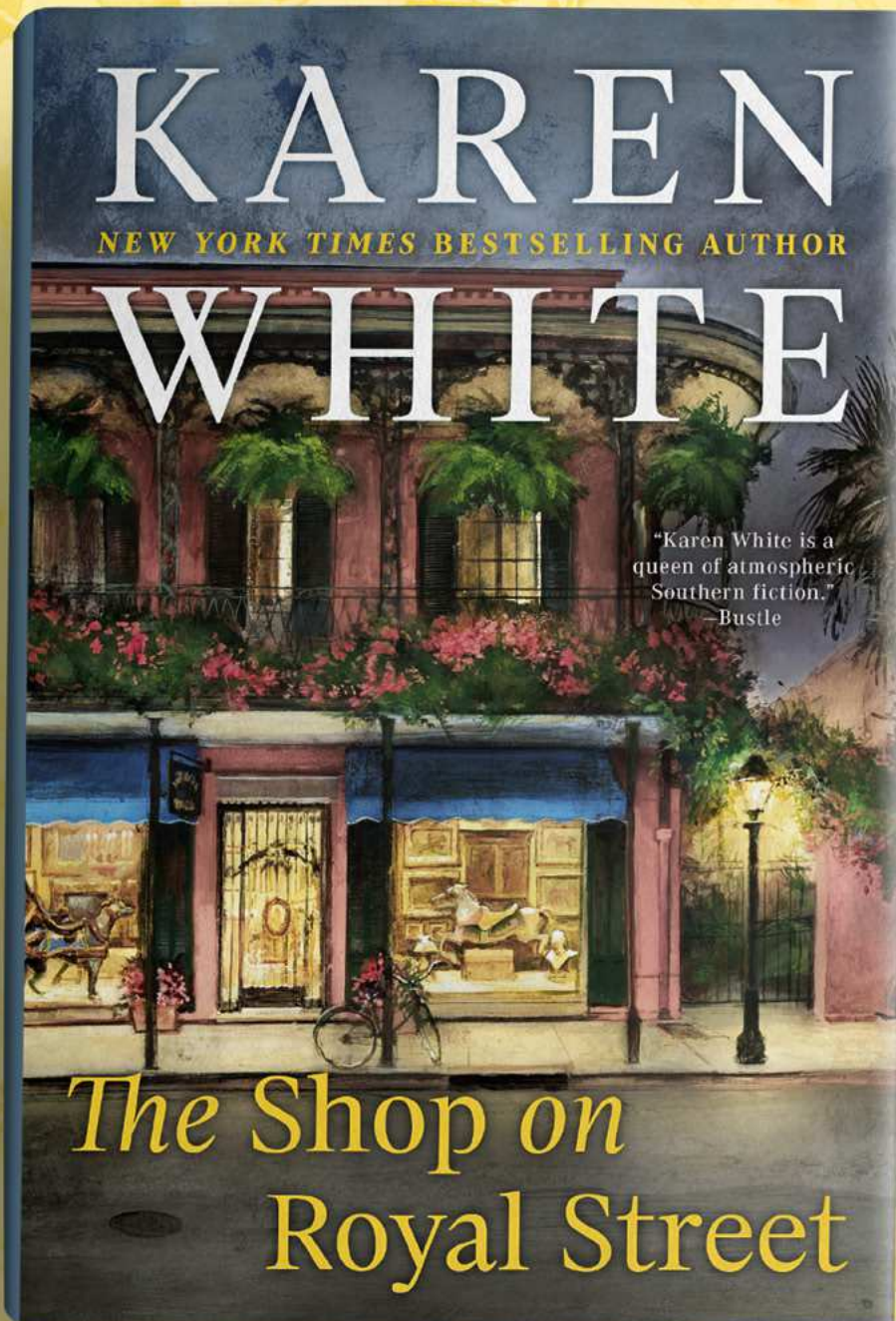
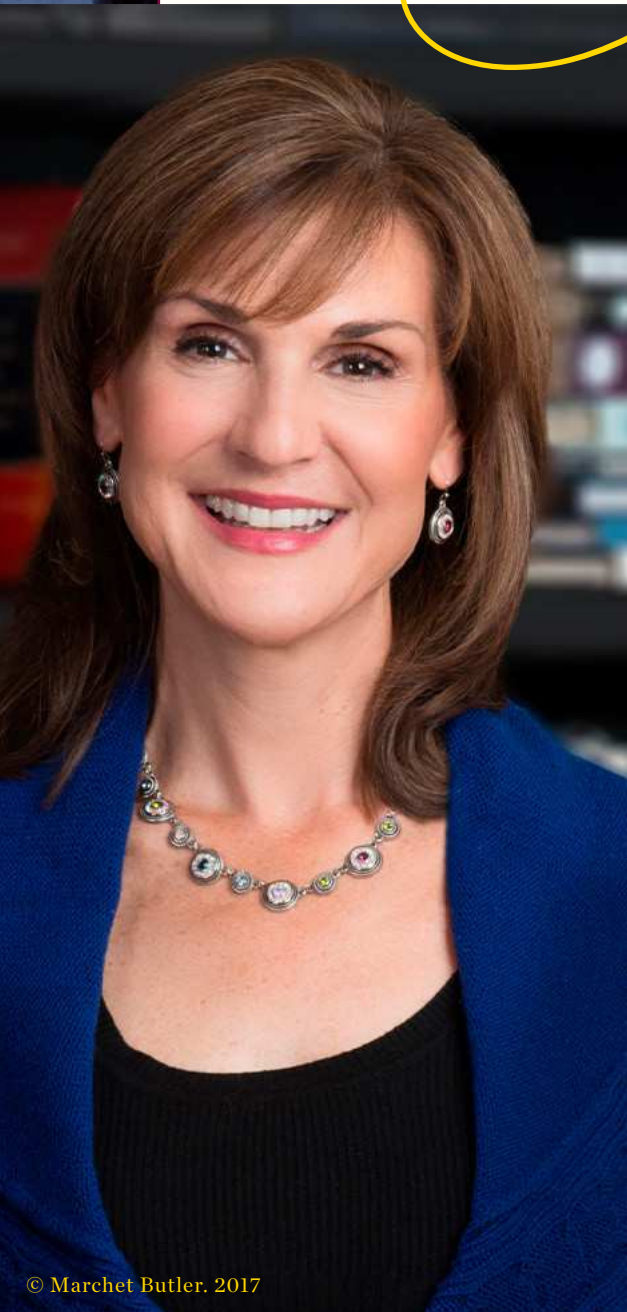


