

Setting the Hook

Cromwell's Folly, CHAPTER 1

March 29, 2014:

Ben Cromwell was murdered in the narrow alley between the casino parking garage and the ramp to the stables behind the Charles Town racetrack. Murdered is the nice word for it. Slaughtered is more apt. Eviscerated. Chopped into pieces scattered in a ten-mile radius from the murder scene that had been carelessly scuffed over with dirt, straw, and cedar chips before anyone realized that spot might be critical to an investigation.

It looked like someone really hated Cromwell—maybe several someones. It also looked like they didn't care if anyone knew about Cromwell's murder. Most of the body parts were found within a week of the police realizing that he'd been murdered—and not just disappeared on a betting binge into a casino so dark and smoky that individual faces couldn't be made out on the omnipresent camera monitors.

In the middle of the night several years ago, I was researching how to write a murder mystery. I came upon a set of guidelines which began, "Find the body." There may have been more to that instruction, but that's what I wrote down on a pink Post-it note along with six other brief mystery milestones that fit on a two-by-two inch piece of paper. I put the note on my desk, and from time to time read it over when my mind strayed from other tasks.

When the story of Ben Cromwell and detective Sam Lagarde started telling itself to me as I drove to the bank one winter day, I didn't realize it was adhering to the short list of instructions I had taken down years before. I had, in fact, jumped right into the story by serving up the body and setting up a false start, a wrong turn the detective must explore before realizing he's got the wrong perpetrator.

The story came pell-mell at me, going so fast my typing barely kept up. I didn't breathe, much less examine what I was doing. Once the first several chapters were out, however, I had the space

to look back at what I had written so that I could figure out where I was going. I had skipped over the usual steps of developing a character, putting him in danger from multiple sources and their various motives, and gone right to what used to be the moment a third of the way through the story when someone stumbles on the dead guy. The brevity, speed, the sense of urgency—all those stylistic elements, I hoped, would capture a reader the way they had me.

Readers have little time and many choices. Writers need to grab their imaginations within split seconds of the moment they open a book to consider it, to decide whether to read it. In *Cromwell's Folly*, the reader is never in doubt about who's dead, or what, where and how it happened. She just doesn't know why or who did it. That's what she has to read to discover, entering the mind of the detective, the killer, and even the victim to find the answers. The beginning of the story is the hook, the inciting event that hopefully keeps one reading. I sunk it as deeply as I could and pulled the line taut.

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Ginny Fite is an award-winning journalist who has covered crime, politics, government, health care, art and all things human. She has been a spokesperson for a governor, a member of Congress, a few colleges and universities, and a robotics R&D company. She has degrees from Rutgers University and Johns Hopkins University and studied at the School for Women Healers and the Maryland Poetry Therapy Institute. She is the author of *I Should Be Dead by Now*, a collection of humorous lamentations about aging; three books of poetry, *The Last Thousand Years*, *The Pearl Fisher*, and *Throwing Caution*; and a short story collection, *What Goes Around*. *Cromwell's Folly* is her first published novel. A second Sam Lagarde mystery, *No Good Deed Left Undone*, under contract with Black Opal Books, will be released in 2016. She resides in Harpers Ferry, WV. www.ginnyfite.com