

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

A MCKINLEY MYSTERY

*Politics  
is Murder*



CAROLYN ARNOLD



Excerpt from *Politics is Murder* (Book 4 in the McKinley Mystery series)  
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## CHAPTER 1

### FIFTEEN MINUTES OF FAME

THE CAMERAMAN HELD up his hand. “We’ll count it down. In three, two,” his arm lowered, “one.”

Sean squeezed Sara’s hand a little tighter and both of them smiled pleasantly at the host. Her name was Reanne Mable. Although she was famous in the local area, the show didn’t pick up the vast audience their appearance on *USA Today* and *Newsweek* had garnered.

While this would be their third on-camera interview, Sean’s nerves didn’t lessen with experience. Sara seemed to have it all under control, though, from her manicured nails to her designer dress. Even her nose didn’t shine under the bright lights casting down on her.

Reanne, a forty-five-year-old woman who hailed from Texas, carried her twang just as vibrantly today as she would have leaving the state. She smiled at the camera—a smile that was both sincere and enormous. Her skill was apparent, as it should be for a television veteran.

“Today we have a couple with us who are living proof that kind acts are rewarded, and graciously. Papers have said, ‘Watch out, Donald Trump.’ But before I go on any further, please welcome Sean and Sara McKinley to the show.”

“Thank you for having us.” Sean managed to blurt out the words, but his stomach swirled as if he had over-indulged in rich food. At least with a small station he didn’t have to worry about a live audience.

“Don’t mention it. It is our pleasure. On a personal note,

it's so nice to meet both of you. To hear the story about how you went from being one of Albany's own, to overnight billionaires, it sounds like a fantasy movie."

Reanne leaned forward in her chair, one hand resting on her thigh, the other gesturing to Sara. "And I understand there's more to it than just the money." She winked at Sean and looked back at Sara. "The whole world wants to know about two things. Your fortune, of course, but also your romance. Why don't you tell us about that, Sara?"

Sara smiled, her brown eyes bright, the flecks of green and gold sparkling. She squeezed Sean's hand and he picked up on her underlying nervousness. She was definitely much better at hiding it than he was. He mentally coached her that the world would love her.

Sara ran her one hand along her crossed leg, lengthening the fabric while straightening her back. "Well, it wasn't always what you see here. We used to just be friends."

Reanne laughed. "So, you're saying there's still hope for the rest of us."

"Absolutely. If you're meant to be with someone, it will happen. The world, the universe, however, you like to term it, will come together and maneuver things into alignment."

"I see you're a big believer in destiny."

"Destiny, the law of attraction, both. I believe we all have a role on this earth. We are born for a purpose, and we will fulfill it whether we're aware of it or not. The thing is, though, for those who don't recognize their true calling, they might not be as happy as they could have been."

"Oh, isn't that the truth." Another polite smile threw in. "Tell us how Sean proposed."

He watched as Sara told their story, not leaving out any details, all his romantic gestures resulting in *oohs* and *aahs* from Reanne.

"That would make it impossible for a girl to say no," Reanne said.

Sara glanced at him and smiled. "It also helped that I

knew he was my soul mate.”

“How adorable. Please, let us see the ring.” Reanne reached for Sara’s hand while she directed the cameraman to close in for the shot. “He’s romantic and he has impeccable taste in jewelry. The cut is divine.” Reanne angled her head and her lips formed a pout.

Sean watched that expression transpose quickly to one gearing back to business. She gestured her hand toward him.

“Tell us where everything started for you, Sean. How did you know Mr. Quinn? I understand you were surprised that he had you in his Will, let alone left you everything. It’s also true you are the new owner of several companies, including Universal Acquisitions Corporation in New York City.”

“That is correct.” His nerves had the first three words cut from his throat as if removing stitches that had bonded it shut.

Reanne handed Sean a bottle of water and then settled back into her chair. “Why don’t you tell us about Douglas Quinn? What kind of a man was he?”

Sara glanced at Sean, the truth reflecting in her eyes. He had a limited number of memories to draw on and it pained him. His heart palpitated as he struggled to find words that would do Quinn justice.

He unscrewed the cap and took a sip of water. “In respect for his privacy, I wouldn’t want to disclose all that I know about him.” He hated that he had to disguise his lack of knowledge by such a blasé statement. “I will tell you that he was a caring and selfless man. He devoted his life to his companies, but not at the sacrifice of heart.”

