

**A sample of  
MONEY IS MURDER  
by Carolyn Arnold**

A MCKINLEY MYSTERY

Money  
is Murder



CAROLYN ARNOLD



Excerpt from *Money is Murder* (Book 3 in the McKinley Mystery series)  
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## CHAPTER 1

### LATE RISERS

THEY HAD MADE IT BACK to Albany at five thirty in the morning—the small price they had to pay to enjoy another evening in Cancun. Coming into contact with the cold air had made Sean wonder if they came home too soon, but he knew things awaited him. Some matters still needed to be sorted out with the inheritance, and he had every intention of meeting the board members of Universal Acquisitions Corporation. He only knew the CEO, Edward Cranston, and they had met once. With all this time on his hands, he wanted to meet everyone who worked for Douglas Quinn, at all of his companies, not just at Universal.

The house was stale when they got in, but exhaustion made it easy to fall asleep. Now, with the sun shining brightly around the edges of his room-darkening shades, Sean figured it was mid-day. The clock confirmed it as two in the afternoon.

He rolled over, his chest to Sara's back, wrapped his arm around her, then leaned in and nibbled on her earlobe.

She swiped at the air and let out a moan.

"Time to wake up, sleeping beauty."

Another moan.

He laughed. Maybe if he put on a pot of coffee, she'd be more interested in getting up.

Before he got back to her, the aroma had filled the space and he found her lying on her back, wiping at her eyes with balled fists.

"It's morning already?" A huge yawn.

"Technically, it was when we got here, so we're really running behind."

She tossed his pillow across the room and he caught it at his chest.

He dropped onto the bed beside her. "Why don't we do some house hunting?"

"Darling," her voice was groggy with sleep, "surely that can wait until I've had a couple cups of coffee."

"A couple? One? All that caffeine's not good for you."

"Do you really want to mess with this? Today?" She gestured down her body. She wore a white silk nighty that reached mid-thigh, exposing skin that begged for his touch.

He cocked an eyebrow. "You should know the answer to that." He moved across the bed and devoured her, starting at her neck, tracing up to her earlobes and then met her lips.

SARA LAY THERE AFTERWARD, admiring her husband. She smiled as she took in his face and put a hand on his cheek. She was never more content than she was at this moment. Today was the beginning of their real life together. The honeymoon was a test-run and it didn't really count, although, she held no uncertainties as to their compatibility. Just like that line in *Sleepless in Seattle*, they were MFEO—made for each other.

"Thanks to you my coffee's probably stale at this point," she said.

"Now, don't be like that. I do believe what just happened took the two of us." He sulked and she laughed.

"I was thinking, why are we back already? I mean, what do we have to do? We have no job to report to."

"It is a strange feeling."

"It sure is. I mean, going to work every day for years, and then now, we can see the world." She reflected on those words. "Why don't we?"

"Oh, darling, you know why. I think it's best that I meet with the employees of Universal so they can put a face with

the name.”

“You were in the paper.” She tossed him another smile, but she understood his sense of responsibility. “When were you thinking of going?”

“Tomorrow.”

The answer didn’t even surprise her. Sean had always been focused and mission-oriented.

“All right then, why don’t we go pour ourselves a coffee and start looking at houses online? We can make some appointments for when we get back.”

He kissed her tenderly and then whispered, “I love you.”

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I’m thinking, for the type of house we’ll be buying, it’s best to just get a real estate agent looking for us.”

There was that flash of hunger in his eyes, the one she didn’t quite understand, the one that craved materialistic satisfaction.

“How big of a house were you thinking?”

“I want something that won’t require we ever move again.”

“Like *ever* again?” She giggled.

“Yep, we’re not going to be like your parents, who are partial gypsies, moving around when the urge strikes. You love Albany. So do I. If we get bored of the scenery, we’ll travel for a bit.”

“Sounds wonderful.” She bounded from the bed, the desire for a cup of coffee, strong. “Come on, let’s get on with the day.”

SEAN FOLLOWED HER TO THE kitchen, realizing they might have a debate coming up in the near future. While his newfound riches would see him buying a grandiose house, her ideals were more grounded. She would find contentment in a house that fit their needs, not something that exceeded them. He would work hard to make her see his way. After all, with a net worth in the billions, he wagered there would be large-scale

entertaining in their future.

