

WARNING!!! THIS LETTER CONTAINS MAJOR SPOILERS!!!
WARNING!!! THIS LETTER CONTAINS MAJOR SPOILERS!!!
WARNING!!! THIS LETTER CONTAINS MAJOR SPOILERS!!!

© Karin Slaughter. Please do not copy, duplicate or otherwise disseminate any of the contents of this letter. If you do, you are a total jackass.

Dear Reader:

One of the major obstacles an author hits when working on a crime series is the obvious question: How many people in this town have to die before there's nobody left but the stupid people? It's the Jessica Fletcher syndrome. As the body count gets higher, suspending your disbelief becomes more and more difficult. Over the years, Grant County has been home to (among other things) a serial rapist, child pornographers, spree shooters and religious nutjobs. The high level of crime in South Georgia was starting to rival Atlanta. At the very least, folks had to be wondering about property values in my little town.

I don't want to go all writerly on y'all, but it's been my goal from the beginning to write about violence and crime as realistically as possible. I try to tackle all the social issues that are important to me: domestic violence, child abuse, rape, etc. I want my readers to be in the heads of my characters and understand the motivations behind their actions. With Lena especially, it was important for me to show an honest recovery from rape. While her actions certainly aren't representative of all women, she illustrates an unfortunately large cluster of survivors who seek to punish themselves when something horrible happens. I felt a huge responsibility as I wrote about her experiences, just as I felt a responsibility to explain how Sara and Jeffrey's relationship evolved over the years. In a nation where our divorce rate is creeping past fifty percent, I felt the need to show that there is still the possibility that two people who love each other can find a way to make their lives work together. I suppose in a lot of ways, part of the series is a love story between Sara and Jeffrey.

There comes a point in every story, however, when something has to give.

I was in the middle of working on my fourth novel, *Indelible*, when the idea came to me that Jeffrey had to die. I really can't explain how my brain came to this conclusion, but it started out very slowly as I was working on the story, sort of like a flea in my ear, so that by the middle of the book, I was certain about what I had to do. Trust me—it wasn't easy. I was depressed for days. I even had to stop writing for a while just to get my head around it. Could I really kill Jeffrey? Could I change the series so dramatically? And then, there was the scariest question of all: would this be committing professional suicide? Would my life-long dream of being a published writer end along with Jeffrey?

All of these frightening questions rolled around in my head for at least a month. Every time I thought about Jeffrey dying, my hands would get all sweaty and I'd get this weird, jittery feeling, like I'd had 8,000 cups of coffee. And some crack. Mostly, I thought

about you, my reader—all those emails and letters I have gotten over the years, all those kind notes about how much you enjoy reading the books, the impact that the characters have had on you. How could I do this to *you*? How could I build up this man, this hero, and then snatch him away?

I told no one about this idea—not my agent, not my editors. I spent many sleepless nights tossing around scenarios for Sara and Jeffrey, trying to figure out another way to believably (there's the key word) change things up without losing a beloved character. Slowly, I let myself really consider the possibility. I knew that I had at least two more stories that I wanted to tell about their lives, and that at some point I needed them to get together so that in the end, when his death came, it would be like a punch to the gut. I also knew that Jeffrey's last book would possibly be the most challenging story I'd ever written.

That was what finally swayed me: the challenge of doing something so horrible, so final, to a character I truly loved. Remember that as much as you enjoy my books, as much as you love or love to hate the characters, these are real people to me. I wasn't just knocking off some fictional person who only existed on the page. I was murdering someone who was a living, breathing human being to me—someone I had shared my life with for almost a decade. And then there was Sara. God, poor Sara. It breaks my heart just thinking about the impact this is going to have on her. I cannot begin to imagine how she will get through this. (Well, okay—now I can, but you'll have to read the next book in the series to find out.)

Having decided what was going to happen, I had to tell somebody. I'm not lying when I say that my heart was racing like a gerbil on speed when I called up Kate Elton, my UK editor who has worked with me on the series almost from the beginning, to tell her that Jeffrey had to die. My voice shook as I explained to her exactly what I wanted to do and why—the whole Jessica Fletcher thing, the need to push myself, to take the series as far as it could go and change it so that I could start anew; a phoenix coming out of the ashes! A challenge for the ages! Shock! Awe! She was silent for just a moment before she said, “Yes, I think that's exactly what you need to do.”

I couldn't believe she agreed. How could she be so uncaring, so cruel?

I think that writing *Faithless*, the next book in the series, was at that point one of the hardest things I'd ever worked on. As difficult as it was to write Jeffrey's death scene in *Skin Privilege/Beyond Reach*, all during *Faithless*, I knew that he was going to die—and not just the fact of his death, but the method. Not to mention that while all of this was going on, I changed American publishers, signing up with one of the most revered crime fiction editors in the country. Just to make things more confusing, her name also happened to be Kate (Miciak). She also happened to agree with the other Kate.

Can you believe the heartless people I have to work with?

So, for the last two years as I toured with Indelible, then Faithless, crisscrossing America and Europe, talking to folks about the series, about Sara, Jeffrey and Lena, I kept what to me was one of the biggest secrets in the world. In short, I lied to you all. I am sorry for that, but I hope that in the end, the payoff was worth it.

And please know, reader, that as I wrote those last pages detailing Jeffrey's death, I cried like a freakin' girl. I absolutely bawled. I still feel as if I am mourning him. It's as if I've lost a dear friend. On the other hand, I am itching to write about how Sara handles being a widow, and the changes that this will bring to Lena's already troubled life.

My next book will be outside the series. I still need time to get used to the idea of Jeffrey being gone. *Sleeping Dogs* (which is the tentative title as I write this) will come out next year, then I'll start working on *Genesis*, aptly named because it will be the beginning of Lena and Sara's life without Jeffrey. The story will start three years after his death, and I think you'll be surprised how their lives have changed.

On a final note, let me assure you, reader, that there's no going back. Jeffrey's death was not a dream or a plot twist. The only thing I ask of you is discretion. Please don't ruin the ending for everybody else. Oh—and one other thing: please be patient. Remember that we're all in this together. I know it's hard, but I do have a plan...

Karin Slaughter
Atlanta, GA USA
18 April 2007

[printed from www.KarinSlaughter.com](http://www.KarinSlaughter.com)