. After all, theirs was a first love, one that endured for a decade.

When I finally went to the Swedish National Archives and discovered hundreds of letters written by *Jacquette* and her family (most in French), it was a revelation. Eventually, those letters, a collection of early-19th century memoirs, and the publication of a wonderful Swedish-language biography of *Jacquette* allowed me to find her voice.



Who or what inspired you when creating your Protagonist?

I'm fascinated by the power of an all-consuming, impossible first love.



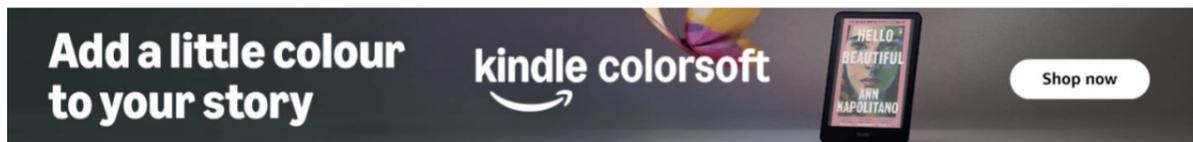
Butterfly Games by Kelly Scarborough

Who or what inspired you when creating your Antagonist?

Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte—Charles Jean in *Butterfly Games*—is a fascinating character. I wanted to know how he climbed from his humble beginnings—he was basically the son of a clerk—to the throne of Sweden. I'd read the standard rags-to-riches portrayals of him, but I suspected there was a dark side underlying his rise to power.

What is the inciting incident of Butterfly Games?

Jacquette, an almost 14-year-old countess, is in a hostile and unfamiliar place—the summer palace where the new royal family is spending their first summer in Sweden. After older girls from a vicious clique called the Chatterati bully Jacquette about her parents' scandalous divorce, her aunt gives her the queen's letter box—bearing a forbidden miniature of the exiled former Crown Prince Gustav—and orders her to hide it. While on that mission, she meets Prince Oscar for the first time. The explosive contents of the box will pull Jacquette into the center of the political tensions that threaten the new Bernadotte dynasty.



What is the main conflict of Butterfly Games?

Jacquette, a powerless girl, struggles against the Butterfly Game, a system that dictates her reality. In the book, the royal court is a constant presence in Jacquette's world, beginning in childhood. It's an antagonist in its own right.

Did you plot Butterfly Games in advance, or fly by the seat of your pants and write freely?

I wrote the early drafts without a plan, which wasn't the best choice for me. I tend to overwrite and go a little off course when a tidbit piques my interest. That writing method added several drafts to the project. I decided to reverse outline the book after the first draft was written and massage the manuscript into a more well-structured plot.

Did you get support with editing, and how much editing did Butterfly Games need?

Editors are so amazing, and I've worked with some great ones. *Butterfly Games* had two copyedits, and each of them improved the manuscript by leaps and bounds. With so many historical details and characters drawn from real life, it was a challenge to maintain consistency throughout. My editors pointed out all sorts of anomalies I never would have found. And I love it when an editor points out that I've used a term that wasn't coined until ten years after the scene she's editing. It's never too late to do better.

As I write this, *Butterfly Games* is with a copyeditor who's working on the Swedish edition, and her suggestions are improving the book even more.



What is the first piece of writing advice you would give to anyone inspired to write a story?

If the book is to be biographical historical fiction, like *Butterfly Games*, I'd advise a young writer to pick a place to end the story. It's one of the biggest challenges in writing the subgenre, I believe. A book that spans three months is going to be a very different book than one that spans a lifetime. Get to know your character and let her speak to you.

Can you give me a hint about any further books you're planning to write?

Jacquette and Oscar's story isn't over, I can say that much. Book 2 of the *Butterfly Games* series picks up after the events of the first novel and follows the characters as they enter a period of enormous transition. Jacquette is now a married woman navigating a world where secrets carry enormous risk. She is no longer the bullied teenager of Book 1; she's developing into a woman who is beginning to understand the cost of playing (or refusing to play) the Butterfly Game. She and Oscar, who is now crown prince, must face the consequences of the choices they made in Book 1 and the reality of the world they inhabit. In Book 2, several other characters take on big emotional journeys of their own. Characters like Brita, Nils, and even Désirée face choices about loyalty, ambition, and survival. The stakes are higher, and everything becomes more complicated.

And, finally, are you proud of your accomplishment? Was it worth the effort?

Yes, and yes. My mother is turning 90 in March, and I want nothing more than to see her at my launch party.

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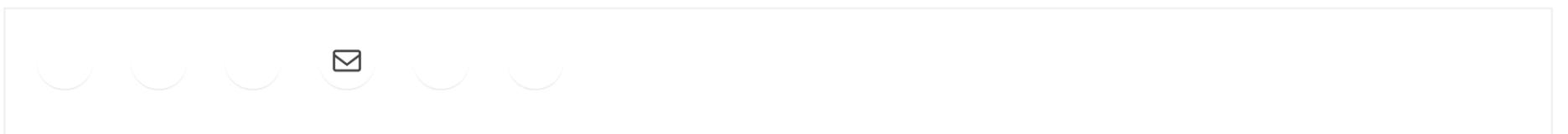
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