

Chatham author pens a mystery: Writing "Cold Feet"

by Karen Pullen

A few years ago I was going to a lot of weddings. The generation after mine was in their twenties and getting hitched. I was also beginning to write mystery novels, and one day, as I sat on a white padded chair watching a bride in strapless satin meet her tuxedo'ed groom at the altar, it dawned on me that a wedding weekend was a prime situation for a fictional murder.

Think about what wedding guests bring to the event. Parents, parents' friends, aunts and uncles and cousins remember the happy couple's backstory, family misdeeds and secrets and feuds, not-so-cute incidents from childhood. The couple's friends know more recent history of failed relationships, quarrels, confidences, mistakes and doubts. A happy event, of course, colored by the past.

Emotions run high at weddings. I remember seeing a groom's mother weep uncontrollably throughout the entire ceremony. Two exes, divorced for twenty-some years, shouting blame at each other for some ancient misconduct. A sullen sister excluded from the bridal party, a stepmother quivering with offense. Grandparents aghast as tradition is cast aside. Why not, I thought, take all this emotion to another level, a level where evil exists?

Thus "Cold Feet," my novel published in January by Five Star Cengage, begins with a wedding at a replica of a Scottish castle, a bed and breakfast, plunked in the middle of a North Carolina hay field. Someone indeed gets cold feet, ending the ceremony prematurely, and criminally. My sleuth character, Stella Lavender, is a guest at the wedding, and she's asked to join the investigative team. At the same time she continues to work her other job, buying drugs undercover, a very risky business. These two aspects of her job meet when she discovers that one of the wedding guests is a paranoid drug dealer, and he discovers who betrayed him to the police.



Author Karen Pullen owns Rosemary House Bed & Breakfast in Pittsboro

I call my book soft-boiled; it's edgier than a cozy mystery, not as violent as a hard-boiled police procedural. There's humor, but the book isn't light.

Marriage, for better or worse, is a theme in "Cold Feet." Two brothers have miserable marriages. One couple – a pair of drug dealers – is, implausibly, happily married. Neither Stella's grandmother nor her mother ever married, viewing marriage as indentured servitude, each raising her child alone. Stella, on the other hand, was engaged to be married until she caught her fiancé exchanging love notes at slut.com, as Stella calls it. She's become a bit of a cynic as a result.

"Cold Feet" is told from Stella's point of view. She's is more conservative than her grandmother; as a cop, she appreciates moral order. In the course of this investigation she enters a world populated by drug dealers, aged hippies, religious scammers, libidinous preachers, depressives, alcoholic innkeepers, and litigious parents. Just your normal everyday set of family and friends, except – one of them is a murderer.

Another discovery I made after the book was published: there's a lot of food in "Cold

Feet". One of the problems an author faces is that her characters must do something while they are talking to each other. And it seems that my characters eat a lot. Stella often cooks for her grandmother. Her narcotics partner is a gluttonous gourmand, always scarfing fancy snacks and musing on his latest dinner party. The murder victim had published a vegan cookbook; one of the recipes is included in "Cold Feet." One of the suspects owns a chocolate shop – another opportunity for Stella to have dessert. At least a dozen other examples of dining are sprinkled here and there. Why? Well, I like to eat, and cook, and think about food. So I guess it was on my mind when I was writing. One benefit for anyone who attends one of my readings is that I always bring a blackberry jam cake to share. It's the cake that Stella eats on page 146, when she visits a bed and breakfast, a nearby competitor to the Castle.

The B&B scenes were easy to write, no research required, because I own a bed and breakfast, Rosemary House in Pittsboro. Researching the life of a narcotics officer was more challenging. I read books by narcs and interviewed a woman who'd just retired after many years as an undercover drug agent. I watched every episode of "The Wire." And of course, Google was my friend.

"Cold Feet" is in hardback only, so far, and selling well to libraries. It's available at Flyleaf, McIntyre's, Quail Ridge Books & Music, and The Country Bookshop in

Southern Pines, also at online retailers. It's been a blast doing readings, a blog tour, and interviews. I try to keep my website, www.karenpullen.com, up-to-date, and put up a new blog post every couple of weeks. Visitors and comments are always welcome!

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SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2013

HEALTHY BODIES

8:00 AM

Rabbit Run 5K & Children's Fun Run
For more information, visit www.cccc.edu/RabbitRun5K.

9:00 AM – 11:00AM

Café will open featuring health foods and information about the Natural Chef Program

9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

A health fair will take place on the patio (weather permitting) or in a SST building classroom

10:30 AM

SGA Sponsored Disk Golf Tournament and Kids Showdown at the Disc Golf Course

The UNC Hospitals (Siler City), Chatham Health Department, and National Organ Donor Registry will be at the event. The CCCC Nursing program students will also be present to share information about their programs.

HEALTHY PLANET

9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

A series of classes will be offered from environmental issues to healthy cooking:

11:00 AM

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