

From “A Role to Die For” by G.B. Pool

I couldn't believe they found Brad's body. I thought I buried him deeper.

But eight years is a long time and a girl can forget little things like that. You know, stuff like: Where'd I park the car? Where'd I leave my shoes? Where'd I bury my boyfriend?

I knew where I buried him, just not how deep. Deeper's better. Trust me. Anyway, the first time you kill somebody is always trial and error.

By the second one, I had improved my technique.

And number three was... sheer perfection.

As for Brad... Dear Brad. Dear no-talented Brad Kingston who schmoozed the director into cutting my part down to a walk-on, he had it coming.

He wanted cutting. I showed him cutting. And not that little nip/tuck he got when he grew that second chin after scarfing down too much designer pizza.

Brad wanted to break it to me gently up at my cabin. How did he put it? A quiet little weekend where we can really get to know each other. Yeah, right. I learned he was a rat and he learned I had a temper.

We had been seeing each other since the cameras started rolling on the picture. Actors always fall in love with their co-stars, unless the co-star is a horse. Well, there was this one story...

Sorry, I digress.

As for Brad Kingston, he was a hand-me-down. I stole him from another actress, Barbara Sanders. We had been stealing choice men and even choicer roles from each other since we both starred in the same movie more than two decades earlier.

Brad was also gorgeous. He may have gotten top billing in the film, but I had been in the business longer, something he never let me forget. I played the “older woman” seduced by the lead character one steamy night.

I believe I seduced him the first time... that is, off camera. But his ego rewrote the scenario and it turned up in a snippet for *Variety* credited to “Unnamed Sources.” The headline read: What Cinema Legend is putty in the hands of a certain Hollywood Heartthrob? Since there were only two of us at my house, I could do the math and figured out who was the “unnamed source” and who was “the putty.”

We drove up to my place late that Friday afternoon so he could explain why I was getting the shaft. I actually started out with three more lines than Brad did in the movie. By the time they finished hacking up my part, I was lucky they didn't open the movie with my corpse being wheeled out of the room.

Brad walked into the cabin and plopped down on one of the long sofas. He unzipped his designer ski jacket and threw it on the floor.

“Come sit by me,” he said, “after you take the luggage up to the bedroom. You know I'd offer to help, but I sprained my arm doing a stunt last week.”

“I thought your stunt double hurt his arm.”

“Well, yeah, but I have to let everybody think it was me. You know the old Hollywood image thing. But a little exercise is good for you. Not that you're fat or anything, but have you

seen some of the girls on the set? I mean they're built like boys, except for the implants. You don't have implants, do you, Paula?"

"No, Brad. This is all me."

Analysis:

"How to Write a Killer Opening." That's the name of a class I teach where I stress the value of having a good opening. If not the first line or first paragraph, at least the first few pages need to do a few basic things because the opening is what the agent/editor/producer reads and it might be the only thing they read, so make it a grabber.

You might not be able to include every one of these things, but if you keep them in mind, you'll have a better chance to open your story with a bang.

The opening should set the **tone** of the piece whether it is serious literature, funny, or romantic. You don't want to start off funny and turn your story into a slasher fest.

You'll want to set the **genre**. The tone might be funny, but is it a funny mystery or a funny romance or maybe a funny science fiction caper?

I have heard experts say you shouldn't **start in the middle of the action**, but if the reader (remember you will first be sending this to an editor or agent) is wading through a ton of backstory before the real story starts, they might toss your manuscript into the round file before they get to the good part. You can always add some backstory later on.

The best way to start in the middle, or as I do, start in the middle of the beginning, is to state the **problem** at hand or the **situation** that needs to be resolved by the end of the story. That way the reader is on the journey/hunt with you from the start.

You might even want to **hint at the solution** just to tease the reader into wanting to see how this thing turns out.

In my short story, “A Role to Die For,” the actress telling the story sets the **tone** by her opening remark: *I couldn't believe they found Brad's body. I thought I buried him deeper.* This piece is obviously funny with dark overtones. She is almost nonchalant about the killing.

The piece is obviously a mystery (**genre**) because we are talking about a dead body.

The story **starts in the middle of the beginning** because old Brad is already dead. Paula then tells how he came to be room temperature and what she did with the body. And she mentions a few more dead bodies she added to her collection: *Anyway, the first time you kill somebody is always trial and error. By the second one, I had improved my technique. And number three was... sheer perfection.*

By now I hope the reader will keep reading to see what else happens and will there be more dead bodies.

And the very fact Paula said the body had been found means somebody, probably the authorities, are going to come knocking at her door. (**That is hinting at the solution.**) How will this aging actress handle this role? I hope the reader is dying to see it through to the end with her.

I try to open my short stories as well as novels with most of these points. It's fair to the readers to state up front what I am offering; give them a taste of what is to come, and most of all: deliver on that promise. From the beginning of “A Role to Die For” the reader gets a dark, humorous mystery that hits the ground running. The story provides just enough sympathy for the protagonist so the reader will want to see if she gets away with it. But does she?

This story was one of the two winners at the California Crime Writers Conference several years ago in their Author Idol Competition. A panel of literary agents picked their two top

opening pages. The story is published in *From Light To Dark* and also in *The Anatomy of a Short Story Workbook*, both published by SPYGAME Press.

Short Biography:



A former private detective and once a reporter for a small weekly newspaper, Gayle Bartos-Pool (G.B. Pool) writes the Johnny Casino Casebook Series and the Gin Caulfield P.I. Mysteries. She also wrote the SPYGAME Trilogy, *Caverns*, *Eddie Buick's Last Case*, *The Santa Claus Singer*, *Bearnard's Christmas* and *The Santa Claus Machine*. She teaches writing classes: "Anatomy of a Short Story," "How to Write Convincing Dialogue" and "How to Write a Killer Opening." Website: www.gbpool.com.