This time through to the kitchen, the flashing light on the answering machine beckoned his attention and he took the few steps back and hit the button.

Six messages.

Three were from television stations wanting to interview them, one was Sara's parents, one was Edward Cranston, the CEO of Universal, and one was from Kate Brackett, his accountant.

*His accountant*—the thought reverberated in his head. He wasn't sure he'd ever get used to this.

He found Sara sitting at the kitchen table, playing with the clasp on the chest he had been given from the executor of Quinn's Will. Between their quick wedding and then honeymoon in Cancun, he had all but forgotten about its existence.

"What's in here anyway?" she asked.

"Good question." He slipped into the chair beside her, took the key from the table and twisted it in the lock. "Guess we'll find out."

"Oh, this is exciting." Sara maneuvered herself, curling her legs beneath her to provide more of a vantage point.

Sean pulled the chest closer and peered inside. "Doesn't look like anything much." He took out a sealed envelope marked *For Sean McKinley's eyes only*.

"Interesting." He flipped it over, hesitating to open it until he felt the object inside. "It feels like another key."

"Open it. I'm dying here." Sara was smiling and perched on the edge of her chair.

Sean ran his finger under the seal and pulled out a tri-folded letter. Inside of it was a skeleton key. The handwritten note read:

*For when you are ready, Douglas Quinn.*

Sara grabbed the key from Sean's hand. Her eyes were large, the flecks of green and gold, electric. "We have to find out where this goes. Is that all the note said? There's

nothing else in the chest?”

Sean stared at the base of it, wishing it to produce something more, possibly a clue as to where this key went. “Nothing. Why would he leave me a key without telling me what it was for?”

Sara kept it in one hand and lifted her coffee for a sip. “He didn’t want anyone to stumble across it. He knew you could figure it out.”

“From looking at it, I’d say it possibly fits an antique desk or a door in an old home.”

“We’ve got to go to his house, Sean. It’s got to be there.”

“Brilliant idea.”

“This has to lead to something great. He put it in a locked chest, *for your eyes only*, and then left it up to you to solve the puzzle.”

“I’d like to say my sleuthing skills were rusty—”

Sara smiled. “Doubt that, and you can’t. Cancun kept both of us sharp.”

“Let’s go, darling. No time like the present.”

She drained the rest of her coffee and got up. “Shower with me first?”

“You don’t ever have to phrase that one as a question.” Sean pulled her to him.

## CHAPTER 2

### A TRIP INTO THE PAST

QUINN'S HOUSE WAS AN OLDER, two-story red-brick in a quaint neighborhood. Dental molding accented the crest of the roof and the fascia, at the front of the home.

Sean unlocked the door and a sense of melancholy trickled over him. This place was now his, along with everything else Quinn had left him. Stepping inside, the ambiance impressed on him that he was somehow invading a sanctioned place and that by his presence, he was a trespasser.

"The last time I was here was ten years ago, give or take. It's not right, my being here now."

Sara laced her fingers through Sean's and drew him to her. "He wanted you to have all of this, darling. He valued your friendship. He understood."

He had let her read the letter from Quinn, the one that included the words cautioning him not to experience any regrets—Sean found it harder to abide by that advice. Somehow, self-flagellation seemed appropriate in light of what he'd received in compensation for his kind act all those years ago. Who, other than Quinn, would place such a high reward on kindness?

Sean kissed Sara's forehead and she drew back, studying his eyes.

"I can tell this is hard for you."

"It is." He looked away from her, finding it hard to match eyes when a swirl of emotions churned his gut.

"Mr. Quinn wanted you to have this key," she held it up

and passed it to him, “and he wants you to find out where it goes.”

“Sometimes it feels like this is one big misunderstanding and that I’m going to wake up. They have the wrong Sean McKinley.”

“You know you’re the right one. Let’s find what Mr. Quinn left for you.”

He nodded. She was right. Quinn had been a grown man, and if he had been compelled to leave everything to Sean, who was he to argue?

“Do you want to split up?” he asked.

“Darling? We’ve only been married for about a month.” She laughed, narrowing her eyes to a seductive trace.

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, I do. I’m just giving you a hard time.”

“Isn’t that my job?” He scooped her into his arms and took her mouth.

She flirtatiously filtered out of his embrace.