Reanne shifted, crossing her leg toward them. She rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and hitched her hand under her chin. Her eyes settled on him as if waiting anxiously for the next word to come out of his mouth.

His stomach performed another flip-flop. “Mr. Quinn was a believer in small acts of kindness. That is how we came

to be friends.”

“Please tell us about the day you met,” Reanne said.

He endured her questions for the next twenty minutes, the odd one being deferred to Sara. No preparation could have been made. Reanne insisted that her interviews be unrehearsed and conducted with a relaxed, conversational quality.

With the parting words spoken to her audience and the confirmation from the production crew, Reanne stood, beaming. She held her hand out to each of them.

“Well, that’s that. You both did excellent by the way.”

Sara smiled at Reanne. “Thank you for having us on your show.”

“Like I said, don’t mention it. This story really touched me, well, I know it touched a lot of people. It goes to prove our actions have consequences.” Reanne’s eyes diverted to Sean.

His skipped to the floor, briefly, before rising up to meet her gaze.

She offered a parting smile. “Have a wonderful rest of the day. The show will air this evening at nine.”

## CHAPTER 2

### THE COMPROMISE

SARA KNEW FROM HIS EXPRESSION this interview wasn't an easy one for Sean. Somewhere in the line of questioning, he had tripped backward in time.

She pulled her seatbelt across and looked over at him. His lips were on a slight downward angle. "Darling, are you okay?"

He turned the ignition and then reached for her hand. "Why wouldn't I be? I have you."

She kept her eyes on him as he put his focus behind them and backed out of their parking spot.

The car lurched back and forth, sputtering as if wheezing.

"Oh." Sean took his hands off the wheel.

The engine shut down with one last moan.

"Did it finally die?"

The sadness that had etched his features eased up, his attention seeming to be diverted to patching his emotional wounds with a retail therapy fix. As badly as she wanted to see a sincere smile on his face, she knew better than to press him about his feelings. If she did, it would push him away.

She smiled at him instead. "Time to go shopping."

"Sounds like a terrific idea."

"Wonderful, but as soon as we get our new ride, I want to go by our house."

"We drove by yesterday," he teased.

"And we will, every day until we move in. You know you love it too."

Sara let her mind dwell on the beautiful estate, the large, bright rooms, the parlor with the piano—which they'd convinced the previous owners to leave behind—and the kitchen, worthy of a professional chef. Now, she had to enroll in culinary classes to convince Sean she was deserving of such a setup.

He tried turning the motor over again, but all it offered in response was a screeching rumble that ended as quickly as it began. "Looks like we're going to need a ride to the dealership."

"What kind of car are you thinking?"

"Ferrari maybe, but there's probably a long wait."

She laughed. "Be serious. We need something practical."

He angled his head toward her. "But a little flashy?"

"A little." She loved the finer things too, but not quite to the extent he did.

He continued the negotiation. "Let's think this through. We're thinking practical, flashy. Two doors or four?"

"Two." The response came without any thought. There was a glint in his eyes, but she wasn't sure if it was surprise or rejection. They had never talked about kids, what if he wanted a houseful? She swallowed deeply. "Or we could get a four-door?" She presented the peace-offering with a gentle smile.

"A two-door sounds great."

"You sure?" She settled back into her seat, immediately wondering why she did so knowing they'd be getting out soon enough.

"Of course. We don't have little people and if we ever did, we could get a minivan then."

She burst out laughing. Just the expression on his face, the marvel in his eyes, the amusement tracing his features—she had placed too much importance and thought to the subject of children. Maybe that conversation could be pushed off further.

"It's not doing us any good sitting here," he said.

“Suppose we look kind of silly.”

“You, darling? Never.” He touched a fingertip to her nose and then kissed her, as a knock came on the driver’s side window.

Sean rolled it down.

“Car trouble?” Reanne adjusted her purse strap as she hunched over to peer inside.

“You could say that.” Sean shared his smile between the two women.

“I can give you a ride to wherever you like. I was just headed home anyhow.”

Sean looked at Sara. “Darling?”

She raised her hands with a smile. The whole thing was a matter of convenient timing.

“We would love to take you up on your offer.”

“Great. I’m parked over there.” Reanne stepped to the side and pointed to the right. “The red Impala.”

