

A sample of
THE DAY JOB IS MURDER
by Carolyn Arnold

A MCKINLEY MYSTERY
*The Day Job
is Murder*



CAROLYN ARNOLD



Excerpt from *The Day Job is Murder* (Book 1 in the McKinley Mystery series)

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CHAPTER 1

THE DAY JOB

SEAN WENT TO WORK EVERY day, trying to forget the one issue he had with his job. It wasn't the fact the cases never got brighter. It wasn't the limited stretch of political tape and budgets governing every move. He was in love with his partner, Sara Cain, ever since she joined Albany PD Homicide two years ago.

He drove while Sara rode shotgun. He split his attention between the road and glancing over at her. Her birthday was in two days and he still had no idea what he was getting her for a gift, but between driving and his thoughts of that, he appreciated her good looks.

Unlike many of her female counterparts, who seemed to forget they were women once the uniform went on, Sara took care of herself. Her long dark hair was in a loose ponytail, but after shift, she let it fall in soft curls over her shoulders. Her eyes were shadowed in tans and browns and her lipstick was a subtle pink that matched her nails.

Her slender fingers hugged a to-go cup of coffee, and she tipped it back for a sip.

Sean gestured to her cup. "How many is that so far today?"

"Number three, and don't get on my case about it." She glanced over and smiled.

He laughed. "And it's only ten in the morning. Should I be proud of you?"

"Sean, it's my body, my choice."

"So it is, for now anyway." He winked at her.

“Now cut that out.” Her words said one thing, but her softened facial features and the brush of her hand in the air said the opposite—she loved him too. As she had laid it out to him, if they controlled their feelings they could spend every day together without the complications of a romantic relationship. So here they were, years later, still friends but he never stopped wishing for something more.

“How are things going with whatshername anyhow?”

“Whatshername? You can’t hide your jealousy at all, can you? Your memory is flawless.”

“Fine. Nancy.”

“Nancy who?”

She shifted in her seat. “You dumped another one?”

“You make it sound like I have a lot of affairs.”

“No, I didn’t mean it like that. You put up a wall like you’re afraid of commitment, but I don’t think you are. I think you’re looking for Mrs. Right.”

“I’ve already found her.”

The words had slipped out before he thought them through.

“Friends, remember?”

“Yes, I know.” He hated the word. A few years ago, it would have been a different story, but now, having it come up in regards to the confined parameters of their relationship made his heart ache.

She took another draw on her coffee. “What did this one do, anyway?”

“She’s a little attached to her cat, who she named Binkie.”

“And for that you’re not going to see her again?”

“I think that’s a valid reason.”

“All right. So it’s on to the next. You know what it is? I think you’re fussy.”

“Well, that’s my prerogative isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess it is.” Sara turned to look out the window.

With the ending of the conversation, Sean’s mind settled on the case they were investigating. The victim,

Mr. Cunningham, took a bullet to his chest. Crime Scene Investigators had discovered evidence that he had been tapping into his neighbor's cable and racking up huge bills in pay-per-view movies and events. That made his neighbor, Colin Burton, the man they headed for now, their prime suspect.

SEAN HELD UP HIS BADGE to the receptionist, a petite lady in her mid-thirties. "We're looking for Colin Burton."

Sara noted how the woman smiled at Sean, and jealousy spiked through her system. He could have any woman he wanted, and she had to stop entertaining the notion it would ever be her. She had seen to that, hadn't she?

"I'll page him to the front immediately." The receptionist had a whimsical expression etched into her face and her jaw slid askew as her eyes went over Sean.

Sara glanced at him. He wasn't even six feet tall, but he was solid and muscular. He took care of himself, opting to drink only one mug of coffee a day, giving preference to a glass of orange juice over the popular caffeinated stimulant. His face was always shaven, his brown eyes clear and intelligent, and he exuded charm.

Sara's eyes went back to the woman and she smiled politely while swallowing the inclination to glare at her instead. She cleared her throat.

"See, it's all that coffee you drink. It's not helping your immune system," Sean said.

She knew he was referring to her cough. "Uh-huh."

"Detectives?"

Colin Burton approached. He was a stocky man who basically waddled in, rather than walked. His deeply-set pale brown eyes focused on them.

