



# A conversation with **KAREN WHITE**

## Author of *Dreams of Falling*

### **What compelled you to write DREAMS OF FALLING?**

Ever since I was a little girl visiting my grandmother's house in Indianola, Mississippi, and rifling through trunks of clothing worn by my mother and my four aunts in the 1950's, I've been obsessed with that era. My grandmother's walls were full of photos of her five daughters looking like Grace Kelly. It gave me nostalgia for a decade I never knew.

The 1950's were a transitional time in American history—a respite from the austerity of the war years and a slow-build to the social unrest of the 60's. I wanted to tell the story of three young women coming of age in a seemingly idyllic era in a small Southern town. And of course, I wanted to show this same town fifty years later and revisit these women to examine the repercussions of their choices on the next two generations.

### **Are any of your characters based on real people?**

Not intentionally! That's not to say I wasn't influenced by people I've come across; I'm sure it's inevitable as I go about picking and choosing characteristics for the people who populate my books. However, there *is* a character, Meghan Black, who is a historical preservationist; she bears a striking resemblance to my daughter, Meghan White, also a preservationist. Meghan Black appeared in *The Guests on South Battery* and will likely be in the next two Tradd Street books. Because, well, why not? Her uncle (my brother-in-law) Rich Kobylt appears in most of my books and is mostly known for being the handyman in the Tradd Street series with low-slung pants. They're only secondary characters—as my primary characters have to be figments of my imagination so I don't feel badly about torturing them and putting them in difficult situations and storylines.

### **Larkin is obsessed with dream analysis and understanding her mother's dreams of fire. Are you also interested in dream interpretation?**

My daughter is very into dream analysis while I'm just mildly interested—mostly because my dreams tend to be too bizarre and defy any kind of interpretation (according to my daughter). A recent dream had me selling perfume from a little red wagon I was pulling through my childhood neighborhood while being pursued by a moose.

I don't keep a dream journal, but I do use sleep and my subconscious to help me when I'm stuck on a plot point. I just think about it before I go to bed and usually a solution has presented itself to me when I awaken. It's this—the active subconscious—that has always interested me rather than dreams specifically. Because, as you can see by my above examples, I'm not sure what my dreams are trying to tell me and I doubt even Carl Jung could!

**You'll be on book tour for over two weeks this summer. What's an item you can't live without while you're on the road?**

A ceramic mug! It's so Diva-ish, I know, but I can't bear to drink out of paper cups, even for coffee. So I always bring my own.

**Do you relate to any of the three best friends—Margaret, Ceecee, and Bitty—in particular?**

I think I relate most to Ceecee. She's not a middle child in her own family, but within the friendship triangle with Margaret and Bitty she's definitely the peacemaker, the pleaser, the one who wants everybody to get along and the one who the other two expect to smooth any wrinkles. I'm a middle child and I could certainly feel an affinity for Ceecee who so desperately wants everyone to be happy, but struggles to balance her own happiness against the needs of others.

**Why are you drawn to writing about mothers and daughters?**

As a daughter and as a mother of a daughter, I find this relationship the most emotionally fraught and interesting of all family relationships. I was very close to my maternal grandmother, much closer than I was to my mother, and I couldn't bear to hear my mother say unkind things about my grandmother. I'm sure my own daughter would like to add a few words here too. It's a perpetual tug-of-war between trying to be our mothers and trying to be anything but. Thankfully, time does grant us new perspective on the mother-daughter relationship, just as how we age (and become mothers ourselves) changes the way we view our mothers. As a writer, there is no relationship that is more complicated and it's certainly one many of my readers can relate to.

**Why did you choose Georgetown as the setting for your newest book?**

I'd driven Highway 17 from Charleston and Pawley's Island on book tours too many times to count, but wasn't overly familiar with Georgetown, which is halfway between. After passing through several times, I was eventually lured off the main road by a sign advertising the annual Georgetown Shag Festival. I ended up falling in love with the town.

For me, the setting of a book is as much a character as the actual living and breathing characters who populate my novels. It's what shapes the story so I have to feel a deep affinity for a place before I cast it in a book.

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