

The first two pages of the third book in the Eve Apple mysteries (Camel Press, Publisher), winner of a Readers' Favorites Award, follow:

"Sharks? You're worried about sharks?" I leaned back in my chair and let the wind blow the sweet smell of salt water into my face. I sat with Madeleine, my best friend and business partner, on deck in the stern of the cabin cruiser, the sun warming us as we headed down the mangrove-lined waterway.

Madeleine moved her head from side to side, gazing into the water rushing past us. Droplets of ocean spray in her hair caught the sun, creating prisms of tiny lights in her red curls.

"We're here to relax, not worry about some big ol' fish. Besides, sharks usually only come out at dawn and dusk. To feed. We'll keep an eye out." I reached for the sun block and stretched out my legs to apply it. My legs were fish white. I needed to get outside more often. Both of us did, but that was the downside of owning a retail business. You worked six days a week, and exhausted, slept the seventh.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a break in the mangroves. "Take a look at that boat. Grandy and Max said it's been there for years and that someone lives on it."

My words had the desired effect. They took Madeleine's attention off her fears and focused it on the beaten-up sailboat that lay anchored in a small canal to our left. It looked as if it had been wedged there for decades.

Alex, a private investigator and my current squeeze—and he really was a man any woman would love to squeeze and often, towering just a bit over me and blessed with intense deep-set azure eyes and a full head of sun-bleached hair—turned his head to look and nudged David Wilson, our captain and Madeleine's new boyfriend, to take a look at the wreck.

"Yep, it has been there for a while." David backed our craft off plane, and we drifted by at idle speed. "I heard they're trying to remove it, but as long as she floats and someone lives on her, there's not much that can be done."

I raised my binoculars to my eyes and caught a glimpse of movement on the sailboat. "I see the guy. He's pretty scrawny. He looks about as bad as the boat." I handed them to Alex to take a gander.

The guy on the boat looked in our direction. I waved and smiled. He gave us the finger. I guess he thought we were invading his privacy. David pushed the throttle forward and we sped off, back on plane and down the waterway to the bay beyond.

We were on our way to Nest Key, one of the small islands near Key Largo, to meet my grandmother, her husband Max, and some of their friends for an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing. David kept his old Chris Craft cabin cruiser docked in the same marina where Grandy and Max's boat was moored. Since David's boat slept four, we decided to spend the afternoon on the island, stay for dinner cooked on the boat, then return to Key Largo. We'd anchor in Sunset Cove and do an overnight there.

It was Sunday, the only day Madeleine and I closed our consignment shop, Second to None, in Sabal Bay. We would have to return early tomorrow to reopen, but we thought it was worth giving up our one day of rest, since we rarely got out of rural Florida and almost never found the time to visit Grandy and Max, who ran a fishing charter in Key Largo.

What did I accomplish in these two pages?

The best way to analyze the first two pages of the book is to consider the questions I asked myself in writing them.

Who are the characters and what is their relationship like?

Readers familiar with the series will recognize the protagonist Eve Appel and her best friend. Thus the verbal interaction will remind them of the make-up of the characters—Eve, spunky and unafraid of anything and tiny Madeleine, shy and more of a worrier. The warmth of the relationship between the two can be found in Eve's attempt to distract her friend from her fear of sharks by pointing out a wrecked boat. I remind those coming back to the series of the characters they've come to like, but also provide enough about Eve and Madeleine to make them likeable for those trying the series for the first time. I do this because I want readers to be able to read the books in any order. To accomplish this a writer must make the characters sympathetic from the beginning.

How can I let the reader know this is a mystery? How can I foreshadow what is to come?

In the first paragraph I juxtapose the comment about sharks in the water with the warm sun, the wind and the smell of sweet salt water. This is a fun weekend outing on a boat, but one where Madeleine worries about sharks. I want the reader to worry along with Madeleine, but to push that concern into the background with Eve's reassuring tone of voice. Everything that follows should convince the reader there is nothing to worry about, yet I've planted that doubt with the first word in the book, "Sharks?"

What is the physical setting as well as the emotional one?

The reader quickly finds out Eve and Madeleine are on a weekend adventure in the Florida Keys, but I also indicate this is not their home, but a break in their daily routine at the consignment shop (whose name I use) they own in rural Florida. With them are two men, Eve's boyfriend, Alex, and Madeleine's newest beau and owner of the cabin cruiser, David. While I provide a physical description of Alex, I also include his effect on Eve. I include their plans for the day and the evening—sunbathing and swimming and an overnight anchoring out. Included in these settings are references to Eve's grandmother referred to as Grandy and her husband, Max. The inclusion of Grandy and Max creates a picture of satisfying emotional bonds between Eve and her grandmother. Because of their inclusion at this point in the story, the reader expects to hear more from them, as they are important in Eve's life and in the development of the story.

How do I make certain my reader knows this is a mystery with humorous elements?

The encounter between Eve and the scrawny man on the beached sailboat is not included simply as a diversion, but rather to establish the tone of the book. The reader is led to expect there will be other instances of humor. Note here: humor is individualistic, so the

included scene might not be considered funny by all, but whether the reader laughs at it is not as important as whether the reader understands the attempt, and I'm reasonably certain from reader responses that they do.

Phrases such as, my "...current squeeze—and he really was a man any woman would love to squeeze and often," to describe her boyfriend Alex, calling the man on the sailboat "scrawny" and suggesting Alex "take a gander" through the binoculars create a light-hearted tone.

This examination of the first two pages of *A Sporting Murder* reveals certain aspects of the story to come: the make-up of the main characters and important secondary characters and their relationships with one another, the physical setting of the story, a foreshadowing of trouble ahead pointing to the genre of the book and the humorous tone of the story. For returning readers, they can settle in for a read they've come to anticipate. For someone just meeting Eve and her pals, they have an idea of what kind of an adventure they will encounter. Good reading ahead!

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