They had spoken to him before, briefly, at his house, but hadn't taken him in for further questioning at the time. However, as they reviewed the case and discovered that the high cable bills nearly resulted in a bankruptcy claim, their

interest in Burton increased.

Sean put his hand on Burton's shoulder. "We're going to need to take you downtown for some questioning."

"Am I under arrest?" He shrugged free of Sean's grip.

"You aren't yet, but we'd appreciate your cooperation."

The receptionist watched, with large eyes and a gaping mouth, as Sean lead Burton out the door.

She leaned over the counter and asked Sara, "He single?"

"Married."

"Oh, even better. Give him my number." The woman quickly scribbled on a sticky note and passed it to Sara.

Sara smiled, but she had crumpled the paper into a tight ball in the palm of her hand by the time she got into the car.

"Watch your head." Sean guided Burton into the back seat.

"You haven't cuffed me. That means I'm not under arrest."

"If you'd like the full experience, I could put them on you."

Sara glanced over her shoulder to see Burton's face pale.

"Like I thought," Sean said and then made his way to the driver's seat, where he clicked up his belt, and turned the ignition.

"See, you could have any woman. She was interested." Sara pointed to the building.

"Sara, let it go. I don't need a matchmaking service." He paused to smile.

He must have sensed she was uncomfortable. Her fist clenched around the note. It would have a home in the first garbage can she came across.

He continued, "I've already made my stand cl—"

Burton vomited.

"Lovely. I'm not sure which is worse—the sound or the—oh, it's definitely the smell." Sean covered his mouth and lowered his foot on the gas.

SARA WAS BENT OVER, inside the back of the department-issued

sedan. "I can't believe we're still cleaning puke."

"Some days are better than others."

She smiled. "Leave it to you to always look at the bright side."

"We've just exchanged drunks for nervous murder suspects."

She laughed. He loved the way her eyes creased, and the way her nose wrinkled with the expression.

"Well, I consider that progress."

"Easy to say when you're not the one doing the cleaning." She tossed the used towels in the garbage, returned the cleaner to the shelf, then picked up her coffee cup, taking a draw.

"You insisted. We could have gotten a uniformed officer to take care of it."

"I know, but I don't like to do that."

"Yes, I know. Our car, our responsibility. You're too good to be real, you know that?"

"There you go again."

He shrugged and kept pace with her on the way to the interview room. Outside, she placed a hand on his forearm.

"Oh, I meant to tell you something." She glanced in at Burton, and then back to Sean. "It's probably poor timing now, but you still have time."

She peered into his eyes and seemed to be studying them, assessing something. What, he wasn't sure. So, while she probed his eyes, he appreciated the color of hers—brown with flecks of green and gold.

"I was reading the obits this morning and I came across the name Douglas Quinn. You knew him, didn't you? I remember you mentioning him."

His breathing paused. Old Man Quinn. It had been a long time since he'd heard that name, but he'd never forget him.

"His funeral is this afternoon at three o'clock. You have time to make it."

"Nah, I have, we have—what happened?"

"The piece read 'he died peacefully at home, at the age of

eighty-three.” She touched Sean’s arm. “It’s okay. Go. I can take care of this.”

Guilt weighed him down. It had been years—over a decade—since he’d last seen him. Sean was twenty-two when they first met and he’d be thirty-three this coming September. The sad part was he wouldn’t even have known about Quinn’s death if it wasn’t for Sara’s strange habit of reading the obituaries.

“Go on. I can tell you want to.” Concern laced her eyes. “Do you want me to go with you? You know, as a friend, for support?”

There was that word, again. Friend. It must have entered conversation twenty times a shift.

Sean leaned against the window and looked into the interview room. Burton was biting his fingernails. The bad habit made Sean shiver in disgust.

He looked back to Sara. “I should go.”

“Well then, go.”

He nodded slowly, saddened by Quinn’s death. They had been close for a time, but life got busy and their visits weaned off to non-existence—Sean’s fault, not Quinn’s. But he still remembered their first meeting like it was yesterday. It was around Christmas, and he was only a beat cop at the time.

CHAPTER 2

MEETING MR. QUINN

ELEVEN YEARS EARLIER...