# Book Club Kit





# *A conversation with* **Karen White**



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## **Tell us about the inspiration for this spin-off series. How does it feel to be telling Nola's story?**

Before I'd even written the final book in the Tradd Street series, *The Attic on Queen Street*, I knew that I wanted to create a spin-off series. I wanted it to be similar in tone but still new and fresh. I also needed a strong protagonist to carry a series who was familiar and beloved by existing readers, but interesting and quirky enough to grab the interest of new readers. Nola was the clear answer.

I think because I'd "known" and loved the character of Nola since her first appearance at the end of the second book in the Tradd Street series, it felt very exciting and natural to switch into her voice and tell the story from her point of view.


## **What research was required?**

I was already familiar with New Orleans since I'd lived there for four years while at Tulane University. Not to date myself, but that was before Hurricane Katrina, which really changed the landscape of the city that I had known and loved. I knew that I needed to reacquaint myself with the contemporary city. Because I believe in suffering for my craft, I took a "research" trip to the Big Easy this past summer where I made sure to eat at fabulous


restaurants, do lots of shopping, drink at several bars, take both a ghost tour and a general neighborhood walking tour. It was a difficult job, but it needed to be done. I am also lucky to have two dear friends who are native New Orleanians who are constant sources of insight—as well as great resources for terrific recipes!

**What will fans of the Tradd Street series love about the new Royal Street series?**

Judging by all the fan mail I've received in the past about Nola, I think readers will be excited to see her in her starring role in the new series. With guest appearances from Melanie, Jack, and other family members and friends from Charles-



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ton, I believe readers will enjoy this “bridge” from one series to the next, while still being entertained by new and quirky cast members, and plenty of mystery, history, and ghosts, all in the equally Southern and intriguing city of New Orleans.

**Do you have a long-term arc of the series planned out? Or will you figure out how Nola's story progresses as you write it?**

Since I typically don't use an outline and instead make up things as I go (NOT recommended), I allow my characters to dictate the story—generally chapter by chapter so I have no idea when I start how each book is going to end, much less where the entire series is going to pan out. Nola is such a strong character that I don't think she will find it difficult guiding me through her story.

