

At the Stroke of Midnight

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Karen Michelle Nutt

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This is a work of fiction set in a background of history. Any resemblance of the imaginary characters to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Praise for Karen Michelle Nutt's

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Ms. Nutt pens a unique time travel with interesting characters and an unexpected twist. I was drawn into Tricia's struggle to save Dean's life, because she knows that their lives are somehow entwined. Dean is a likable playboy, who deserves redemption.

All in all, AT THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT is an enjoyable short story, which I highly recommend.

**Marlene Breakfield,
Reviewer at Mystique Books**

“The author takes us immediately to the heart of her story with Dean, the captivating movie star and Tricia his savior. This is a wonderfully romantic story. Modern and revealing!”

**Reviewer: Anastasia,
Ghost Writer Literary Reviews**

“I absolutely loved this story. This author has great dialogs, well thought out characters and an awesome story line. This story kept my attention from start to finish and I recommend it to anyone who loves a time travel story with a touch of romance.”

**Reviewed by Tory Lynn author of My
Charming Protector**

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In Memory of Clifford Coleman
December 1, 1992- May 27, 2007

Chapter One

Tricia Lancaster parked her car across the street. She leaned on her steering wheel as she gazed at the two- bedroom house that was once Dean McCloud's home. To the right like a backdrop, she could see the Hollywood sign in the distance.

McCloud had been an American icon in the 70's, when angel flight pants and afghan coats were in style. He starred in the western series, The Long Trail where every week he kept the west safe from outlaws. He was on his way to being on the big screen, landing a part that would have been perfect for his bigger than life persona. He could have had it all, but he threw it all away by blowing his brains out.

Some believed it was an accident while conspiracy theorists believed he'd been murdered. The coroner called it a suicide, leaving his fans disillusioned.

His home was turned into a shrine. It was a museum of sorts for the long dead actor as if all of America should give homage. Tricia was here to cover a story for the local newspaper.

In three days, it would mark the anniversary of the death of Dean McCloud. There would be thousands of flowers and presents covering the lawn and a vigil would begin a minute before midnight, the documented time of his death. She was here to do the story and take some pictures. She'd film the rest later. She begged

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for the piece even though it wasn't a high priority for the small town paper. She couldn't tell anyone the true reason she wanted the story. She felt connected to Dean McCloud as if she should know him.

It started with the dreams. Vivid true-to-life dreams before she knew he was even an actor. For God's sake, she wasn't even born when Dean McCloud died. She hadn't even seen one of his TV shows until they aired on Nickelodeon. Now she owned the entire three-year series on DVD. She bought his biographies and purchased magazines on eBay that had pictures and articles about the actor, but none of them touched what she knew from her dreams.

She opened her car door and stepped out. Without a backwards look, she locked it as she made her way to the front steps.

She took a deep breath before she entered. She was here to take the tour. She should have done it a long time ago, faced the ghost so to speak. She hoped seeing his home and doing the story would finally put her obsession of him to rest.

She needed to have a normal relationship, not this morbid affair with a man who died over thirty years ago.

She paid the elaborate fee and took the pamphlet that gave a brief description of Dean McCloud. She walked into the living room where the twenty-something docent was talking about Dean as if he were a close and personal friend.

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At first glance, Tricia knew most of the furniture wasn't original. The recliner was brown; his had been blue. The lamp should have been made out of glass marbles instead of the gold tinted glass. The carpet wasn't even close since it used to be green shag.

She walked down the hall glancing at the photos depicting Dean as a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, with his shoulder-length dark hair, sideburns and contagious smile that showed off the sexy dimple in his right cheek.

She moved on, venturing toward the bedroom. She hesitated at the doorway.

This room was where he had decided he had nothing to live for. She didn't go in.

Instead, she took a detour into the den. The floor television model was showing a Long Trail episode, one of her favorites. Dean, or rather his character Samuel Baines cleverly stopped a bank robber from killing a hostage. Dean was talented. He was charming and lethal all in one.

Ignoring the roped off area, Tricia made herself at home and took a seat. She tossed her backpack at her feet. Dean had sat in this chair; this was his. She lightly caressed the threadbare arms of the recliner. She snuggled down to watch the show, catching a whiff of cologne. She smiled wondering if it was Dean's scent forever embedded within the fabric of his chair.