“WE HAVE A TWO-ELEVEN IN progress, Mr. Convenience variety, corner of Hawk Street South and Morton Avenue.”

Robbery.

“Dispatch, this is unit three-oh-five. Our ETA is two minutes. Responding to call. Over.”

“Unit three-oh-five. Acknowledged.”

Sean’s training officer, Jimmy Voigt, returned the radio to its cradle. “You ready, Sean? This is the real deal.”

Sean nodded, letting out a deep rush of breath.

“Just stay alert and don’t try to be a hero. Heroes get shot.” Voigt gave the sirens life and they wailed into the night air.

Sean had been through this speech a hundred, if not a thousand, times. No call was routine, no matter what it appeared to be on the surface. Each response had the potential of being the last.

“*There’s a bunch of crazies out there.*” Voigt had said, on day one.

Sean’s insides churned and had him thinking about the antacids tucked in his jacket pocket, but he would manage without them. It was just nerves, adrenaline. It also made his chest heavy and his breathing uneven, bringing with it a tingling sensation that started in the earlobes and moved down, creating a burning heat in his solar plexus. He liked

to think it was his cop intuition that would keep him alive and one step ahead of the bad guys.

Mr. Convenience was in sight and they were closing in fast. The two-minute estimate Voigt had provided dispatch came in at just over one. The speed had turned the images into blurs and the wet pavement refracted the whirling blue and red lights.

“Dispatch, unit three-oh-five, on scene.”

“Unit three-oh-five, acknowledged.”

The parking lot had two cars, both sedans. On quick estimate, they both dated back over five years. One likely belonged to the employee and one to a customer, but it was possible more people came by foot.

They ran the plates on the vehicles and one was registered to Bill Smith, age thirty-five, and the other to Douglas Quinn, seventy-two.

The storefront was all windows, half of it blocked by displays, but the checkout was visible. A man in a black ski mask was gesturing wildly to the man behind the counter and based on age, it was Smith.

“He doesn’t appear to be armed or he’d have the weapon out already,” Sean said, his heart pounding so rapidly that his hearing had dulled.

“Stay alert.” Voigt’s eyes remained straight ahead.

The suspect had finally clued into their arrival—it only took him a minute, but who said the bad guys were intelligent—and stared right at them. He slipped a hand into his coat pocket and came back out with something.

“Gun!” Sean yelled, then he and Voigt dashed behind the squad car.

Voigt called in and they were told to wait for backup before proceeding. The relatively simple directions were hard to follow. An excited energy had Sean’s skin jumping and made sitting still near impossible. The words “armed suspect” came through as Voigt provided the situation update.

The gunman was waving his weapon at the store employee, who appeared to be crying. Smith retreated, with his back pressed against the shelving where the cigarettes were. The suspect got more brazen and yanked the cashier out, the barrel pressed to his head.

They couldn't hear his words through the glass, but it was clear he was yelling. The body language communicated everything. He was going to shoot the man if they didn't act soon.

Sean stood up fast, his hand resting over his holster. "We can't wait."

Voigt grabbed Sean's forearm and wrenched him back to the ground. "We wait, rookie. Or we die. No one dies today."

"He doesn't want to shoot the guy or he would have already. He just wants to run now."

"You a mind reader, kid?"

"He wasn't holding a gun when we arrived. He resorted to pulling one out once we got here."

"We don't take chances with lives. We wait."

Approaching sirens confirmed that they'd have company soon, and this guy would be going down. If he didn't cooperate, the scene could end badly. It would be his first DB, dead body.

No one dies today. The mantra Voigt apparently subscribed to, despite what his many years of experience should have taught him—sometimes bad things happen and people die.

Sean's thoughts kept skipping to Quinn, the old man inside the store. He hated not having a visual on him. Where was he?

Sean glanced over at Voigt. "You said no one dies today."

Voigt kept his eyes on the store. "That's right."

"Well, he shouldn't either."

"You have a soft spot for the bad guy?"

"We don't know what led him to this point."

"Don't get into the mind crap, McKinley. Focus."

He was Sean's TO, and that was the only reason he didn't

talk back, but even then, it took all self-control not to lash out.