“Fine, you’re breaking my heart, but fine.”

“Oh, Sean, I’m sure you’ll survive a few minutes without me right by your side. Besides, you are the one who suggested we go our separate ways.” She pranced off in the direction of the stairs, blowing him a kiss before going up.

Sean investigated the main level. The living area was positioned right inside the front door. There wasn’t a sectioned entry, but a lonely coat rack and rubber mat identified the space.

All Quinn’s furniture was dated but in good condition. There were plastic sleeves on the arms of the couch and sofa chair. Sean smiled when he realized this. He remembered Quinn’s advice about their use—Sean had told him that’s only what old people do. Quinn had conceded that he did fit into that category.

Sean touched his fingertips to the plastic, transporting himself back to Quinn’s presence, savoring the memories for a few seconds longer before moving on to survey the

room.

He ran his hand along shelving and media cabinets, searching all the doors and edges for a hole that would accept a skeleton key.

He went on to the kitchen, checking every cupboard and the pantry. When he finished, he paused outside the basement door, which appeared to be older with inset molding, a dark brass knob plate, and a wooden handle. Beneath it was a key slot.

Could it be that easy?

He put the key in, but it fit loosely. He let out the breath he had been holding. Quinn had faith in him and it was time he developed some in himself. He wasn't going to give up until he found where the key belonged.

SARA STEPPED INTO QUINN'S BEDROOM, despite the odd feeling she was imposing on a stranger's life, a man she only knew through stories that Sean had shared with her. While she wished that she had known Sean earlier in life, she appreciated how different things could have been. Things happen at the time meant for them to happen.

She ran her hand along the comforter on the bed, trying to connect herself to Quinn, convinced that, through time, she would come to know him.

She noticed, as she worked her way through the second floor that there weren't any framed photographs. For a man who lived to be eighty-three, she found that to be an anomaly. He should have rooms full of portraits. Did he not have a family? She made a note to ask Sean about it later on.

What he did display on the walls were random Victorian-style canvases in gilded frames—women in large dresses holding sun umbrellas, little children in fields of flowers, large houses.

She noted the taste was geared toward a woman's, rather than a man's, preference. She would wager that Quinn had been married once. She wondered what had happened to his

wife and was certain there was a sad story in there.

Quinn wasn't married when Sean had known him eleven years ago, he'd told her, and he wasn't at the time of his death. Based on nothing more than her gut instinct and conjecture, Sara surmised that he'd had the love of his life early on and there was no sense committing to anyone else.

She pivoted, glancing around the last bedroom. Nothing stood out. The doors were older and had key slots, but none of them were locked, so that told her they didn't hold the secret to what they were seeking.

She was just starting to wonder how long she had been caught up when a clock chimed four times. It had been a while since she'd heard one like it. She went downstairs to see if Sean had better luck.

## CHAPTER 3

### NEXT STEP, BY THE CLOCK

ONLY A FEW FEET AWAY, and jarred from his thoughts, Sean jumped when the chimes sounded.

“Darling, what a beautiful clock.” Sara rushed past him to the mantle and lifted it up.

It was an antique, dating back decades, of that he was certain. It would have even been a classic for Quinn—and that said a lot.

It was made of pine, by the looks of it, with intricate wood scrollwork framing the front face. The hands were brass, and the golden numerals, Roman.

“I’m assuming this is the one that just rang.” She inspected the clock, running her fingertips along its edges.

“Yeah, and it nearly scared me to death—” He moved in closer.

“Darling, what is it?”

“Could it be? Let me see that.”

She handed it over, her brow knitting.

“There’s a door in the back. Makes sense this would be where the inner workings are, but look at this.” Sean flipped the clock over and there was a keyhole.

“Oh, try the key.”

Sean took it from his pocket and slipped it in. It fit perfectly. He paused to look up at his wife. Her excitement mirrored his.

He went to the coffee table and placed the clock down. Sara dropped to the floor and he settled in beside her.

With a small twist, a panel opened.  
Sara let out a gasp and Sean laughed.  
“What? This is exciting.”

He had to give her that.

He took the panel and put it beside the clock. He expected it to reveal the inner workings, which it did, but it also provided something else—a folded piece of paper. He opened it up and read it out loud.