**What are some of your favorite Tradd Street Easter eggs that fans can look for in the new series?**

I'm hoping readers will recognize the last name of Kobylt—as in everybody's favorite plumber/handyman (with his infamous low-slung pants) from the Tradd series, Rich Kobylt. Readers will meet Rich's New Orleans cousin, Thibaut Kobylt, who will be a recurring character throughout the new series. Fortunately for Nola, he wears a belt (unlike his cousin).

Melanie's influence over her stepdaughter is evident in Nola's embrace of spreadsheets and label makers as well as Nola's newfound love of Melanie's three main food groups: sugar, carbs, and caffeine.

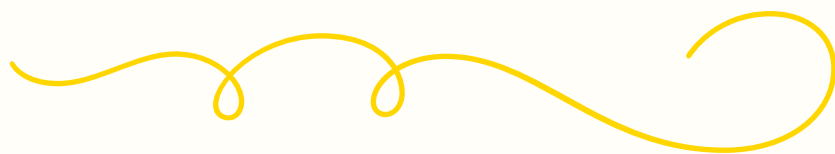
Readers might also enjoy cameo appearances from several Tradd Street characters, as well as a surprising reappearance of former love interest Cooper Ravenel—brought back into Nola's life due to reader demand.

Also brought into the new series because of reader fascination will be the inexplicable calls on an unplugged landline phone from departed loved ones to give advice to the living.

**Are there any other interesting anecdotes we would want to know about the writing/conception of this series?**

When I first conceived the idea of writing a series back in 2005, my first choice of setting was New Orleans. Having been a student at Tulane University for four years, I was not only familiar with the city but also in love with its history, architecture, and ambiance. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina swept through the Big Easy in August of 2005, causing massive destruction and loss of life. I knew that Katrina was too big a character to fit into my series, so I had to find another great Southern city with lots of history, gorgeous architecture, and, of course, ghosts, which is how the Tradd Street series came to be set in Charleston.

I'm so thrilled that seventeen years later I finally have the chance to create a series set in one of my favorite cities—New Orleans!





# Grillades

**4 pounds beef/veal rounds, ½-inch thick**

**½ cup bacon grease, divided**

**½ cup flour**

**1 cup chopped onions**

**2 cups chopped green onions**

**¾ cup chopped celery**

**1½ cups chopped green peppers**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

**1 (28 oz) can of whole tomatoes, drained (lightly) and chopped**

**½ teaspoon tarragon (optional)**

**⅔ teaspoon thyme**

**1 cup water**

**1 cup red wine**

**3 teaspoons salt**

**½ teaspoon black pepper**

**2 bay leaves**

**½ teaspoon Tabasco**

**2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce**

**3 tablespoons chopped parsley**

Remove fat from meat. Cut meat into serving-size pieces. Pound to ¼-inch thick.

In a Dutch oven, brown meat well in 4 tablespoons bacon grease. As meat browns, remove to warm plate.

To Dutch oven, add remaining 4 tablespoons bacon grease and flour. Stir and cook to make a dark brown roux. Add onions, green onions, celery, green peppers, and garlic, and sauté until limp. Add tomatoes, tarragon, and thyme and cook for 3 minutes. Add water and wine.

Stir well for several minutes; return meat; add salt, black pepper, bay leaves, Tabasco, and Worcestershire. Lower heat, stir, and continue cooking. If veal rounds are used, simmer covered approximately 1 hour. If beef rounds are used, simmer covered approximately 2 hours.

Remove bay leaves. Stir in parsley, and let the grillades sit several hours or overnight in refrigerator. More liquid may be added. Grillades should be tender. Serve over grits or rice.

# Discussion Questions



**1.**

Why do you think Nola wanted to own the house so much? Do you think there is a truth about being connected to a house?

**2.**

Do you think Beau has a sixth sense, like Melanie (if you are familiar with the Tradd Street series)? Why do you think he is not yet ready to admit it?

**3.**

What do you think of Nola's future romantic suitors? Did you like one over the other?

**4.**

Jolene is a contrast to Nola in so many ways—how do you think their friendship works the way it does? Do you have someone like a Jolene or Nola in your life?

**5.**

What makes the setting of New Orleans so special to this book? Do you think it could have been set anywhere else in the United States?

**6.**

What do you make of Beau's grandmother Mimi? Do you think she has other secrets she is hiding?

**7.**

Are there any characters from the Tradd Street series that you would like to reappear in the new series?

**8.**

What do you think is next in store for Nola? Where do you see the series going?