Two squad cars pulled into the lot. The four officers, two to each car, barricaded themselves like Voigt and Sean.

Voigt called out to them. "The guy's escalated. Cashier's being held hostage. There's at least a second civilian, but we haven't seen him."

"Should we call in a negotiator?" another officer asked.

As ideas kicked around, all Sean wanted to do was act. Talking didn't get them any further ahead. The older man could be dying in there. Sean would be violating direct orders, but someone had to do something.

He was already on the move when he heard the cries from Voigt and the others. But they were too late and it would probably be his last act as a cop.

Sean ran toward the store, the suspect as his focus. He held up his hands in surrender in front of the doors, his gun still secured in its holster.

"Let him go. Take me." Sean spoke to the gunman as he eased his way into the store.

What had brought the guy to this point? Was his first read on him correct?

"Why?" the suspect responded.

"No one dies today."

At this range, Sean studied the weapon in the man's hand and a smile tugged his lips. He refused to allow it full birth. "Take me in exchange."

"I will kill him." The man pressed the gun harder, causing the cashier's head to angle to the side.

"No you won't." Their eyes connected. Time seemed to halt.

Sean opened the door farther, keeping his eyes on the perp. "Put your gun down."

The gunman ran past, knocking Sean into the hard bin of a chocolate bar display. Cursing under his breath, Sean straightened out and spun around. He had to let the rest of

them know not to take harsh action.

“Don’t shoot him,” he called out.

The suspect lost his footing on the slushy pavement and came crashing to his knees.

The five officers circled him as he held the gun over his head.

Officer Voigt ripped the weapon from the man’s hands and then looked up at Sean and shook his head, smiling. “It’s just a water gun, folks.”

Another officer cuffed the suspect, pulled him to his feet, and led him to a squad car.

Smith was pale and appeared clammy.

“Are you okay?” Sean asked.

He nodded, pointing a finger to an older gentleman sitting on the floor. “But he’s not.”

Quinn.

The man was bleeding. His nose appeared broken, his eyes glazed over in shock.

“The guy hit him,” Smith stated the obvious.

Sean hurried to Quinn’s side, dropping to his knees as he called over the radio for an ambulance. “Officer McKinley, send a bus. Man injured.” He addressed Quinn. “Sir, are you all right?”

The old man’s blue eyes were full of tears and there was a vulnerability in them, but Sean sensed Quinn wasn’t used to feeling that way. He took in the overcoat he wore and the suit pants, but what stood out the most was a familiarity that pulled Sean to him.

“Name’s Mr. Douglas Quinn. I just wanted a chocolate bar and needed milk.” His dark eyebrows pressed downward as he spoke, standing in stark contrast to his silver hair.

Hearing the man talk, Sean understood why he felt that bond. Quinn reminded him of his father, and the similarities were so strong, he could have been his brother.

“Mr. Quinn, we have to stop the bleeding.”

“Yes.”

He went to put a hand into his jacket pocket, but Sean stopped him and pulled out a handkerchief, extending it to him. "Here, this is clean, don't worry. You're going to be okay."

Quinn's eyes never left Sean's, but it wasn't odd. Even though they had never encountered one another before today, Sean knew he'd be seeing more of him. He made him feel in touch with his dead father. And how Sean missed the man.

CHAPTER 3

THE FUNERAL

QUINN'S MEMORIAL SERVICE TOOK PLACE in a small funeral home. There would be no grandiose ceremony or hundreds in attendance to remember him. A tragedy considering he was the most selfless person Sean had ever met, next to his dad.

Dad always came first. He never had a chance to truly know his mother as she died when he was nine. Although his Dad did his best to keep her memory alive, Sean grieved the fact he couldn't remember her. Somehow over the years he had learned to handle the feelings, but as a kid it wasn't easy when other mothers were around and his wasn't anymore.

Sean gave himself a quick look-over in the rearview mirror and straightened a few stray hairs around his ears. He got out, pulled down on his jacket and ran his hands down his pant legs to straighten the wrinkles from the car ride over.

Stepping inside, a part of him felt as though he wasn't worthy of being there, but there's no other place he would be this afternoon. The aroma of floral arrangements hit his nose, stained with its negative association—death. Flowers saw us into the world, and they saw us out.

