

# Five minutes with CAROLINE SCOTT

The historian turned author on her personal connection to her debut wartime novel and her idyllic writing set-up in south-west France

*The Photographer of the Lost* is set in 1921 and is told by two narrators, both of whom are making journeys through France. The novel follows Edie and Harry's parallel journeys, as they piece together memories and information about Francis, until their paths meet in Ypres. There they must confront the truth, and their own complex feelings.

Writing *The Photographer of the Lost* was, in many ways, a way of exploring and connecting with my own family history. I wanted to get closer to my great-grandfather's experience of the First World War and, in particular, to understand the reasons why he went 'absent without leave' in 1918.

Like Francis, another character in my novel, my great-grandfather went home on leave, didn't come back, and ended up in front of a court martial. I wanted to know why he did that, and how he coped with the consequences. I could only get so far with my research, though; the historical record was full of gaps and I was left with questions.

In my twenties, I commuted between London and Belgium, and spent a lot of my time crossing the former battlefields. Then, in 2004, I moved down to south-west France with my family. We bought an old farmhouse, and with my interest in the First World War, I couldn't help wonder if the men who lived within these walls had gone off to fight in the north, and if they came home again. France lost over a million men to the war, and every little village here has



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its own memorial, often with a strikingly long list of names carved upon it. The shockwaves of the war reverberated all the way down the length of France. I brought a French soldier into my novel, and the consecration of a village war memorial, because I wanted to tell that story.

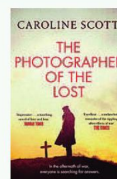
My favourite parts of living in France are the tranquillity, the landscape and architecture, in all its variety, the sense of history and community, the conviviality, the food and the wine! I live in a tiny farming hamlet and it's gloriously peaceful here.

All I hear is birdsong and the occasional tractor engine. People pay to go on writing retreats to places like this, so I know I'm very lucky. I usually sit down to write after lunch. I usually work at the dining-room table (dog underneath) or out in the garden in summer. At the moment, I'm often still out in the garden with my notebook at 10pm. The evenings are just so beautiful right now. I love watching the swallows and the sunsets.

*Caroline Scott was talking to Helen Parkinson. The paperback edition of The Photographer of the Lost by Caroline Scott is out now.*

# Books

## HISTORICAL FICTION



**THE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE LOST**  
Caroline Scott  
£8.99, Simon & Schuster

We meet the characters of Scott's debut novel in the aftermath of the First World War as Europe lies in ruins and people are piecing back what remains of their lives, the after-effects of conflict still an enormous weight on their shoulders. Photographers dedicate themselves to documenting the graves of the fallen on the battlefields of France, while women seek their lost husbands. Thanks to Scott's emotive writing style, you'll cry for the lost and cheer at any glimmers of hope; a moving depiction of a search for answers through wounded France.

## ART



**L'ORIGINE: THE SECRET LIFE OF THE WORLD'S MOST EROTIC MASTERPIECE**  
Lilianne Milgrom

£13.85, Little French Girl Press  
Perhaps the world's most famous female nude, Gustave Courbet's risqué *L'Origine du Monde* caused a scandal in the 19th century; now it takes pride of place in the Musée d'Orsay. Author Milgrom was the first artist granted by the museum to copy it and spent six weeks in its company, inspiring her novel. The result is a fascinating fictionalised dive into the masterpiece's history, beginning with Courbet and his model Constance Queniaux's close encounter. This is French art history with a twist!