

SUNDAY

Interview of Author Karen McCullough



Today it's my pleasure to present an interview of romance author Karen McCullough.

Latest Book: A Gift for Murder, MMP edition

Buy Link: <http://www.harlequin.com/storeitem.html?iid=25947&cid=337>

BIO:

Karen McCullough is the author of ten published novels in the mystery, romantic suspense, and fantasy genres and has won numerous awards, including an Eppie Award for fantasy. Her short fiction has appeared in several anthologies and small press publications. Her most recent novel releases are MAGIC, MURDER AND MICROCIRCUITS, a paranormal mystery/suspense novel now available in most electronic formats, and A GIFT FOR MURDER, published in hardcover by Five Star/Gale Group Mysteries and in mass market paperback by Worldwide Mystery Library. She invites visitors to check out her home on the web at <http://www.kmccullough.com>

Q: What's the first thing you did when you received word you'd sold a book?

A: It's been more than 20 years since I first got the THE CALL. And it was a phone call, although I was at work at the time. I came home to find a message on my answering machine from an editor at Avalon Books saying they wanted to buy my romantic suspense novel, The Night Prowlers.

I remember jumping up and down in the kitchen where the answering machine was and then taking the tape out of the machine to save it before I went to yell the good news to the rest of the family.

Q: What part of the book is the easiest for you to write? Why?

A: Usually the very first couple of chapters are pretty clear in my head when I begin so I tend to write those very quickly. And I have some idea of the ending and most of the plot threads have been drawn together by the end, so that's not hard either.

Q: What part of the book is the hardest for you? Why?

A: All of the middle. Because I don't use detailed outlines, I generally have only a foggy idea of how my characters get from beginning to end, so I have to set up a lot of the plot developments as I go along. That means the part from chapter three or four to about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through the story is pretty difficult as I figure out what the real problems are, how they develop, and how they're going to work out.

I almost always hit a point, usually right around the three-quarters point, where I pretty much despair of the story and want to give it up. I'm convinced it's terrible, pointless, and I'll never make it into anything anyone would want to read. It takes some a real push to make myself work through that to get to the end.

Q: Do all your heroes and all heroines look the same in your mind as you "head write"?

A: Absolutely not. They're all very much individuals, and I can usually see them in my mind in great detail right from the beginning. I don't always know as much about who they are on the inside—I tend to learn that as I go along, but I know what they look like from the outset. I'm not sure where the mental pictures come from since I don't cast actors or try to find pictures of the people initially. I just know what they look like in my mind, including hair and eye color, the shape of the face and important features, scars or other unusual things, even their physical size and weight. I even visualize secondary characters very specifically.

Q: Do you eat comfort food when writing? If so, what food inspires your imagination?

A: Mostly not. I can't afford the weight I'd gain if I ate while writing. What drives my writing (and most of my life, in truth) is coffee. I love the taste of coffee, and I'm a bit of a snob about it. I like really good coffee, and I'm willing to spend a bit more to get the good beans.

Q: What hobby do you enjoy when not writing?

A: I have several. I'm a big sports fan. In spring and summer I love going to baseball games, either at the local ballpark, where we have a class A team, or to major league games when I'm in a city with a team. In the fall, pro football. Since I live in North Carolina, I root for the Carolina Panthers, although I have an emotional attachment to the New England Patriots that dates back to my teenage years in Massachusetts. Most of my family still lives in the Boston area as well.

In winter it's college basketball – Duke all the way, since my undergraduate degree is from Duke.

I'm also an avid gardener. Nothing inspires me like digging in the dirt and watching seeds sprout into plants and then bloom with gorgeous flowers.

And, of course, I read... As much as I can manage, given how many other things I have going on in my life. Most of my reading is done late at night as I'm winding down from the day.

Q: What is your favorite romance book that you've read?

A: Favorite romance book – that's hard. I don't read much straight romance. I prefer romantic

suspense or paranormal romance. It's hard to pinpoint one favorite, but the list of favorites includes most of Mary Stewart's novels, particularly MADAM, WILL YOU TALK? and THIS ROUGH MAGIC; Barbara Michael's books, especially AMMIE, COME HOME and INTO THE DARKNESS; CRY NO MORE by Linda Howard; PRIDE AND PREJUDICE; and one historical that really worked for me: DEVIL IN WINTER by Lisa Kleypas.

Tell us where to find you: website(s), publisher's page(s), blog(s), Facebook page(s), etc. List them all!

<http://www.kmccullough.com/>><http://www.kmccullough.com>

<http://www.kmccullough.com/kblog>

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#%21/karenmccullough>

<https://twitter.com/#%21/kgmccullough>

Amazon page: [http://www.amazon.com/Karen-](http://www.amazon.com/Karen-McCullough/e/B0043TJ870/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_pop_1)

[McCullough/e/B0043TJ870/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_pop_1](http://www.amazon.com/Karen-McCullough/e/B0043TJ870/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_pop_1)

Market Mysteries Site: <http://www.marketcentermysteries.cm>

Web Design site: <http://www.karenswebworks.com/>

BLURB:

For fifty-one weeks of the year, Heather McNeil loves her job as assistant to the director of the Washington, D.C. Commerce & Market Show Center. But the Gifts and Home Decorations trade show, the biggest show of the year at the center, is a week-long nightmare. This year's version is being worse than usual. Misplaced shipments, feuding exhibitors, and malfunctioning popcorn machines are all in a day's work. Finding the body of a murdered executive dumped in a trash bin during the show isn't. The discovery tips throws Heather's life—personal and professional—into havoc.