An exceptionally tall man greeted him. He was dressed in a black, pin-striped suit, which, to the eye, only stretched his height farther.

"Which family are you here for today?" the man asked.

"Quinn." Sean's voice seemed to pierce the sanctity

somehow, and, saying the name aloud, drove home the feeling he shouldn't be there. Maybe it wasn't too late to leave.

"Here you go." He extended a memorial card and smiled politely, knowingly as if he sensed Sean's level of grief. He gestured to the room on the left.

Sean stood there for a few seconds.

The enormity of emotions inherent with death lapped over him, encasing him in a womb of self-propriety and self-assessment. Sad energy flowed through the building, bringing finality, showcasing the transitory journey of life—the embodiment of hopelessness.

Maybe he shouldn't be as affected, seeing as his day job was murder, but it was humanly impossible not to be impacted by the end result everyone has to face. It was as if we were meant for so much more than this life. Maybe that was why some believed in their loved ones living on. Sean supposed, in a sense, they did. They continued to exist within those they left behind, leaving the people whose lives they'd touched a little better off for having known them.

Sara must have adopted the same mentality. When he'd asked why she read the obits, she said that when a person passes on, the world changes forever. She saw everyone as adding something to society at birth, and she experienced the loss when someone died. She was more in-tune when it came to the world around her than he could claim, but the longer he lived, the more his perspective fused with hers.

The room was a tapestry of unfamiliar faces. He regretted declining Sara's offer to come along. If she had, at least he would have recognized one among the crowd.

He spotted a few available seats and made his way to one. A few gathered in clusters at the back of the room. Some dabbed tissues to their eyes, but their tears transformed to laughter as their spirits must have been lifted with the telling of a comical memory.

The human race had a tendency to come together when

faced with a crisis. It had him wondering what the world would be like if people were always like that. He wasn't typically so sentimental but based on the situation he gave himself a pass.

Still, guilt weighed heavily with the fact that Sean had let the visits wane, even though, in the months following the robbery, he had seen Quinn on several occasions.

Quinn was old-school, with the inherent manners and charm of sophistication. It might have seemed odd to the world around them—a twenty-two-year-old hanging out with a man in his seventies—but it felt perfectly right. Quinn had a lot to teach the world and had shared many life lessons with Sean during the numerous afternoons they spent talking about women, family, and business.

On one visit, Quinn told him the only reason he tolerated the company of such a young man was because Sean was a gentleman. Initially, he wasn't certain why Quinn had made that assessment. Quinn then pulled out a rectangular box. Inside were five embroidered handkerchiefs with the initials *S.M.* in blue thread. As Sean had pinched the fabric, it took all his willpower not to cry.

"You used yours for me," Quinn had said with a smile.

What he never confessed to Quinn was that his father always had them, and somehow by carrying one, it brought his memory closer. Now they would serve to connect him to two men who had irrevocably touched his life.

SEAN HAD TOLD HER HE was all right going to the service alone, but Sara felt as though she should have gone with him anyway. Since when do men admit to having emotional needs, and that especially applied to Sean. His focus was keen, his determination unwavering, and his pride more than healthy. He would hate to show vulnerability, but she sensed it coming off him. This death touched close to his heart. He had regrets.

She tried to keep her mind on the case, but Burton had been questioned and cut loose. A few pointed questions

were all it took to make it apparent he wasn't their killer. It was time to approach this case from another angle, but from what direction?

She refreshed her coffee, hoping it would realign her focus. It didn't.

Her mind kept slipping to Sean and she found herself staring at the screen. She was over-analyzing things. Sean needed her today and she was his partner and friend. It was her responsibility to be there for him.

She shot up, taking her jacket off the back of the chair, but the sleeve knocked over the mug, spilling coffee everywhere.

It was a sign from the Universe to stay put, or at least that's how she was going to take it.

THE SERVICE STARTED AND SEAN'S thoughts traced from the present to the past, his focus scattered, drawn away to a woman in the row across from him. She kept passing glances in his direction. She was mid-thirties with long blond hair swept back into a bun, and a round, pleasant face.

Did she think she recognized him?

At first, her attention had him turning to the right to see if she was actually looking at someone else. When he turned back, she was facing the podium again.

