

Novel Beginnings for Mystery Fiction

By Jacqueline Seewald

For those of you who are unfamiliar with my Kim Reynolds mysteries, I'll mention that *THE BAD WIFE* is actually the fourth novel in the series and the most recent. Each novel in the series features the same main characters. However, each novel stands alone as a unique and complete murder mystery. In addition, the main characters are not static. Like real people, they lead changing lives and have complex personalities. Kim Reynolds, an academic librarian who is also a reluctant sleuth and psychic, has been romantically involved with Lieutenant Mike Gardner, a homicide detective. It comes as something of a shock to both Kim and him discovering that he is still legally married.

Some mystery novels start *in medias res*, in the middle of the action. Two of the mysteries in this series, *The Drowning Pool* and *The Truth Sleuth*, begin with murders in the first chapter. That isn't the case in either *The Inferno Collection* or *The Bad Wife*. Which type of beginning is preferable? That will vary with the dynamics of the plot.

In the opening of *The Bad Wife*, readers get some of the back story via dialogue. The purpose of the first two pages is to set the initial scene in the novel and place the reader squarely into the emotional connection between two of the main characters, providing an understanding about them as people and also about their past relationship and history. With this type of intro, the writer is taking a chance. If readers aren't drawn immediately by the characters in a novel, they won't be interested in reading the book. They'll toss it aside. Today's reader has a short attention span. I find creating a strong beginning to a novel possibly the most challenging aspect of the writing process.

Ready? Here are the first two pages of my novel:

"Must be fate," a deep, masculine voice said.

Kim Reynolds dropped the head of lettuce she'd been examining and it rolled across the floor.

"Didn't mean to startle you." Mike Gardner's voice was like a caress.

She looked up, taking in his rugged looks. "I didn't expect to run into you in the produce section of the supermarket." Kim did her best to ignore the frisson of attraction she felt in Mike's presence.

"I'm not stalking you," he said.

"I never thought you were," she said.

He gave her a small smile that implied he didn't believe her. Then he scooped up the head of iceberg lettuce and handed it back to her. "You nearly decapitated it."

"You would think that way," Kim said. She meant to sound stern but ruined it by smiling back at him.

"Hey, I'm a cop. Guess I tend to think in violent metaphors."

Kim looked around. "Mike, don't you usually take the girls shopping with you?"

"Evie stayed late to try out for a school play. She's into drama now. I dropped

Jean at a friend's house so they could study together—at least I think that's what they're doing." Mike Gardner studied her with a probing look. "So how have you been?"

"You mean since you saved me from being killed?"

He shrugged in a nonchalant manner, but his expression was one of concern. "I wasn't going to mention that. You still teaching at the high school?"

She looked away. His sharp gray eyes saw too much. "I gave my notice."

"How come?"

"One of the reference librarians at the humanities library is going out on sabbatical. I was offered the chance to go back to the university in my old job. It's what I'd rather do."

"Congratulations." She sensed his warmth was genuine.

"Thanks."

"I guess your principal was pissed off?" His keen gaze searched her face.

Kim shifted uneasily. She shoved a lock of dark auburn hair behind her ear. "Hank said he kind of expected it. I guess I disappointed him. I confirmed what he thought all along, that the work was more than I could handle."

"Sweetheart, don't be so hard on yourself. You did a good job with those kids under difficult circumstances. No one could have done better."

She smiled, appreciating his kindness. Mike Gardner had a good heart; no one knew that better than her.

"So are you still seeing Principal Anderson socially?"

Kim stiffened. "No, I'm not. But it's really none of your business."

He drew closer, invading her space. "I beg to differ with you. I think it's very much my business. Everything about you concerns me."

Kim breathed in the male scent of him and felt her emotions exploding. She kept a tight rein on her feelings most of the time, but it wasn't easy with Mike so close to her.

"And how is your wife?" she said in as even a tone of voice as she could manage.

Mike had the decency to look down at the floor. He fisted his hands, shoved them into his jeans pockets and frowned.

THE BAD WIFE is available directly from the publisher Perfect Crime Press and also from Amazon.com in both digital and print versions:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00J6PCKVW>



Multiple award-winning author Jacqueline Seewald has taught creative, expository and technical writing at Rutgers University as well as high school English. She also worked as both an academic librarian and an educational media specialist. Fifteen of her books of fiction have been published to critical praise including mysteries *The Inferno Collection*, *The Drowning Pool*, *The Truth Sleuth*, *Death Legacy*, *The Third Eye*, and *The Bad Wife*. Her short stories, poems, essays, reviews and articles have appeared in hundreds of diverse

publications and numerous anthologies such as *The Writer*, *L.A. Times*, *Pedestal*, *Sherlock Holmes' Mystery Magazine*, *Over My Dead Body!*, *Gumshoe Review*, *The Mystery Megapack*, *Reader's Digest*, *Library Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly*.