The police suspect the victim's wife killed him, but Heather doesn't believe it. She's gotten glimmers of an entirely different scenario and possible motive. Questioning exhibitors about the crime doesn't make her popular with them or with her employers, but if she doesn't identify the murderer before the show ends, the culprit will remain free to kill again.

Her only help comes from an exhibitor with ulterior motives and the Market Center's attractive new security officer, Scott Brandon. Despite opposition from some of the exhibitors, her employers, and the police, Heather seeks to expose the killer before the show ends. To solve the mystery, she will have to risk what's most important to her and be prepared to fight for answers, her job, and possibly her life.

EXCERPT:

(Note: the first chapter is available at my site here:

<http://www.kmccullough.com/Murder.php>. This excerpt is from Chapter 3)

I reached the Center a little past seven, way earlier than needed, but what else was I going to do when I was awake, showered, hair-dried, dressed, and in possession of a triple-shot, venti cappuccino?

I had a key to one of the service entrances, but rarely used it, since the main doors were generally open by the time I arrived. At seven-ten they were locked, gated and alarmed. Unfortunately, the entrance my key fit was on the far side of the building. Since the Market Center takes up an entire large city block, it was a long walk around.

An eerie quiet prevailed. The ever-present city traffic was beginning to increase, but the usual cacophony of motors and horns and sirens remained muted. A cool mist hung in the air, starting to dissipate as the sun brightened. Only one other person walked the sidewalk, and she was

across the street.

The tap of my heels on concrete seemed to echo in the early morning emptiness.

I felt alone in the world, an odd sensation, and—given what the day promised to be like—a pleasant one.

I was totally unprepared to round the corner and all but run into a man coming toward me from the other direction. I managed to swing my hand with the coffee out of harm's way, just in time.

We stopped just inches apart. He grunted in surprise, stepped back first, and said, "Heather . . . McNeil, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Scott? Craig said he'd hired you, but what are you doing here so early? Didn't he tell you we start work at eight? The building doesn't even open until seven-thirty."

He shrugged, drawing my attention to the broad shoulders encased in a battered leather jacket. Something about the guy set my hormones fizzing. Sexual charisma, I suppose, whatever that is. I glanced at his face. Definitely compelling. He had a sharp, narrow jaw. His nose's lack of symmetry suggested it had been broken, and his thin mouth appeared mean until he smiled. It added up to a man who looked hard, cold and tough. I hadn't thought that way yesterday, but maybe he'd tried to make a good impression.

After all, he was applying for a job.

He held himself with a tense alertness. It gave him the air of someone always on guard against attack.

At first he didn't answer my question about being early, but I waited, and finally he said, "I like to check out places where I'm going to work. To figure the lay of the land."

"You've done security work before?"

He nodded.

"Good. We're going to need all the help we can get. Today may be a rough start for you. Did Craig tell you about—"

"The body in the trash can? I saw it on the news last night. Was that, by any chance, your missing executive?" He focused sharply on me. His eyes were neither green nor gray nor blue, but some of each.

Nice eyes, but cool.

I couldn't handle that stare right now, so I turned and headed for the side door. "Come with me. I've got a key. Yes, it was our missing executive."

He walked beside me. "Any idea what happened?"

"The police haven't said much about it."

"The news report said it was being treated as a criminal investigation."

I stopped for a moment, surprised to hear that confirmed so soon. "I guessed it would be," I said, more to myself than to him.

“Why?”

We reached the door and I put the key in the lock. He pushed it open and followed me inside. “If it were an accident,” I said, “why would my missing executive end up with cardboard and stuff on top of him?”

Posted by Marianne Stephens at [12:01 AM](#)

4 comments:



[Sharon Hamilton](#) said...

Karen, so good of you to share your writing process - always something I love reading. When you get to that tough part, what do you do to get through it, or do you just persevere? Any tips or things that jump start your muse?

Great excerpt. Going on my TBR.

[July 8, 2012 10:39 AM](#)



[Paris](#) said...

Welcome Karen and thanks for sharing! Your excerpt is wonderful. I love a good mystery:)

[July 8, 2012 12:21 PM](#)



[Cara Marsi](#) said...

I enjoyed your writing process. Your new book sounds terrific. I love mysteries. I also love coffee so I'm with you there. I too got my first "call" from Avalon. Good luck with your new book.

[July 8, 2012 3:48 PM](#)

[Karen McCullough](#) said...

Hi Guys --

My apologies for taking so long to respond. My Internet got knocked out by some fierce storms and I've been trying to catch up ever since it came back on.

Sharon - On the tough parts, I find if I just make myself keep going, even if it's one sentence at a time, I can push my way through it. I frequently bribe myself. I love playing computer solitaire, so I make a deal with myself... I can only play a game after I've written one sentence. After I write that sentence, I can play one game, then I have to write another sentence. I eventually find that the muse picks up and will get rolling again that way.

Paris and Cara ... Thank you for the nice comments!

[July 11, 2012 10:01 AM](#)

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