

ALL THINGS GIRL.net: Questions for Lauren Henderson:

1.) Please tell our readers a bit about you, and about your background.

I was born in London, and went first to a school in the countryside/London suburbs (called North London Collegiate) which is the model for Wakefield Hall in the book. Like Wakefield Hall, it was very academic and sheltered, so it was a total shock for me to go to St Paul's Girls in Central London when I was 16. St Paul's is the model for St Tabby's in *KISS ME KILL ME*, and it's so sophisticated that our 6<sup>th</sup> form induction lecture was mainly taken up with the headmistress telling us firmly not to join model agencies before running it past her first. I was *terrified*. There were two supermodels in our year, though one eventually was kicked out of her agency for being too thin - you can imagine how skinny that was! I still remember being able to see every single bone in her arms. There were plenty of divas, fashion obsessions, drugs, sex, clubs and bad behaviour.

Though I hated my time there, as it was incredibly intimidating, I certainly got a lot of good material for my YA books! After St Paul's, I went to Cambridge University to study English Literature, and then I was a music journalist in London before moving to Tuscany to write books. I wrote 7 books in my Sam Jones mystery series, about a badly-behaved girl sculptor who keeps stumbling across dead bodies.

Then I moved to New York, and wrote 3 chicklit novels (feeling like a bit of a change, and also some time off from the dead bodies) and a dating guide, *Jane Austen's Guide To Dating*. I followed the rules in my own dating guide, and met my husband in NYC – moved back to London with him and two very fat cats two years ago, and we think we've settled in London for good. Obviously, I couldn't stay away from mysteries forever, as I'm back writing mysteries again with the Scarlett Wakefield YA series!

2.) In what ways did your childhood influence you as a writer? As a person?

I was quite a loner, as I didn't have an easy childhood – my parents fought constantly and made life at home very difficult. I retreated into books, and

that's definitely where my impulse to write comes from – I found so much pleasure and comfort and security and excitement in reading stories, I wanted to start telling stories of my own and pass that pleasure on to other people. I think having to deal with two very difficult people as my parents certainly made me strong and independent, and it's no surprise that my mystery heroines, Sam Jones and Scarlett Wakefield, are also very strong and independent – they have quite indestructible, almost super-heroine qualities in the sense that they refuse to acknowledge defeat, which is a quality that I really admire (and have a little bit of myself). My sister would just call it insane stubbornness, but I think 'indomitable' sounds better – well, I would, wouldn't it?

3.) Most writers are also avid readers. What authors most influenced you? What did you read as a child? What are you reading these days? Is there a favorite book or author you want to share with us?

Oh, blimey, I could go on for ever with my favourite authors! When I was a teenager I loved historical stories- Geoffrey Trease, Rosemary Sutcliff, Georgette Heyer. They're probably very old-fashioned now – they were probably old-fashioned then! – but it was wonderful to escape into a different world and learn about the past while reading a fantastic story. I have a lot of crime writer and chicklit and literary author friends whose books I love, and edited an anthology called Tart Noir with some of my favourites (warning: some of the stories are very dark and sexy and/or violent, so not suitable for young readers). I share a website, [www.tartcity.com](http://www.tartcity.com), with my friend Stella Duffy, whose books I love. My ultimate heroine is Modesty Blaise, from the books written by Peter O'Donnell – she really is a super-heroine and can cope with every situation life throws at her.

4.) Has writing always been your passion? When did you first realize you'd written something good?

It's definitely always been my passion – I was trying to write Regency romances from the age of 11. I really hope I never find those old notebooks

because I'd be quite embarrassed to read them now. For some reason, I was obsessed with counting how many words I'd written and I would write in a big notebook and count the words in every single line – that sounds so OCD, doesn't it? I think the first time I realized I'd written something good was my first good short story, because short stories are easier to control than novels. But I was amazed when my first novel, *Dead White Female*, was accepted. Absolutely amazed. I think I'd have paid them to publish it.

- 5.) Many of our readers are also writers, who are curious about the business of writing. Tell us about getting your first book published?

I entered a competition to find a new female crime writer, and though I didn't win, one of the judges was a literary agent and asked to read the full m/s of the book (I'd submitted sample chapters). She gave me good notes, but didn't end up representing me. Still, her notes enabled me to cut the book and sharpen the plot, and I then sent it off to a girl I'd been at university with, who was working as an editor. My book, *Dead White Female*, was her first purchase – and the first book in my Sam Jones series. She paid me practically nothing, but having a publishing deal enabled me to get an agent, which was a huge step too. Basically, I kept pushing, and I used all the contacts I had. I also was part of a writers' group for a couple of years, which I would really recommend to everyone as it really helped develop my writing.

- 6.) Did you keep a diary or journal when you were a kid? How about today? Do you blog?

Never kept a diary. To be honest, I wouldn't have trusted my mum not to read it. And I would love to blog – I have a MySpace page, [www.myspace.com/mslaurenhenderson](http://www.myspace.com/mslaurenhenderson), and I want to start blogging there, but I've been so busy writing *KISSES AND LIES*, the sequel to *KISS ME KILL ME*, that by the time I've finished writing for the day my brain is wiped and all I can do is lie on the sofa and watch America's Next Top Model...

