A NOVEL & FEATURE FILM

COLOMA

Everyone in Coloma is digging for something.
Kate August is about to dig up her family.

Generational mystery · Haunted love story



Based on the novel by Suzy Sammons · Draft for discussion · November 2026

LOGLINE

Can a 150-year-old murder be the catalyst that leads a cynical woman to finally believe in the love of her father and unlock a mystery that can change the story of a whole town? But to redeem both her past and the past of the Victorian she inherited, *she must trust the son of the family who committed the original crime.*

COLD OPEN

October 1972. The house says no.



Young Don August roars into Coloma in a black Mustang, waving trust papers that prove the Vineyard House belongs to his family.

On the third-floor balcony, Robert Wallis offers him a payday to sign it all away. Broke and afraid, Don takes his hand.

The house erupts. Windows blow out. The balcony turns to liquid — and the ghost of Martin August throws Don over the rail… and then catches him.

Don drives back to Chicago and never speaks of it again.

Thirty years later, his daughter gets the house.



THE WORLD

Coloma, California — Truths Still Buried



The town

One main street on the American River. Rafters in summer, ghost hunters all year. The bank, the souvenir shop and the judge all answer to one man: Robert Wallis IV.



The house

A peeling pink Victorian built like a puzzle box: secret rooms, a hidden speakeasy, love notes in a tin box. Over the fireplace hangs a portrait of the man who stole it.



The vineyard

Planted by Martin August in the 1850s, gone wild on seven acres below the house. One row is still alive — because someone has been tending it in secret.

THE STORY

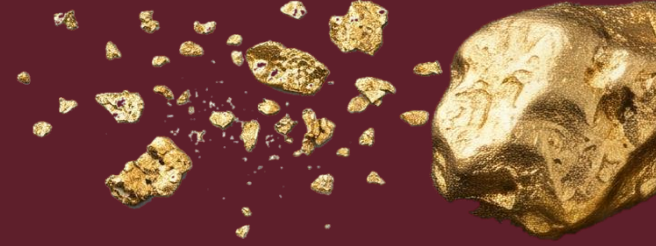
Buried Truths



Katherine August built a successful Chicago ad agency career and has never let go of one cynical belief: every man cheats, just like her father. When Don August dies under a semi truck, he leaves her a mystery: a haunted Victorian in Coloma, California, where the Gold Rush began.

She arrives to sell it fast. Instead, she finds a quiet, town oppressed by generations of corruption. Then she meets Martin August, her great-great-grandfather whose “suicide” was actually a murder. Now Kate must face the mystery that winds all the way to her own father.

As Kate digs, Robert Wallis IV tightens his grip around the lie he’s been protecting, and a 30-year-old note in her father’s handwriting overturns everything she believed about him. To free Martin, the house and a town still under the Wallis thumb, **Kate** must trust the one Wallis who wants to break the chain of corruption, who also happens to be the man who will break open her own highly controlled life.



THE THEME

What is your gold?

Martin dug for gold and found it in the vines.

Kate digs through her father's lies — and her own.

Jack digs out from under his family's name.

Every answer is the same: freedom.





OUR HEROINE

Kate August, 32

Razor-sharp, funny, armored. A St. Regis penthouse with a view of Lake Michigan and a Rubik’s cube she scrambles and solves when she can’t feel anything.

Underneath: a girl who wanted her father to love her without having to earn it. When he's killed, the battle she’s constructed can never be resolved.

THE ARC

Katherine → Kate

She insists on “Katherine” when she hides behind control and “Kate” when she risks the truth.

Control → Trust

She tells Jack Wallis the worst thing about herself, expecting him to leave. He doesn’t.

THE CENTRAL TRIANGLE

The heir, the enemy's son and the ghost



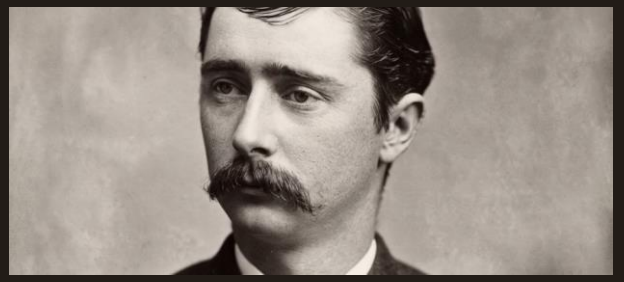
Kate August

The surprising living heir. Digs for deeper truth as a way of life, except her own because she fears what it might say about her.



Jack Wallis

Winemaker with a law degree he only uses when backed into a corner. Quietly tending the vines his family stole. To break the chain he must betray his father. He's the one man her thesis can't test.



Martin August

German immigrant, Gold Rusher, vineyard pioneer. Throat cut in 1879, ruled a suicide, and that deceit shaped generations of mis-used wealth. He appears only to Kate and his emotions make the house erupt.

THE ENSEMBLE

Every one of them disproves her thesis





Kate's sister **Rachel**, a San Francisco realtor, loves her with a patience that never runs out, however hard Kate tests it. Rachel's husband **Craig**, an accidental celebrity pastor and history buff, is the one man who can match Kate's wit and challenge all her assumptions. And her brother **Michael.** He's the touchstone who rolls in with his wife and three boys in a fancy RV, gently saying the hardest truths, usually through movie quotes.



Coloma has been waiting for an August to return. **Charles Garcia**, 80, carries four generations of winemaking that Martin taught his family. He calls Kate "mija" and keeps a shotgun handy. **Sally Chambers**, the museum curator who protects the town's reputation, has never said no to a Wallis — until now. And **Joe Buchanan** rebuilt his tavern with his own hands, loves his wife, and has no idea how rare that makes him.

