

Romance Promo Central Interview

<http://romancepromocentral.com/2012/09/29/interview-with-karen-mccullough-author-of-a-question-of-fire/>

Interview with Karen McCullough, author of *A Question of Fire*

*Romance Promo Central is happy to welcome Karen McCullough to the blog. Karen is here to answer some of our questions about her book, **A Question of Fire** and also about her writing. If this book sounds like something you would be interested in reading please use the buy links at the bottom of the post to pick up a copy.*

RPC – How would you describe your book in 20 words or less without using the blurb?

Karen – For *A Question of Fire*: Cathy Bennett finds both love and danger when she's the recipient of a murdered man's last words. For *A Gift for Murder*: Murderous competition at trades shows usually doesn't take quite such a literal turn.

RPC – How would my friends describe me in 20 words or less?

Karen – A head full of conflict, violence, sex, and mayhem hidden beneath a quiet, reserved, analytical demeanor.

RPC – Did you always have in mind to be a writer or it just happened?

Karen – I never actually decided I wanted to be a writer. I sort of slid into it sideways. I spent fifteen years as a computer programmer, a job I loved until burnout set in. (You know you're burned out when you start dreaming lines of Cobol.) I moved into writing software documentation, discovered that I actually enjoyed writing and began doing more nonfiction. But I've always been a reader, and I've always had stories swirling around in my head, so it wasn't a surprise when I decided to try writing my first short story. (I do have to credit my husband for planting the seed, though. One day, kind of out of the blue, he suggested I try my hand at writing a science fiction story. So I did.) That was so addicting, I had to do it again. And again. And pretty soon my short stories were turning into novels, and well, here I am, many novels, novellas, and short stories later, still doing it.

RPC – Aside from writing, what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Karen – Lots of things! I love reading, long walks, working in the garden, theater, movies, dinners with friends, and watching sports on television, especially baseball, pro football and college basketball.

RPC – What's the hardest part of writing a book?

Karen – Actually writing it! No, I know that sounds kind of flip, but really it's not. Writing a book means spending hours and hours a day in the chair, at the keyboard, putting words on paper (or on screen these days). It's demanding work. Every word has to be considered, every sentence examined and each paragraph evaluated. Does it help set the scene? Say something about the characters? Advance the plot? Each sentence is a piece of a giant puzzle, and it has to fit with all the others so that by the time you get to the end, the picture is clear and beautiful.

RPC – What's your favorite part of writing a book?

Karen – I have two favorites actually. I really enjoy writing the first chapter or a new book because it's all exciting and new and anything's possible. The second is when I get to a certain point in the story where all the loose plot threads come together in my head and I can see exactly how it will all work out. The latter usually happens about three or four chapters from the end, and at that point I can hardly type fast enough.

RPC – Your favorite books and author?

Karen – Favorite Books and Authors: J.R.R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings; Andre Norton's Witch World books, especially Year of the Unicorn and 'Ware Hawk; Barbara Michaels: Ammie, Come Home, Witch, Into the Darkness; Mary Stewart: Madam, Will You Talk, This Rough Magic, My Brother Michael; Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden books; Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse stories. I'm also a major fan of the British Regency and Victorian novelists: Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, the Brontes, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, and Elizabeth Gaskell, among others.

RPC – How important do you find the communication between you and your readers? Do you reply to their messages or read their reviews?

Karen – It's important. I don't get a lot of reader mail, but I always try to respond when I do. I also read reviews, though sometimes I wish I didn't. I appreciate reviews, even negative reviews, that tell me something useful about a story and why it succeeds or fails for readers. A review that says nothing more than "This is crap" doesn't help, but a review that tells me that a character's actions don't seem in line with his personality or that certain actions don't make sense in the context are useful and can help me improve this book or later ones.

RPC – Favorite place in the world?

Karen – Wherever I am at the moment, because I really do appreciate each moment as a gift. That said, I love to travel, but haven't done nearly as much of it as I'd like to. Places I've been that I've really enjoyed: The Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina/South Carolina beaches, the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Boston, New York, Washington, D.C. I have a son who lives in Oxford, England, and I really enjoy visiting there. There's a long list of other places I want to go.

RPC – Are you working on anything new and if so when can we expect to see it?

Karen – I'm currently a bit over halfway through the sequel to my recent mystery release, A Gift for Murder. My tentative title is Wired for Murder. I hope to have it finished within the next couple of months, but when it will be published is still unknown.

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Karen McCullough is the author of a dozen published novels and novellas in the mystery, romantic suspense, and fantasy genres and has won numerous awards, including an Eppie Award for fantasy. She's also been a four-time Eppie finalist, and a finalist in the Prism, Dream Realm, Rising Star, Lories, Scarlett Letter, and Vixen Awards contests. Her short fiction has appeared in several anthologies and numerous small press publications in the fantasy, science fiction, and romance genres. She has three children, three grandchildren and lives in Greensboro, NC, with her husband of many years.

