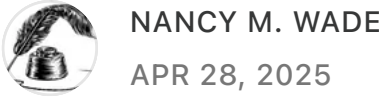




COZY SCRIBE

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Spring! Has it finally arrived? Do you feel the same way, dear Cozy Scribe readers? Has winter felt extra long this past year or maybe it’s just the negative news and politics that makes us feel that way? The “winter of our discontent”.

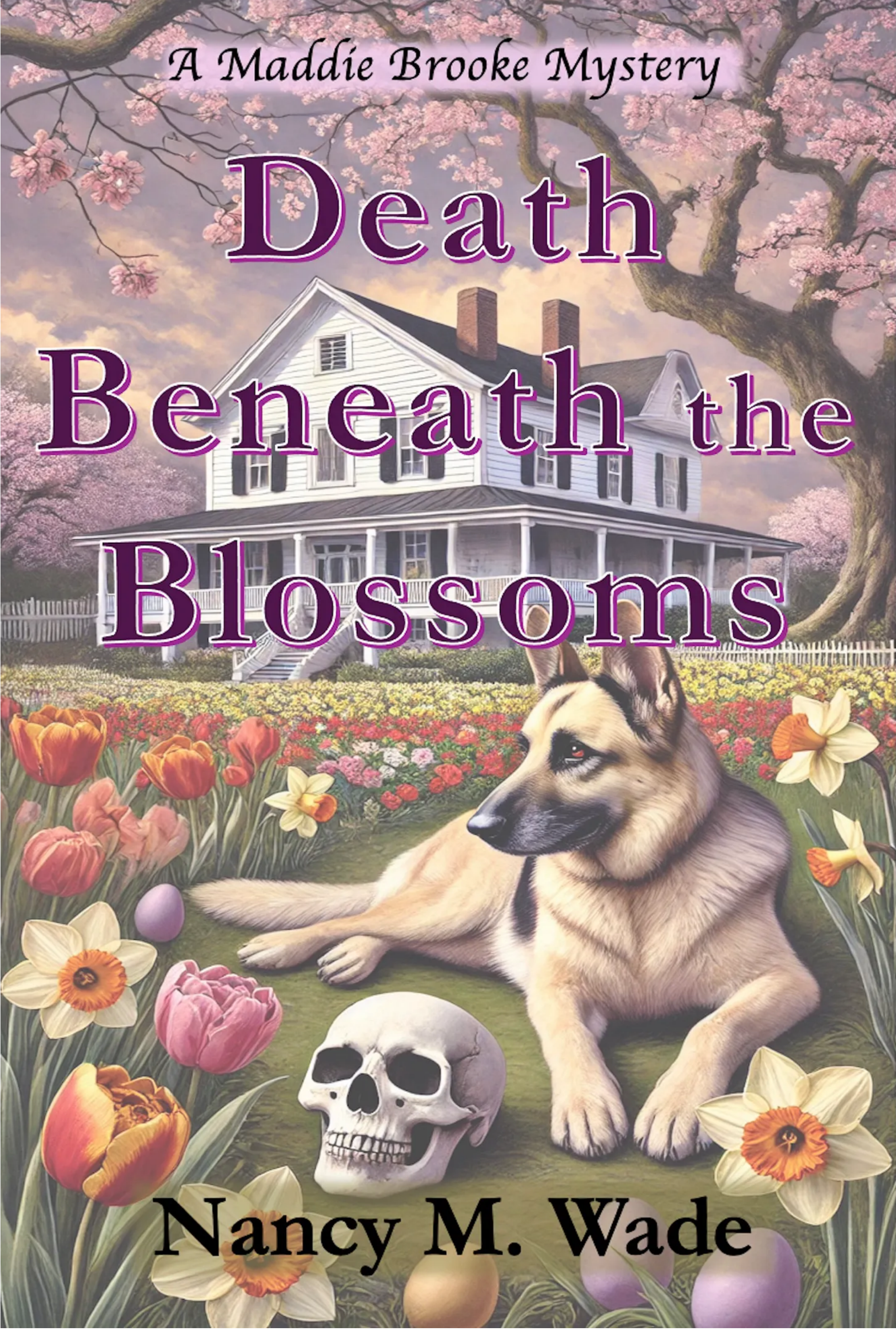
I’m teetering between the desire to be active and join protests or the self-preservation desire to be an ostrich and put my head in the sand and ignore all the calamity around me. Times like these, I seek a fantasy world that I can control. My writing calls to me, seeking refuge, I choose to live in Meadowood or Clarkstown with my familiar characters.