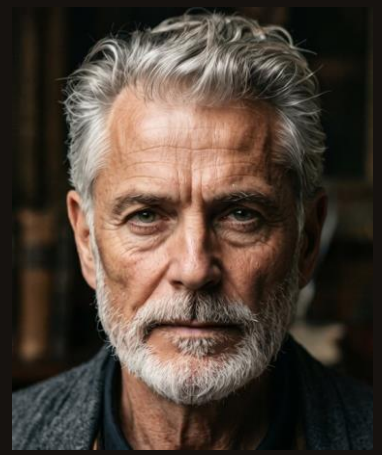
Then there's **Killer Lucky**, a sassy black Lab who chooses Kate on first sense. She calls him Killer. Jack calls him Lucky and he always knows when Martin is in the room.

THE ANTAGONIST

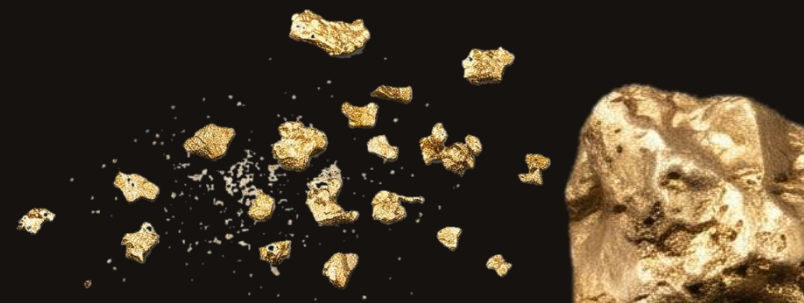
Robert Wallis IV

Owns the bank, the town budget and the judge. His late wife was his only conscience; without her he is dangerous in the same way a cornered animal is.

Five generations knew the truth. Each kept it hidden.



Generation	How he kept it buried
Robert I	Stood silent, married the widow, took the vineyard
Robert II	The law: rezoning out anyone curious
Robert III	Money and a fake haunting to scare people off
Robert IV	Isolation; kept it even from his son
Jack	Breaks the chain



THE FOURTH LEAD

The house is a character

Martin built a puzzle box. Kate carries a Rubik's cube. Neither one can be solved one side at a time.

It reacts

When Martin rages, floors heave and glass flies. When he grieves, the house goes cold and still.

It's a puzzle

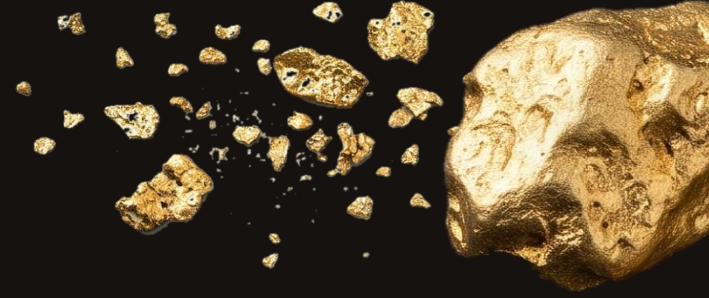
False panels, a hidden speakeasy, love letters in a tin box. Kate twists her cube when she can't feel anything. The house is the first puzzle she can't solve alone — and every move that opens it scrambles a side of her she'd kept perfect.

It has two hauntings

The Wallis family's fake one — mannequins, lighting rigs, hidden cameras — and the real one. In the end, the fake rig's cameras catch the arsonist.

It has a dog

Killer Lucky arrives starving and neglected, like the house. He heals as it heals, and he always knows when Martin is in the room.



TONE

Witty on the surface. Aching underneath.

Knives Out

A witty, crowded family whodunit around a contested house.

Practical Magic

A warm haunted house, sisters, and a curse that is really about love.

Under the Tuscan Sun

A woman remaking her life by restoring a ruin far from home.

A ghost story that is really about forgiveness — of a father, and of yourself.

ROOTED IN A TRUE STORY

The author is an August

One family's name, restored beyond the word "suicide."



Martin August is drawn from Martin Allhoff, a German immigrant vintner in Coloma whose death was recorded as a suicide.

Author Suzy Sammons, born an Althoff, descends from his brother's line. The Vineyard House is a real Victorian in Coloma, long said to be haunted.

Suzy brings 30 years in advertising and a formative stint as CEO of the Dove Foundation, and is currently co-founder and COO of Society Arts. (SocietyArts.com)

BEYOND THE FILM

A story that can bring a real town back

A sequel built in

Book Two is planned. The ending leaves Kate and Jack at one kiss, and a player piano starts playing by itself: Louisa isn't finished.

The real house

A proposed partnership with the Vineyard House's owners to restore the property alongside the production. [Status: to be discussed]

The town

Film tourism for a Gold Rush town, and a story-world wine: Jack's first vintage from Martin's one surviving row. [Ideas — to be developed]

THE PACKAGE

Where the project stands

Item	Status
Source material	Novel manuscript in development
Format	Feature film, PG-13, ~[110] minutes
Screenplay	[Screenwriter to be attached]
Attached	Suzy Sammons — author, [producer role to confirm]
Budget	$6MM - $9MM

Everyone came to Coloma for gold.

The Augusts came back for the truth.

C O L O M A

Suzy Sammons ·
Nashville, Tennessee
suzy@hawkeye.pro
suzysammons.com
310.795.7868

