

The LadyKillers

An unsuitable blog for a woman...

A blog for readers and writers of crime fiction



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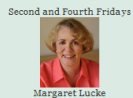
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August 11, 2011

When Smart Characters Do Stupid Things -- by Mara Purl



Please welcome our honored guest blogger today, author Mara Purl. Mara is the award-winning author of *The Milford-Haven Novels*, which, collectively, have won 15 literary awards. Mara's novels are based on her successful radio drama *"Milford-Haven, U.S.A."*, the first environmental radio soap opera, and the only American radio soap ever licensed and broadcast by the BBC, where the show reached an audience of 4.5 million listeners throughout the U.K. Along with producing sixty episodes of her BBC show, Mara also produces and performs audio books. She won the silver Benjamin Franklin and the gold USA Book News Audio Fiction awards for performing the first two of her own novels.

Mara grew up in Tokyo, Japan, and received a performing and literary degree from Bennington College. She lives in Los Angeles, California, and Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is a long-time and frequent visitor to the Central Coast. Learn more about Mara and her books at <http://www.marapurl.com>.

What the Heart Knows starts off with a bang--well, a thud was all that could be heard by the killer as his massive fist connected with the soft side of his victim's head. But for her, the crack was as loud as a gunshot.

Mid-air when his fist slammed into her, she then landed a story below, inside the unfinished house. Stunned, she still had enough presence of mind to play dead in hopes her killer would believe the ruse. But then he lifted that conveniently placed shovel and began to bury her in the wet, sandy soil of Milford-Haven. . . .

Okay, but what was she doing there in the first place?

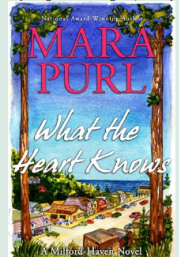
That was my challenge in writing this key character who starts my series of twelve novels. Though my books are not traditional mysteries--indeed, the crime of Chris's murder isn't solved till several books hence--still, the theme of her murder establishes not only an undertow throughout my coastal tale, but also becomes a set of tumblers locking the safe that holds a nexus of interwoven storylines the reader must unlock. Couldn't I just set aside Chris's usual intelligence and allow her to do one stupid thing? Well, yes, the thing she does can be stupid--but not from her perspective, or she'd have stopped herself, because she prides herself on her smarts.

Okay. Rewind. Christine Christian, noted broadcast journalist, had hit her professional stride. Her series on lost children would most likely win an Emmy, according to her network enecs. Tomorrow she'd be off to Japan to start shooting her earthquake series.

Her head is in the right place. It's taken several years--Chris is now in her early 40s--but at last, she's got her professional ducks in a row. The network job that had her tied to a desk? She quit that a while back. She'd finally used her head. It'd been time to strategize, really think about what she wanted, then aim for it. What she wanted was the freedom to research and write her own stories, travel with a crew to shoot the footage, then come home and take the time to edit her miles of videotape (the story is placed in the 1990s) into tight episodes that told compelling stories, exposing lies, getting to the bottom of schemes, and shining a light in dark places.

So her life is about truth-telling, about smarts, about outwitting bad-guys and saving the world one story at a time. Her life is about digging up clues, following leads wherever they lead. This all makes sense from the perspective of the head. What about the other side of the equation, the heart side? This is the side Chris has always carefully avoided. After all, feelings just get in the way of smart decisions, right? And intuitions? They're just little iterations of fear. And to be a good journalist, she must be fearless.

Smart though she is, Chris is just plain stupid when it comes to the heart. Yes, it's true, a few months earlier she'd finally opened the door just a crack to let in the attentions of Joseph Calvin, the rich, older guy who seemed to make coming home to the Central Coast uncannily right. But mostly it's fun in the sack followed by juicy conversation. It's not like she actually loves the man, nor has he mentioned anything about loving her, exactly.



This is Christine's tragic flaw--that she doesn't know what her heart knows. Her life-long practice of living out of balance--head first, heart last--isn't serving her well. She could change the balance, begin the adventure of listening to that inner voice. But she doesn't.

The whisperings that urge her not to go to the unfinished house that night, but instead to meet Joseph as promised . . . she squelches them. The prickles of danger that dance up her spine even as she parks her car that moonless night? She ignores them, misidentifying them as sissy-fears. Had she listened, her intuition would've told her not to meet the stranger at the house that night, but to find a different way to expose the baddie. Her heart would've shown her a way to accept help when she needs it, discriminate between the trustworthy and the malicious sources.

Though Christine dies that night, her journey is far from over. For nothing will be truly right again in Milford-Haven until her murder is solved. And in the solving must come to light . . . what the heart knows.

What the Heart Knows will be released in September. To download the *Milford-Haven* Single, *When Hummers Dream*, [click here](#).

To be eligible to win a gift basket of Mara's books and lots of goodies, leave a comment below. Winner will be announced at *The LadyKillers* on the **Sunday (August 14)** post. Be sure to check back to see if you are the lucky winner!

Posted by LadyKillers admin at 12:03 AM in [Honored Guests](#), [When Smart Characters Do Stupid Things](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#)

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August 10, 2011

Please trespass

Camille, here, and a little paranoid. Why am I feeling all eyes on me this week? Because cozy mysteries are always under attack when it comes to the TS/L (too stupid to live), and maybe even the LadyKillers are ready to attack. And all because one or two (OK, a thousand) amateur sleuths take it upon themselves to solve crimes, meet bad guys in underground garages at midnight, and do anything but follow the rules.

