



# finally home

With the deep Southern roots of her family tree planted firmly in her soul, this engaging novelist writes of the land she loves.

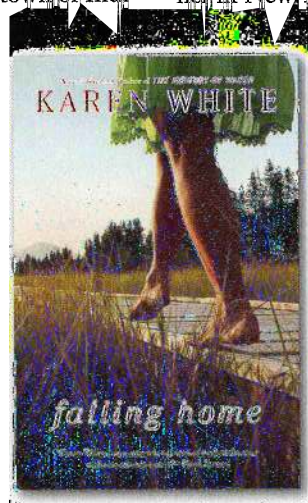
By Karen Callaway

Although Georgia author Karen White was born in Oklahoma and grew up in exotic locations from England to Venezuela, she has always been a Southern girl at heart. She enjoyed the small-town life her cousins enjoyed in her mother's hometown of Indiana, Mississippi, and anxiously anticipated her annual summer visit to this deep-in-the-Delta community. Eighteen years ago, she made her dreams of living in her beloved South a reality with a move to the Atlanta area.

Reading any of this author's books—she has more than a dozen—leaves little doubt of her Southern affections. With locales ranging from Charleston and the Lowcountry to Louisiana and her adopted Georgia soil, Karen's books feature strong female characters that readers love—and can identify with. "I think women can relate to them because they're not perfect, they're flawed, they have baggage," she explains. "But they

always seem to find the inner strength they need to find their way out of whatever predicament they find themselves in."

Take Cassie Madison, protagonist of her recently reworked and re-released novel, *Falling Home*. After a betrayal by her sister drove her away from their hometown of Walton, Georgia, and landed her in New York, Cassie has spent the last 15 years trying to erase any vestiges of her previous life, including her Southern accent. She has a successful career, a fabulous fiancé, a coveted address in the city—and no need to look back. But when her father is dying and she must return home to face the hurts she left behind, she finds the strength, seemingly present in the DNA of all Southern women, to not only get through, but also to triumph.



Karen is able to use her own life experiences to add depth to the characters at crossroads in her stories. Research for *The Memory of Water*, a novel that takes place on the coast of South Carolina, required her to take sailing lessons—despite her extreme fear of deep



water. Recalling that confrontation of her fear enabled her to tap into the emotion necessary to fully develop the story. Her books often include difficult subjects, such as breast cancer, mental illness, and death, and she tackles them with sensitivity and insight. Eschewing her "self editor," Karen tries to write the story as it comes to her "rather than make it palatable to a certain audience"—something her readers have come to expect and appreciate in a Karen White novel.

Which isn't to say her books are predictable; quite the opposite is true. There are as many plot twists and turns in them as there are shrimp boats in the Lowcountry. Readers will often find a history lesson thrown in (illustrated in *Folly Beach*) or even encounter ghostly beings (as in her popular Tradd Street series). Though fans don't know exactly what they will discover in Karen's titles, they know they will always be enthralled—and eager for the next release.

And just where does she get all the great ideas for her books? Karen laughs, and says they come from the "stewpot" in her head, an analogy that amuses her since she doesn't cook. As she goes through her everyday life, she comes across things that pique her interest. "I throw them all into the stewpot to simmer," she explains. "By the time I take them out, I feel like the ideas are well seasoned."

Karen strives to pen the sort of books she likes to read herself. "I like the kind of stories you can get lost in," she says. "You can make me laugh, you can make me cry, but give me a satisfying ending." As her awards and fan following suggest, this Southern-borne author does just that—and so much more.

## get to know KAREN WHITE

- 1 Karen works in two locations. Her office is for the business side of things—the blog, web site, fan mail, etc. She does most of her writing in the sitting room in her bedroom. At church time, when she's not checking and going over her notes, she spreads everything out on her bed. Occasionally, she sits out to write on her porch in peace, which even looks a little like pasture.
- 2 During Karen's "writing day," it always by her side. In fact, she had to get a chair and a table for her sitting area to accommodate Quince's constant companionship. Named at 10, the lovable pup in her Tradd Street series, is modeled after this precious pup.
- 3 The author must have her prerequisite Diet Dr Pepper and coffee close at hand while she's writing.
- 4 Karen is a very orderly person. After her daughter, Meghan, went to college, Karen called in a professional organizer and reworked her room. "Every single book, I walk on the room and just say, 'ahhh...'"
- 5 Walton, Georgia, in *Falling Home* is a composite of several small towns, including Ellen and Inwood, Bluewater, her father's and mother's respective hometowns.
- 6 Karen's next book, *The Warm Towel*, takes place in pre-Civil War and post-war in the New Orleans.
- 7 The rewrite of *Falling Home* allows Karen to add both Harriet's and Maude's takes on the events, along with Cassie's—which "picks up the book so much for the readers." She looks forward to releasing the sequel, *After the Rain*, and perhaps penning a third book that will pick up Maude's storyline when last left.