*“Dear Sean, Up until this point we have been through a lot together, haven’t we? I knew you would find this. I sincerely hope that you were able to enjoy spending some of the money I left you. I also hope that you were able to find true love and someone to share it with. I need you to do me a favor.”*

“This is amazing, darling. He knew you would find this. He left it for you. I wonder at what point in his life? Back when you first met, or more recently.”

“There’s still more to the letter.” Irritation laced his speech, but her speaking had yanked him out of his spiritual reunion with Quinn.

*“When I met you, you were a street cop, but I followed your career and know that you turned out to be a murder detective. This is where you can help me, friend. My daughter, Cindy, was murdered. Now, the papers will tell you that she committed suicide, but not my girl. Please, do whatever you must, but find justice for her.”*

When he finished reading it, Sean passed the letter to Sara.

“Did you even know he had a daughter?” she asked, her words hushed, teasing the edge of being audible. She must have picked up on his emotion.

“No, I’m embarrassed to say, it turns out I didn’t really know the man that well at all.”

## CHAPTER 4

### SORTING OUT THE DETAILS

SEAN RUMINATED OVER THE GIST of the message. Quinn wanted them to investigate the death of his daughter. There was a lot of information they would have to gather for themselves, as his letter was rather vague.

“You looked through his office?”

Sara nodded, absentmindedly, and handed the letter back to Sean.

“Did he have a computer?” He asked the question but surmised he already knew the answer. Quinn had been an older man and probably had no need for them. He employed people to use technology for him.

“No, but he did have an old typewriter.” Sara smiled, but it only remained there briefly. “We’re going to have to find out more about his daughter. I’m surprised he didn’t put more information in the letter.”

“That’s the thing. My gut’s telling me there’s something we’re missing. Why go to all the trouble of locking this letter in a clock only to give us vague details to go on?”

“He was confident in your abilities to solve this.”

“Or he didn’t want the wrong person to stumble across it. We’ve got to get back to the house and get online.”

“We could call in a favor with Jimmy.” Her face cracked into a smile and he returned one.

“Do you think he’d help us out again?”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think he wants to get involved with

us on a regular basis.”

“We could always bribe him.”

“Didn’t you promise him a fine bottle of cognac? We still haven’t made good on that.”

“Sounds like the perfect time.”

“I don’t know if I want to waltz down to PD. I’m not ready to see everyone yet,” Sean sulked.

“Come on, darling, you’re being silly. They’d be happy to see you.”

“Yeah, but if the chief catches wind that Jimmy’s helping us out, his job could be at risk.”

“True. We’ll have to deliver it to his home this evening. He can dig up her information in the morning. We have an appointment tomorrow anyway, don’t we? We could ask Mr. Cranston about Cindy.”

“Beautiful and smart.” Sean kissed her.

SARA CLICKED ON THE KEYBOARD and moved the mouse around the screen. “This will only take a few minutes, but at least we’ll know a little bit about Cindy and the circumstances surrounding her death. Then we’ll go to Jimmy and ask him to look into this further.”

Sean pulled up a kitchen chair beside the task one Sara was in. “Whoever thought your fascination with obituaries would pay off?”

She turned to face him and smiled. “Seriously? You’re saying that? If it wasn’t for my fascination, as you put it, you might never have found out about Mr. Quinn.”

“Oh, nonsense, dear, his lawyer would have hunted me down.”

“Uh-huh, you’d hope so anyway.” Her smile faded as she returned her attention to the screen. “There are pages of results.”

“I guess it makes sense if she was the daughter of a billionaire.”

“I suppose, but Mr. Quinn was really private about his

affairs. You had no idea, and even after being inside his home, I never would have guessed it either. Looking at these results, however, Cindy didn't keep as low a profile. Look."

She pointed to the titles of newspaper articles.

*Tycoon's Daughter Found Dead*

*Was It Really That Awful At The Top?*

*The Rumors Surrounding Tycoon's Daughter, Exposed*

*Billionaire's Daughter Killed Herself*

"We owe it to him to figure out what happened to his daughter. If he didn't believe she killed herself, that's enough for me," Sean said.

"Darling, are you sure? I mean, this would have been investigated already."

"Considering all that Quinn has done for me, for us, we owe him this much."

Sara nodded. "You're right. I agree. Time to get to the liquor store and then pay our friend a visit, don't you think?"

"It sounds like a perfect idea."

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