- 7.) Writing can be extremely solitary. How does a social life fit in? Tell us about making friends within the publishing industry?

Ooh, I was really lucky starting out, and I didn't realize it. I began by writing 7 mystery novels, and the crime writing community is very friendly and welcoming. So I was taken under the wing of Val McDermid, a very successful crime writer, from the moment I did my first book signing – she was signing at the same bookshop – and made a lot of crime writer friends who were a great support to me, especially Stella Duffy, one of my best friends (as is her lovely wife Shelley, a playwright). Then, when I started writing chickfic – romantic comedy – I met people like Sophie Kinsella, Chris Manby, Jenny Colgan, Lisa Jewell, Sarah Mlynowksi, Mike Gayle, and we ended up forming a group of chickfic and ladlit writers who talk and email each other all the time, as a support group (because writing can be really solitary) and also as friends. I feel incredibly lucky to have all these friends, because it does make a huge difference and help to balance out the loneliness of being at home all day writing and not seeing anyone!

- 8.) Many of our readers struggle with balancing their creative needs and the rest of their lives. How do you do it? Walk us through a typical day in the life of Lauren Henderson?

Get up, drink coffee. Put on sweatpants and nasty old t-shirt. Go to the computer. Write or edit. Often don't have breakfast or lunch or eat anything till about 2ish, which is a really bad habit – as is forgetting to wash my face or brush my teeth till quite late in the morning! I'm sure the postman thinks I'm some kind of sad shut-in loony. By about 2 I surface, eat something, feeling like my brain's been wiped, and then go out for a long walk or an exercise session. Sitting around so much in the morning means I really need to do something physical in the afternoon. I've done yoga, Pilates, running, trapeze, gymnastics, and pole-dancing classes for years and years. I like to mix up my exercise, but my favourites are trapeze and gymnastics because they're so exciting. I also like being strong – knowing I can climb a 30ft rope, or hang upside down off a pole, or hang off a bar and swing myself around is very satisfying to me.

In the evenings I'll hang out with my husband or go out to see friends. I always dress up when I go out, because of spending the day in ratty sweatpants or exercise clothes. I had drinks with the features editor of COSMOPOLITAN magazine last week – I do a lot of articles for COSMO in the UK – and she teased me because I was really dressy and made-up and had made such of an effort. I pointed out that it's because I spent all day slobbering around, and she said that it's the same with all of her freelancers – they all really dress up when they come out for drinks with her.

9.) Where do you find the inspiration for your stories? How did you come up with *Kiss Me Kill Me*?

There was an article in the Canadian press about a girl who kissed her boyfriend and he dropped dead – they thought it was because he had a nut allergy and she had eaten peanuts. Though that turned out to be a wrong assumption, I and my editor thought it would make a fantastic premise for a mystery novel. I'm also allergic to nuts myself, though much less so than Dan in *KISS ME KILL ME*, so it's something I know quite a lot about! I decided I wanted this to be the heroine's first kiss, because that would make it even more important to her to find out how Dan really died, and whether she was responsible. So that was my initial impetus for the book, and the series, because I wanted the mystery of Dan's death to be complicated enough to have to run over more than one book. I also knew I wanted Scarlett to be a gymnast, because it would both explain why her life had been quite sheltered up till the start of the book – gymnasts train so hard – and it would also give her fantastic physical skills that she could use in a variety of exciting action scenes! Like, for instance, the one where she jumps out of her window, pursuing Taylor, and swings off a tree...

10.) Scarlett seems pretty resourceful for a teenager. Tell us a little more about her?

Like all of us, Scarlett has no idea how resourceful she is until she's put in a series of dangerous and crucial situations and she has to fight with everything she's got to find out the truth. As I said, she's a gymnast, so she has all these great physical skills already, and she has to learn how to apply them to the dangerous situations in which she finds herself while she's investigating. Extreme necessity always brings out qualities in people

they don't know they have, and Scarlett is really on a journey of discovery – not just to find out the truth about Dan's death, but also to find out about herself and how much mental and physical strength she has. She's an orphan and though her grandmother loves her, she's the least demonstrative woman in the world, so Scarlett's always been on her own as long as she can remember. Which is lonely, but it's meant that she's had only herself to rely on, so she has many more strengths than she realizes..

11.) What about Taylor, and Nadia?

Taylor's a great character – I love writing her. She's a total, 100% tomboy, very butch and super-strong with no doubts about her physical abilities at all – she can be almost like a cartoon character. I like that she starts seeming indomitable, and we'll gradually, as the series progresses, get to see that she really is human and has the normal insecurities and self-doubts we all have – she's just got a very tough shell and it takes a while for her to let people in.

Nadia's the opposite to Taylor in every way! She's obsessed with her image. Taylor works out to be strong and healthy – Nadia only cares about how thin she is. And she's in extreme competition with Plum, while being intimidated by her. She's way too sophisticated for a seventeen-year-old – her parents are very rich and have left her to her own devices for much too long. And, as we're going to learn in the sequel to *Kiss Me Kill Me*, she's got some unpleasant secrets of her own.