“We’ll be right behind you.”

“I’ll call the tow truck on our way,” Sean said.

She smiled and walked toward her car, then unlocked the doors, and Sean and Sara loaded into the back.

Reanne laughed. “I’m playing chauffeur, am I? You truly are a couple who is meant to be.”

“I just don’t want to leave her side any more than is absolutely necessary.” Sean doled out a waggish smirk, which had Sara’s heartbeat speeding up. She didn’t think that would ever change. Smiling, she did up her belt and reached for his hand.

Reanne’s car started without hesitation. “So where to?”

“The Mercedes dealership in Latham.”

Sara stared at his profile until he looked at her.

He shrugged. “What? Yes, I know where they are. But their cars are practical, reliable, and a bit flashy.”

“I’ll trust you.”

“Not to mention, unlike a Ferrari, they’ll be there and we’ll drive off the lot with one today.”

Reanne was reversing out of the spot, but Sara noticed her eyes dart to the rearview.

“Would you listen to him,” Sara said.

“Oh, don’t worry about it. You two are living the dream. Although, you would think, for billionaires, you’d have an amazing car already.”

Sara rubbed Sean’s arm and responded. “We’ve been busy from the moment he proposed.”

“I bet.” Reanne flashed another glimpse into the rearview. When her eyes met Sara’s, she diverted back to the road.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD

THE SHOWROOM WAS ELEGANTLY ARRANGED with cars displayed on circular platforms and the sitting area consisted of plush, leather couches accented with modern coffee tables.

Sean's eyes went directly to a silver sports model and he ran his hand along the side.

He admired the sleek body line, and the leather interior. What had most of his attention were the gullwing doors, which opened up, like the DeLorean in *Back to the Future*.

"Excuse me, may I help you with something?"

Sean pried his attention from the vehicle to meet the eyes of an inquisitive salesman, no older than twenty-five.

"Good day, I'm Sean." He extended his hand.

The salesman shook it and introduced himself. "Chris." He took a few well-paced steps and spun to look at Sean again. "I see you're interested in the SLS AMG GT. Amazing car. Its good looks and body line are only matched by its superior handling. Have you ever owned a Mercedes before?"

"This would be my first one."

"Well, you'd discover it would be a lovely treat."

The salesman's tone of voice carried the implication it might be out of Sean's financial reach. Chris was saying, and not too subtly, that this model wasn't for the middle-income earner, but it was geared to those with a strong financial portfolio.

Sean suppressed smirking at the thought that the

salesman, who seemed to deem himself superior, didn't recognize the cut of suit Sean wore. He slipped a hand into a pant pocket, the jacket lifting over his arm, draping in the fine manner expected of the designer. Beneath his jacket, he wore a matching vest, the fabric, a navy blue with white pinstripe.

Chris grinned smugly at Sean, and while the salesman attempted to establish a level of camaraderie through eye contact, he failed. Instead of finding offense to the situation, Sean found amusement.

"Does it get good fuel mileage?" he asked.

"Comparable, for its class."

"Yet it stands on its own."

"Yes, as do all Mercedes."

Chris pointed to another vehicle nearby. "Now, I'm not sure if you've seen our CLA Class, but it boasts Mercedes excellence at an economical price point."

"Actually," Sean bobbed his head toward the car in front of him. "I would like to take this one for a test drive. I assume that will not be a problem."

Sara, who had been quiet up until now, laced her arm through Sean's. "You fell in love already?"

"This is the one, darling, and this fine gentleman is going to hook us up for a test drive."

Chris straightened his tie at the knot, lingering there awkwardly. He gestured toward a line of glass-partitioned offices, directing them to one in the middle. "We'll need to complete a financial background first, but then the keys will be in your hands. I'll also need to come along, company policy, as I'm sure you can imagine." He pressed his lips and took off toward the office.

"Darling, do you think it's necessary to take it for a spin? If we don't like it, we could just pick up another car, give this one to Jimmy, or use it for running errands." Sara nonchalantly shrugged her shoulders.

Chris stopped walking and spun around. He blinked

deliberately and his gaze went from Sean to Sara.

Sean could have lifted his wife at that moment and spun her around, for her amazing ability to read people.

Chris cleared his throat and blinked. "This way." He was on the move again.