Karen can be found:

[Website](#) * [Blog](#) * [Twitter](#)



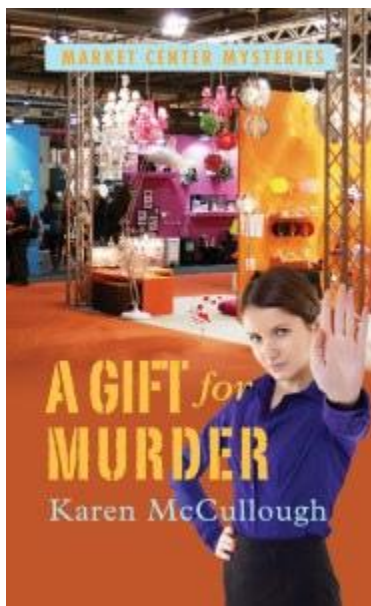
Blurb for A Question of Fire:

When Catherine Bennett agrees to attend an important party as a favor for her boss, she knows she won't enjoy it, but she doesn't expect to end up holding a dying man in her arms. Nor did she anticipate she'd become the recipient of his last message about the location of evidence that would prove his brother innocent of murder. Now the killers are after her to get that information. She'll need the help of attorney Peter Lowell, as well as the victim's difficult, prickly younger brother and a handsome private detective to help her find the evidence before the killers do.

A Question of Fire is available:

[Kindle](#) * [Nook](#) * [iTunes](#) * [Kobo](#) * [Smashwords](#)

[Order trade paperback from author](#)



Blurb for A Gift for Murder

The Gifts and Home Decoration trade show provides Heather McNeill with the longest week of her hectic life. As assistant to the director of Washington, D.C.'s, Market and Commerce center, she's point person for complaining exhibitors, missing shipments and miscellaneous disasters. It's a job she takes in stride—until murder crashes the event.

A major supplier of gifts and accessories is found dead in a Dumpster, a wound to the head indicating it was no accident. Heather's first priority is damage control—keep the rumor mill from killing the trade show. The victim, Tim Bethel, left behind a trail of broken hearts—including his wife's. Though Mrs. Bethel may be the prime suspect, Heather thinks the true motive for murder involves Tim's business indiscretions, not his personal ones. But can she solve the crime before she loses her career, her sanity...or her life?

A Gift for Murder is available:

[Amazon \(Hardcover\)](#) * [Barnes & Noble](#) * [Harlequin](#)

eBook coming soon!

Excerpt from A Question of Fire:

Chapter One

“Miss!”

The word slithered from the bushes behind her, startling Catherine Bennett out of the few wits she'd managed to recover in the peace of the dark, quiet garden. Thready strains of violin music and the buzz of voices drifted across the lawn from the open door to the house. In the light spilling out from it, she could distinguish a couple of people sitting at a table on the deck. Cathy measured the distance with her eye. A good, heavy-duty scream would be heard, even over the party noises.

“Please, miss!” Tense urgency drove the voice as it called again.

She didn't need this. The evening had been disastrous enough already and a man hiding in the garden spelled trouble with capital letters. She got up and backed away, while turning to face the source of the call.

“Don't run away, please,” the voice begged. “I won't hurt you. I promise. I just want to ask you something.”

A ring of sincerity in the pleading tone kept her from sprinting straight back to the house, an action the more cautious part of her brain urged. Cathy strained for a look at the person in the shrubbery. The voice was male and adult, though probably not very old. “Come out where I can see you,” she demanded.

“Shhh!” he ordered in a fierce whisper. Leaves rustled, and a slender shape detached itself from the bushes. In the darkness she couldn't distinguish his features.

A light breeze in her face set her shivering. “What do you want?” She backed another step away. They both jumped when a particularly loud laugh rang across the yard.

He turned to face the house. “You been at the party?”

At it, not of it, Cathy thought. She didn't say so; the young man wouldn't understand the distinction. “Yes,” she answered.

“You know a guy named Peter Lowell?”

“Yes,” Cathy admitted, wondering where this was leading.

The young man's indrawn breath sounded almost like a sob. “He's in there, ain't he?”

“Yes.”

“Could you ask him to come out here?”

“I don’t know. We just met tonight and I . . . I don’t think he liked me very much. He might not come.”

“Please. It’s real important. You gotta try.” A quiver shook the young man’s body and voice. Tension or fear — or both? Whichever it was, he sounded near the breaking point.

“All right. Who should I tell him is here?”

The clouds drifted apart and the moon emerged from their shadow. A sliver of light fell across the man’s cheek and glinted off the sheen of perspiration there. “Tell him . . . Tell him it’s Bobby. He’ll come, I promise.”