12.) What was your favorite scene in the book?

Oh wow, that's such a hard question! I love writing the action scenes – Scarlett on the trampoline and swinging on the tree as she jumps out of her bedroom window after Taylor. But I also love big confrontational scenes, like the fight with Plum, and romantic/sexy scenes, like the kiss with Dan and Scarlett's attraction to Jase... and I love writing funny scenes too, like the ones with Lizzie... ugh, obviously I'm finding it impossible to pick! But I'd love readers to tell me theirs. Email me at [Lauren@tartcity.com](mailto:Lauren@tartcity.com) or message me at MySpace – my user name's mslaurenhenderson.

- 13.) The ending of *Kiss Me Kill Me* seems to beg for a sequel, and I see from your website that the next volume is due next spring. Can you tell us a little about it?

I just finished writing it a week ago! It's called *Kisses and Lies* and it resolves all the questions about how and why Dan was killed, though it ends with a surprise twist of its own. Hmm, what can I say without giving anything away? Scarlett goes on a date with Jase... she gets drawn into a big conflict between Plum and Nadia... she goes on a quest to a castle, where someone else dies... and Plum does some crazy table-dancing! So it's just as full of thrills and spills as *Kiss Me Kill Me*. I had tons of fun writing it.

- 14.) Did you find the young adult (YA) market vastly different from the contemporary/adult market? What made you choose to write a YA mystery?

I don't find the market that different – you need to write good books with strong characters and plots, no matter what. And, like adult mysteries, readers love a good, long-running series, so hopefully everything I learned in writing the Sam Jones mystery series will make the Scarlett Wakefield series just as exciting! I started writing the books because I was asked to by my editor Claudia – who used to be the assistant to the US editor of the Sam Jones series. She'd remembered me when she got her editing job, and thought I'd do YA really well. I was instantly attracted by the idea of writing YA – the first thing I said was, "I want to set it in a girls' boarding school in the English countryside". I don't know where that came from, but as soon as I said it, I was inspired by the idea, and everything flowed from there....

- 15.) What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Study the market – read a lot of books like the one you want to write. See what the authors do well, and what they do badly – learn from their successes and their mistakes. Work out what you can bring to your writing that no-one else can. Write from the heart, but plot your book reasonably well before you start. Write about what you know to begin with – don't try to run before you can walk. And keep going. My friend Val McDermid, a very

successful thriller writer, says that the key to writing is finishing – so many people start books they don't finish!

- 16.) Ipods and mobile phones have become universal accessories, and indeed, are mentioned in connection with the teens in your novel. Have you succumbed? What's playing on your Ipot while you write? What's your ring-tone of choice?

Ugh, I have very uncool tastes in music! My husband likes very cool rock bands and obscure Japanese pop and thinks I have the worst taste in the world, which honestly, I probably do. I love pure pop – Abba and Britney and Shakira and early Madonna. I used to have Dancing Queen as my ringtone but then some bastard nicked my phone and I've been too lazy to work out how to download ringtones to the new one. I love a lot of country music, which I listened to when I lived in NYC – I'd have CMT on the TV all the time. There's something so pure and straightforward about country music and it's a bit less sexist than rap. I really hate having to buy a 'clean' version of a song to avoid hearing women called rude words every other second. I like Eminem, but blimey, he's a really angry little boy, isn't he? Someone should have washed his mouth out with soap a bit more often. I used to be a major indie chick when I was in my early twenties in London, and I went to all the cool indie clubs, saw Nirvana at tiny venues, etc etc, and Nirvana, Jane's Addiction, Nine Inch Nails are still my favourite music to dance to when I feel like pogoing. My husband and I do agree on one thing – we love The Cure. We wanted to have Love Cats for our first dance at our wedding, but knew his family wouldn't get it, so we didn't do it, and I still regret that!

- 17.) What's next for Lauren Henderson? Tell us about your next project?

Hopefully I'll do more Scarlett Wakefield books – but actually my next novel is going to be called *Divas*. It's an adult fiction, sex & shopping/blockbuster novel, with battling heroines – a spoilt heiress and a pole dancer, who have to join forces to wrest their rightful inheritances from the evil villainess, who's murdered her husband – who was also the heiress's father and the pole-dancer's lover. It's set in London, New York, Italy and lots of exotic

locations. I've written three chapters already and it's so much fun – really over the top, like a glamorous soap opera, with everyone tossing their hair around and hissing threats while dressing fantastically. It'll be published in the UK next September, and it'll be written under the name of Rebecca Chance. I've written so many different kinds of book already in my real name – mysteries, romantic comedies, a non-fiction dating book called *Jane Austen's Guide To Dating* – that the publisher of *Divas* thought this book should be under a pseudonym. It's a two-book contract, so I'll be doing another Rebecca Chance one after that – probably about trophy wives going into rehab a lot. I don't know any more than that about what the plot's going to be – that's all I have right now, but an idea always starts with just one line and then you go ahead with fleshing it out!