He dropped behind the desk and Sean sat across from him. Sara stood in the doorway, seemingly disinterested in the entire process.

Chris pulled out a pad of forms. "First, we'll need to complete this. If you would be so kind as to fill in your information," he ripped off the top sheet and extended it, with a pen, toward Sean, "then we'll go from there."

Sean played along, finding it interesting how one was treated when seen as not having enough to justify setting foot in the dealership. This was the class he was used to being grouped with, and, now that he had no need to subjugate himself to the treatment, he actually found it amusing. When the truth came out how wealthy he was, Chris would wither into the floor.

He started filling in the form and got as far as his name and a start on their address when a figure outside the glass caught his attention. It was an older man, dressed in a tailored suit, no doubt a designer cut. The man stopped beside Sara, taking her in, from the tip of her Jimmy Choo shoes, past her Louis Vuitton handbag, all the way up to the hat she wore.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but are you Sara McKinley?" he asked.

Sara smiled pleasantly. "I am."

The man looked at her, into the office at Sean, and then over to Chris. "I'm Roman Bryant, the owner of this fine dealership. I trust that you're getting all the assistance you need, Mr. McKinley."

Roman kept his eyes on his employee as he maneuvered past Sara, into the office. His eyes went to the form in Sean's hands, and his face reddened, his brows pulled downward,

and Sean made out a pulse in his cheek.

He addressed the salesman. "What are you doing here?"

The question, fully directed at Chris, had the young man reaching for the knot of his tie again. "Standard policy, sir, they are..." he cleared his throat, "filling out the financial paperwork for the background."

"You make all the customers fill out these forms?" Roman took the sheet from Sean with a pressed smile that communicated admiration and respect for him, and then he dropped the uncompleted form in front of Chris. "Do you have any idea who these people are?" Roman gestured to Sean and Sara with a wide sweep of his arms.

Chris's face paled as he looked at Sean to Sara, back to Sean.

"I will take that as a no. These people get whatever they want, do you understand?" Roman turned pleasantly toward Sean. "What fine model garnered your attention?"

"He fell in love with the SLS AMG GT," Sara chirped in.

"Let's get you a set of keys, then, shall we?"

Chris bolted to his feet. "But, boss, company pol—"

"Rubbish. This is Sean and Sara McKinley. It might not hurt for you to listen to the news or read the papers." He addressed Sean and Sara. "Please, forgive him for this misunderstanding."

Sean glimpsed at Chris, who wouldn't satisfy his desire for eye contact.

"McKinley." The name slipped from Chris's lips and then his eyes widened. He covered his mouth and dropped his hand nearly as quickly as it had made contact. "I am so sorry."

"As you should be. We will discuss this matter later," Roman said.

"You know what? I've changed my mind." Sean hadn't used the money to toy with people yet, but he realized he didn't altogether hate the power that came with it.

"Changed your mind?" Panic draped across Roman's

features, followed by a flash of rage directed to his employee. "If there is anything we can do, please."

"Well, there is, actually." Sean casually placed his hands in his pockets again.

"Valentino." The designer cut wasn't missed by Roman.

"Correct." Sean glimpsed at Chris, who had dropped back into his chair.

"Very nice. May I?" Roman asked, hand extended.

Sean nodded and Roman touched the sleeve, barely brushing the fabric with his fingertips. He lifted his head, leveling eyes with Sean.

"The test drive, please, let me arrange it for you. You can go right now."

"No, I don't think I'm in the mood for that anymore."

"Please, Mr. McKinley."

Sean went to Sara and wrapped his arm around her waist. He waited for the beats of a few seconds and then said, "We'll just take it. Actually," he glanced at Sara, "we'll take two."

## CHAPTER 4

### SETTLED IN FOR THE NIGHT

A FEW HOURS LATER, they left the dealership with a new car in metallic gray. The second one was being ordered in as Sara requested it in Mars Red, a color they didn't have in stock. They also ordered vanity plates—*McKinley 1* and *McKinley 2*.

They drove past their future home and, even though the house sat back on the property, the sight of the gate and winding drive was enough to infuse them with electric energy. They were ready to move on and make a home together—somewhere fresh and new where they could put their stamp on it.

After they had driven by it, they were lost in conversation about furniture arrangement and their personalized plans for the property. Even an hour later, when they had slipped into the post office to pick up Sara's held mail, they were still talking about it.