Cathy sighed. “All right, I’ll try. Wait here.” She turned toward the house when another noise sounded behind them — the crackle of twigs or dried leaves underfoot.

Bobby’s head jerked around toward the bushes, then he called again, “Wait!” There was no mistaking the sheer desperation in his voice now. “Please. Wait.” He looked from her face to the shrubbery and back again. “I better give you the message. Tell this to Mr. Lowell, and no one else. Promise you won’t tell anyone else?”

Cathy went back to him, found one of his arms, and pulled him back into the shadow of a large boxwood. The arm she held was trembling. “All right,” she said. “What’s the message?”

The young man looked around the yard and took a couple of quick, shallow breaths. “Tell him Danny was framed. I got the proof. Tell him—”

Another rustle shook the bushes, followed by a sudden, sharp crack which reverberated for a few seconds afterward. Bobby groaned and collapsed, sagging against Cathy. The abrupt burden of his weight drove her to the ground, where she found herself half crushed by the young man’s bulk. She moved out from under him, a rush of adrenalin sharpening her senses so that she could hear, over Bobby’s ragged breathing, the squish of a footstep in the shrubbery and the churning of leaves and branches fading rapidly as the gunman retreated.

Cathy stood up and started toward the brush to follow the noise, but changed her mind when a choked groan from Bobby called her back. He sprawled motionless on the ground where she had pushed him when she stood up. The moonlight provided little illumination, but a new, large smudge stained the young man’s light shirt. “Please. Tell Lowell—” He choked on the words.

Cathy found one of his hands and tried to tell him to be still, to be quiet, she’d get help. His breathing was harsh, rattling, and difficult.

Bobby moved his head in a bare negative motion. “Tell Lowell . . .” He worked for a breath. “God, please . . .” He tried again. “Danny . . .” He paused and the hand she held clenched. “In the air . . .”

Breath and strength deserted him at the same time. The fingers clasping hers went slack and slid out of her grasp.

Cathy did scream then, yelling for help at the top of her voice, though she knew the man on the ground was beyond assistance. She stood and ran back to the house. People responding to her cry met her as she got to the bottom of the stairs, and she managed to choke out the words to explain that someone needed to call the police and an ambulance.

When a man said he'd make the calls, she went back to the site of the shooting, leading a knot of strangers. The young man still sprawled, face up and unmoving, on the grass. Cathy collapsed beside him. She picked up his hand again, and held it while they waited in the darkness. She asked one of the people to find Peter Lowell and bring him. She shivered as the breeze blew across her bare arms again, but the tears sliding down her face burned.

Other people joined the group and several pressed questions on her. She explained only that she'd met this person in the garden and he'd been shot by a sniper while they were talking. Someone brought a flashlight and by its glow they ascertained that the young man was indeed dead. Cathy looked away after her first view of him. Stripped of personality, the face told her nothing she didn't already know: he had been young. The crowd was beginning to overwhelm her when she heard a voice she thought she recognized asking to be allowed through.

"Lowell?" she said.

The flashlight swung toward the newcomer, picking out a tall, slender man in a gray suit. The beam glinted in his blond hair and reflected off the lenses of thick glasses. "Yes," he answered. "What's—?" He stopped abruptly. "God Almighty!"

The light had moved back to shine on Cathy. She must look even worse than she knew. She lifted a hand toward him and saw in the light it was red with blood; she let it fall back into her lap and shut her eyes against the glare.

"Turn that away!" Lowell ordered the man with the torch. "You wanted me?" he asked.

"He wanted you." She gestured toward the man on the ground. "He was trying to get a message to you."

"Who is it?"

"He said his name was Bobby."

"Bobby?" The name meant something to him. Lowell went down on one knee beside the body.

"He's dead," Cathy warned.

"Dead!" She could hear his shock. "Bobby? Are you sure?"

“I’m not a doctor, but yes, I’m sure.”

“Dead? No.” Pain sharpened Lowell’s voice to a thin wire of sound. “Oh God, no.” His hand moved to the dead man’s throat, felt for a pulse, then reached up to smooth the hair. “He was trying to get a message to me?” He stopped and swallowed hard. “Did he say what the message was?”

“Yes,” Cathy said.

“What—?” The sharp blaze of a siren cut through the night and the chatter of the crowd. Lowell looked up and surveyed the people gathered around them. “Later,” he said, and Cathy nodded agreement. The siren approached and swooped into the driveway, cutting off abruptly as the police car reached the end of the driveway at the back of the house. Blue lights swirled, reflecting off trees, grass and crowd, throwing crazy shadows over them all. Another siren heralded the arrival of an ambulance just seconds later. People piled out of the ambulance and police car, hauling lights, weapons, and medical equipment.