Maddie Brooke - Book 3

I’ve been hard at work writing a third book in my southern cozy Maddie Brooke mystery. However, I find I can’t escape some of the influences of the news. American Veterans are taking it on the chin within this administration. Men who have fought for their nation, obeyed orders, sacrificed time with their families ... only to have their government turn their backs on them and deny them health care, benefits, even a roof over their head. I can’t ignore them, even in fiction. In this novel, which I am calling “Death Beneath the Blossoms”, I delve into the affects of PTSD and the suffering some men experience. Do they ever leave the war behind? More likely our veterans carry those experiences with them into their lives, influencing their behaviors and choices. Maddie meets several veterans that display this malady. Do you think PTSD could cause someone to commit murder? This story explores that possibility.

Cherry blossoms are in full bloom at the Magnolia Blossom Inn, yet there are sinister undercurrents on the spring breeze. As I write, I am expanding Maddie’s background, sharing her past conflicts with love and trust. Her friend Lily Chung is given a new opportunity to grow her medical career. I hope readers will enjoy seeing these two women grow and explore new horizons.

What do you think of the cover? Too ghoulish for Mother’s Day?



A.I. Audio Books

I recently received an interesting email from Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) to convert one of my existing Ebooks within their “bookshelf” into an audio book using A.I. generated voice narration. I was intrigued. Reading more about the process, I decided to experiment.

My first Meadowood Mystery was a book called “Scarecrows and Corpses” - I know, another ghoulish title - and it was self-published in KDP. So I decided to use this title to convert into an audio book. What did I have to lose? Following the Amazon process, it was easy to instantly load the Ebook format on file into this audio setting. Now the fun part ... I got to audition twenty different A.I. voices to select one that I felt sounded appropriate for this tale. The category ranged from female age 30-40 using American English, to male of the same range, to female or male British English and even a choice of male or female Southern American English and with different age ranges. Some voices were low and more baritone, others a tenor, the female voice more girlish or mature matron. I finally settled on the female, American English voice of a 30-40 age range. After all, the story is told in first person through the eyes of Meredith Gardner, a 30 something wife and mother.

I found that the difficult part of this process came next. Listening. Chapter by chapter, line by line, word by word, I sat and listened to the A.I. generated voice read my story. I had to stop it and start again continuously after inserting pauses where I wanted the narration to pause for effect, like a real human would when reading. There were words that the computer mispronounced and I was given the option to stop and correct the pronunciation by inserting a phonetic word to assist the computer. I found it trying at best to try to indicate where a long “a” would be spoken versus a soft “a”, for instance. The A.I. struggled over the word Avon (the cosmetics that Meredith sold). We all know that word begins with a long “A” sound, but the computer just didn’t quite get it.

The audio edit process took longer than I had expected. It was interesting and at times satisfying to hear my story being spoken, yet frustrating too when I couldn’t resolve a pronunciation issue or make the pause after a particular word or phrase show more emphasis and not merely a blip on the recording.

Overall, the A.I. narrated audio book was a learning experience, cost free, and worth trying. I think. Time will tell. No doubt about it, if you invested the money to hire a real voice actor, the results would be far more superior and satisfying for an author. But hey, with no investment in this process other than my time, I figured, why not?