"I really want to paint one room red," Sara said as she shuffled through a pile of envelopes.

"You have a thing for red." He took the mail from her with one hand while reaching to grasp hers with his other one, as they walked back to the car.

Sara gazed up at him. "It really is a beauty."

"Yeah, not bad is it?"

"I thought that poor salesman was going to have a heart attack when his boss came in."

"And did you see his face when I said we'd take two?"

They were both laughing.

"I know we shouldn't take such pleasure in it, Sara, but—"

"Hey, it was fun. It's not like we've always had money."

"What do you say to a celebratory dinner?"

"For the money?"

Sean shrugged. "For the money, the car, the house." A certain mischievousness lit his eyes. "Us."

"Sounds like an excellent idea."

They chose a small bistro and had a peaceful meal, dining by candlelight and sipping a glass of wine. Afterward, they headed home and that's where they settled, on the sofa, at eight forty-five, getting ready to watch themselves on TV.

"Here you go, darling." Sean handed her a glass of cognac, a habit that had recently entrenched the both of them. They had even invested in a set of crystal snifters, an odd contrast to the rest of the dishes filling Sean's cupboards.

"Thank you." Sara reached out from beneath the blanket she was nestled under. "I always hate seeing myself on television."

"I'm not really sure why. You're beautiful." He snuggled beside her.

"Says the man who is extremely partial." She smiled at him, a lazy one encouraged by the eventful day and the glass of wine earlier. After she drank the cognac, she would be melting into the sofa.

Their eyes drifted from each other and toward the TV. The volume was muted, but the local news played out on screen. From the captions and expressions on people's faces, along with picket signs, something had happened.

"Turn it up, please," Sara said.

"I was just go—"

*"Zoning bylaws are making it impossible for the local business owner. How are we supposed to carry on when taxes go sky high? We barely make enough to survive now."*

The concern came from an older woman, who stood in front of a man, about her age. He had his arm around her,

his hand on her shoulder.

*"This business has been in our family for generations and we are forced to close our doors."*

The reporter took the microphone from the woman's face and put it back in her own. *"It seems Mayor Davenport has some answering to do for the business people of Albany. When we tried to contact him, we were told that the mayor wasn't fielding any investigative inquiries at this time. That's another way of saying 'no comment' or 'it's not my problem.' Abby Clark, reporting from downtown Albany."*

Sean took a draw of cognac and set the glass down on the table beside him. "I knew there was a reason I didn't vote for the guy."

Sara chuckled. "I didn't realize you loved politics."

"Don't tell me you don't vote."

"You should see the look on your face right now." She pointed at him. "Of course I do, but I don't think it really matters who is in office."

He shifted his body, angling toward her. "And...you are American?"

"Stop it."

"You've got to be kidding me. You don't think it matters?"

"Nope." She took a sip and opted for cradling the glass against her chest.

"Hmm."

"I didn't realize I married a political junkie."

"Oh no, I'm not exactly that, but I think it does matter who is voted in."

"Can we agree to disagree on this one?" The way she looked at him, the softness in her expression, the glint in her eyes, she could get away with murder right now.

He nodded.

She turned back toward the TV. "There we are."

It was an introductory piece about what would be coming up next. It showcased Reanne Mable, with flashes of them, the caption reading *Move over Donald Trump*.

“We’re going to be larger than life on this thing.” She lowered her head, her chin tucking toward her chest.

“You don’t like my large screen TV?”

“Don’t you mean ours?”

He teased her. “I’m sharing my billions with you and you want to stake a claim on the electronics too?”

“I figure, why not.” She laughed.

“You know, I bought this thing when you told me we’d just be friends.”

She reached out and touched his arm, resulting in her moving over and snuggling into his side. “Blanket?” She held it up, bracing to drape it over him, but he shook his head. “You were seeking retail therapy?”

“Yep.” He pointed to the media area. “Actually everything you see over there.”

She angled her head toward him. “It was all bought the day I said we’d remain friends?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her happy expression diluted into a somber one, extinguishing the light from her eyes for the trace of a second. “You know we had to make that decision, right?”

“Yes, but don’t worry your pretty little head about it anymore because it’s history.” He brushed back hair from her forehead and kissed her there.

“I’m so happy that it is,” she said.

“Me too.” He wrapped his arm around her and they watched themselves play out on the screen.

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