Was she one of Quinn's relatives? He made a mental note to seek them out afterward to offer his condolences. Hopefully, he would be able to pull out a story that would make someone smile. He couldn't imagine Quinn wanting those he left behind to be wallowing in grief. A man such as Quinn would prefer his funeral to be a celebration of his life.

As the eulogy continued, the woman's attention was getting annoying.

He raised his brows, trying to elicit a response from her—anything to indicate what she wanted. The hint of a smile brushed her lips, but then she looked away again.

Was she trying to pick him up at a funeral?

With the thought, his main excuse for not seeing Quinn more often became clear—life, and the distraction of women. Not that he'd had many affairs, but Sean never had problems attracting them.

One issue he had with most women he dated was their need for constant attention. He found them to be clingy with a suffocating need to discuss their feelings and hear sentimental promises. The entire grooming required of such a relationship left him feeling exhausted before he pursued them. He had no patience threshold when it came to dramatics and tears. On the flipside of the emotionally unstable were the ones who embraced their liberal advancements and viewed hot pursuit as a successful ploy to rope a man. No thank you.

Maybe that's why this woman's ogling heated his insides—and not in a good way. This was not the appropriate time or place.

The service ended and he had to decide whether to flee or carry through on his self-promise to reach out to Quinn's family. So, as everyone got up from their seats, Sean touched the shoulder of the man in front of him.

"Excuse me. Would you happen to know who here are Mr. Quinn's next of kin?" The words from the job slipped out. He corrected it. "His family?"

The man shook his head. "Mr. Quinn didn't have any family left alive, son."

Sean's heart sped up. Did he know the man he spent hours with, at all?

Thinking back now, Quinn never talked about himself. They'd spent hours together, yet their conversations had always focused on what was going on Sean's life.

"All right. Thank you."

The man pressed his lips but never smiled. He wrapped his arm around a woman beside him and they slid out of their aisle.

Scanning the room, Sean caught the blonde staring again.

She pulled her jacket from the back of a chair and slipped it over the white blouse she had paired with a black pencil skirt. She came forward with an extended hand. "I'm Daphne Graham."

"Have we met before?"

She laughed, an unexpected deep, throaty sound that likely worked on most men, just not this one.

When he didn't 'bite', her expression straightened and her aura reverted to a professional tone.

"Are you Sean McKinley?"

"Yes, but I don't know who you are."

"I'm Mr. Quinn's estate attorney and executor of his Will."

"Still doesn't explain how you know who I am."

"You look like a cop, Sean."

"Mr. McKinley will work just fine."

"Very well, Mr. McKinley. Very proper, but I like it." She adjusted a leather attaché under her arm. "My father was a cop. I have a brother who is a cop. All of you have a certain air about you." Her words came to a standstill as their eyes locked. "You're probably in a hurry. That's another thing with cops. You always have something to do."

"That would be correct. If you would excuse me." He took one step.

"Please. There is something I need to discuss with you."

"With me?"

She held out a business card, pressed between her index and middle finger. "That's my card. If you can, I'd like to schedule you for tomorrow afternoon. Would one thirty work for you?"

Had Quinn left him something? Did he correctly understand her interest in him?

He smiled at her. "Did he leave me a collection of handkerchiefs?"

Daphne returned the smile, this time it seemed sincere, without a hidden agenda. "He did like them."

“You knew him well?”

She nodded, but she was able to withhold any clear evidence of grief. There were no tears in her eyes, no downward tug on her lips, no quiver contorting her chin.

“I worked with him for years. He told me about you.”

“About me?”

“Yes, of course. He said that he never understood why a young man would want to spend time—”

“With an old coot like him.”

“That’s right.”

Neither said anything for a few seconds, both summoned to the past carried on melancholy wings.

Sean broke the silence. “Well.”

“Well, Mr. McKinley, I’ll see you at one thirty tomorrow, then? The address on the card.”

“Yes. Of course.”

“All right, then.” She excused herself with a slight dip of her head.

What she left in her wake was a mixture of excitement and despondency. It didn’t matter what he got from Quinn, just the fact that he’d cared enough—that Sean had made a difference in someone else’s life—that was all that mattered.

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