It's the rule-breaking aspect that deserves attention.



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Diana Orgain blog
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OUR FAVORITE LINKS

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AUGUST 2011

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One weekend I showed up to teach a writing class that was to be held on the property of a county park. The class was scheduled for ten o'clock. I showed up about 15 minutes early and found a couple of students waiting outside a high chain link fence with a serious padlock, and a No Trespassing sign.

No problem; we were early. We chatted on; more students came. We hardly noticed that a half hour passed. No one showed up to let us in. A couple of delivery people came by in trucks and left when they realized there was no entry. We made a few calls with our cells—first to my contact at the school, who suggested I call the park police, who suggested I call the city police, and so on.

The boring part of the story is that eventually someone came to let us in.

The interesting part happened while we were waiting.

A young woman pulled up in a low red sports car. She got out and addressed us.

"I have to get in there," she said. "I was at a wedding in this park last night and left my purse."

We shrugged and explained that there was nothing we could do until someone came with a key to the padlock, and we did expect the city police at any minute.

She grunted. The next thing we knew, she was scaling the fence. She plopped down on the other side. About ten minutes later, she approached the fence again, from the inside, and climbed out.

In her hands were a purse, a pair of stilettos, and a bra.

She gave us a wink, got in her car and drove off.

My writing students and I got a lot of mileage of the incident, creating many colorful back stories. If she hadn't scaled the fence, there'd be no story.

What impressed me most was the young woman's willingness to disregard the No Trespassing sign and its warning of a heavy fine.

Was it stupid of her to ignore that sign? What if she got caught?

I'm such a rule-keeper! The physical difficulty of scaling a fence pales in comparison to the mental and psychological difficulty of breaking a rule, big or little.

Maybe that's why I write fiction—to break rules vicariously. Seems like fun and it gets things done.



Would you have climbed that fence?

(Never mind whether your bra would have been in there.)

Posted by Camille Minichino at 1:21:01 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(16\)](#)

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August 09, 2011

When Smart Characters Do Stupid Things

One of my pet peeves stands up on hind legs and howls when an otherwise smart character does something for which his or her neck should be wrung, were there any justice in their fictional world:

"By the way," the young woman said, "I just saw ten thugs beating up a young man on the corner."

"I must rescue him," her petite friend replied, racing out the door.

That is not only badly written, it is exaggeration, but how many times have we read about Our Sleuth (and not always the amateur) rushing into some clearly dangerous situation without any obvious means of protection. Did he really not have time to call for back-up? Why didn't she question the need for a midnight meeting in an abandoned warehouse without so much as a sleazy bar nearby? Either is cause for a bullet sandwich or concrete feet, and no jammed gun or conveniently discovered ice pick that frees Our Sleuth from the ropes is going to win me over. At least the writers of the *Perils of Pauline* knew how to do over-the-top melodrama with humor. Think twirling moustache and vampire-blackened eyes on The Villain.

The unexpected event or a raw emotional response based in personal trauma are legitimate. So is any act of heroism for which the author has carefully prepared the reader by character development. All that creates good tension. What readers don't like is the character who says, often upfront, that he or she knows full well what the danger is but will go right ahead anyway for some reason that is fairly petty: he's just tough; she's itching for a fight because the boss has it in for her; or, worst of all, he or she just doesn't think.

Have any of my characters (presumed smart for the sake of argument) done something stupid? Brother Thomas did once act as a decoy, but he had back-up. Another time he hid in the shadows, hoping to overhear the killer, only to be knocked out by an unexpected assailant. And he has nearly drowned. His choices may not be the safest, but I'd like to think he has approached dangers with acceptable reason.

No one can anticipate everything so there is enough tension with all the unknowns. Authors don't need to add character stupidity to the equation. I tend to close book and put in donation pile when I get too much of that. And if you conclude that I have committed the same literary offense, feel free to do the same to mine!

Posted by Priscilla Royal at 01:00 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(9\)](#)

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August 08, 2011

Taking a risk



Camille here, taking a risk with this placeholder quote while MARY ANNA EVANS is flying above the clouds and out of LadyKillers range.

Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.

It's from e.e. cummings -- how can we go wrong?

Posted by Camille Minichino at 1:14:43 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(6\)](#)

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August 07, 2011

News and "Smart & Stupid"

NEWS FLASH!!

This coming Thursday, August 11, our honored guest blogger is women's fiction author Mara Puri. Early editions of Mara's novels have won fifteen gold and finalist literary awards including the Benjamin Franklin, the Indie Excellence, the USA Book News Best Book, and the ForeWord Book of the Year. Drop in to the LadyKillers on Thursday, read and comment on Mara's post, and you'll be eligible to win a gift package with Mara's book, an audio book and some other goodies...

This post is part of Mara's month-long blog tour. You can follow her tour schedule [here](#).

Next Week's Topic: When Smart Isn't

Next week's topic of discussion at the LadyKillers is "When Smart Characters Do Stupid Things." We all know the type: the character who goes down into the dark basement with one or two other characters. *After all, it's dark. There's no down there!* But it