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On the television, she watched Dean out draw the outlaw. This episode, this scene in the saloon was his last.

Tricia was startled awake by a loud popping sound followed by screams. She catapulted out of the chair expecting to have to take cover. Fear was replaced by confusion. The last thing she remembered was watching Dean's final performance on the old television console.

She looked around the crowded room wondering how she slept through the caretaker setting up for the seventies costume party. The men had long hair and side burns and the women wore dark eye shadow, flowered tops and suede boots.

Tricia deduced the popping sound came from someone uncorking a champagne bottle. A woman in a tight short skirt and go-go boots was trying to pour the bubbly into two flute glasses.

"Hey, do you need a beer?"

"What?" She turned, seeing the Corona inches from her face before she looked up. "No, I'm ..." Her eyes widened.

"I must be dreaming. Dean McCloud?"

His cocky grin spread across his face.

Tricia was convinced she was still asleep, only she never dreamt with this much clarity. "Dean?"

"That's me, Baby."

She looked around her, taking in the subtle differences that made the home seem more ... McCloud-like, was all she could come

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up with for now. Dean sat down in the chair and snaked out a hand, grabbing her arm and pulling her onto his lap.

Her arms went around his neck, but that was simply preservation. It was not meant as a come on. Dean obviously thought otherwise. He smiled his eyes taking in every feature before his gaze landed on her lips. She knew the moment he decided to kiss her. His eyes turned a shade darker, and his eyelids closed halfway. Her heart pounded in her chest. She prayed if this was a dream she wouldn't wake up. Dean McCloud was going to kiss her.

Dean loved these parties, women throwing themselves at him as if he were a god. This one was cute even in her odd attire. He loved the way her wild curls framed her pixie-like face. Simply enchanting, he thought as his fingers caressed a curly strand.

She seemed skittish, innocent, so unlike the other women who threw themselves at his feet. He wanted a small taste of her before he let her go. His lips came coaxingly down on hers with tantalizing persuasion, surprisingly she didn't object. The pleasure was like sweet agony as she met his caress, as if she had been waiting for him. He took more.

Tricia relished in the way his tongue traced the fullness of her lips before slipping between them. While he tasted her, she clung to him. Passion inched through her veins making her want the kiss to go on forever.

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She was kissing Dean McCloud, the man she dreamt about, with the contagious smile and polished moves. His hands moved to her waist holding her close. That felt too good. Her mind screamed it couldn't be happening. The man died over three decades ago, she thought as reality came hurtling down on her. She pushed him away, breaking contact as if his lips had suddenly burned her. A shadow of annoyance crossed his face until he must have realized panic rioted within her gaze.

Dean hadn't meant to scare her. His fingers lightly caressed her arm. "Don't fly away little chick. I won't hurt you." This was a private party among friends to celebrate the wrap up the last episode of The Long Trail. Dean wondered who brought her.

"Forgive me."

"Forgive you?" he asked.

"Yeah. I have to know if you're real." She touched his face his ears, his nose, which caused him to chuckle. When her fingers touched his mouth, he took hold of her wrist halting her. He tried to reclaim her lips but she moved her head to the side and his kiss landed on her cheek.

He pulled back to look at her. She tasted wonderful, like strawberries, all sweet. He wanted her, but he had enough ethics not to pursue this one. She screamed of commitment and he wasn't offering.

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“Chickie, I need to tend to my other guests.” His fingers twirled a honeysuckle-colored curl before he gently removed her from his lap and stood. Since she looked like she was about to pass out, Dean placed his hands on her shoulders and turned her so that she fell easily into the chair he had just vacated.

She looked up at him with those big amber-colored eyes. Man, she was one foxy lady. He cupped her chin, gliding his thumb over her lips that were still swollen from his touch. He was tempted to take from her again, but then his gaze found hers and he knew it would be too much.

He casually stepped back and melted away to join the others who were making bets on how many shots of whiskey Fred Mack could take before he fell on his face.

Tricia sat there not moving for a full minute. Forget that she had miraculously traveled back in time and was thoroughly kissed. She glanced around the edge of the chair to see Dean throwing his head back with a roaring laugh.

The phenomenon was Dean McCloud was alive.

End of Sample