

Adding a Prologue: When Is It Necessary?

by Amy Reade

I spent a seemingly-endless amount of time on the first page of my new novel, *The House on Candlewick Lane*, and I am pleased to announce that it never changed!

But...it's no longer the first page.

Instead, it's the first page after the Prologue.

I have always been a fan of authors like Jane Austen, who can take the reader's hand and lead them through a quaint garden of description and backstory. But times have changed and today's readers have less and less time to devote to reading. I've found that authors in the 21st century need to take the reader's hand so they don't fall off when the thrill ride starts.

That's what I was thinking when I wrote the first page of *The House on Candlewick Lane*. I wanted to drop the reader right into the action, so *something* had to start on the first page. And what more horrifying crisis to create than a mother learning that her little girl, who is supposed to be at school, never made it into the building?

I wanted to take my time with the opening scene because it evokes a fear that every parent has and I wanted to draw out and explore that feeling. The scene starts quite innocently—the school secretary calls the mother, Greer, to confirm that her little girl, Ellie, is out of school for the day. Greer knows Ellie got on the bus, so she assumes the teacher has made a mistake in taking attendance. But it quickly becomes clear that the teacher didn't make a mistake. Greer's worry sets in, and so does the reader's. That's what I was aiming for—I want the reader to be engaged from the start, wondering where the daughter is, what's happened to her, and feeling that same gripping fear the mother feels. One of my beta readers brought the book with her one night when we were getting together. She was crying. "You know this is my worst fear. Please tell me nothing happens to Ellie," she said.

That's when I knew I had written a compelling beginning.

The book follows Greer's journey as she searches for Ellie. It's a search that takes her from Massachusetts to Scotland, the land of her birth and the place where her family and her ex-husband's family still live. And that's important, because much of the foundation for the events in the story is built upon something that occurred in Scotland.

The scene that provides some of the backstory for the book takes place in the house on Candlewick Lane and comes much later in the novel. That's why I added the Prologue. My editor suggested that I give the reader a short glimpse into the past right at the beginning of the book—a glimpse that would give the reader a sense of foreboding and would get the reader wondering what took place in the house on Candlewick Lane and what it has to do with Ellie's disappearance, which follows quickly on the next page. Between the apprehensive feeling the

reader gets from the Prologue and the kernel of fear the reader begins to experience on the next page, I want people to keep those pages turning!

I hope I've succeeded in crafting a book readers will enjoy. *The House on Candlewick Lane* will be released on February 7, 2017. For now I have the opinions of several people, including my editor and my beta readers, who think the first two pages pull the reader into the story with that magic mixture of fear, relatability, and the need to know what comes next.

Here are the first two pages of *The House on Candlewick Lane*:

Prologue

I must have fallen asleep, because I sat up with a start, not remembering where I was. But after a second it all came back to me in a sudden rush of fear and indignation. I was sitting on the twin bed. It was hot. My hair stuck to the back of my neck and my forehead. Gray light forced its way into the room through the small window that overlooked the fields behind the house on Candlewick Lane. The rain was still falling, smearing the glass. I wondered where Neill was. I knew pounding on the door would be of no use, but I had to do something. I had to try. My fists bore the bruises from my earlier futile attempts to be heard. There was nothing to do but wait to be released from this tower prison. Someone *had* to let me go.

They couldn't keep me here forever.

Chapter 1

The phone rang as I was gulping down my second cup of coffee, ready to head out the door to work.

"Hi. Is this Ellie's mom?"

"Yes."

"This is Maureen from the primary school office, just calling to confirm that Ellie is out today."

"No," I answered, setting the coffee cup down with a clunk. "She should be there."

"Okay. Mrs. Dennis probably just marked her absent by mistake. I'll call down to the classroom and get back to you."

"Thanks." I hung up, frustrated with Mrs. Dennis. This wasn't the first time she had been careless about marking Ellie absent when she was sitting right in front of her. And now I had to wait for the office to call back and was going to be late for my class.

I had folded half a load of laundry before the phone rang again.

“Dr. Dobbins? This is Maureen again. Mrs. Dennis said Ellie wasn’t in the classroom, so I went down to check. She’s not there.”

“Is she in the bathroom?”

“Mrs. Dennis said there’s no one in the class bathroom. I checked the bathroom in the hallway and she wasn’t there. She’s not in the nurse’s office, either. The custodian is checking the other bathrooms and the gym to see if she’s there.”

It wasn’t like Ellie to leave her classroom without telling the teacher. “Let me call my neighbor. She walked Ellie to the bus stop with her kids this morning. I’ll call you back.”

I hung up and dialed Dottie, my neighbor across the street.

“Hi, Dottie. It’s Greer. Did Ellie get on the bus okay this morning?”

“Yeah. Why? Is something wrong? Is she sick?”

Author Bio:



Amy M. Reade, a recovering lawyer, lives in southern New Jersey, though she wishes she lived in Hawaii. She is the *USA Today* bestselling author of *Secrets of Hallstead House*, *The Ghosts of Peppernell Manor*, and *House of Hanging Jade*. She is currently working on Book Three of The Malice Novels, a series set in the United Kingdom. The first book in the series, *The House on Candlewick Lane*, is available for pre-order at

https://www.amazon.com/House-Candlewick-Lane-Malice-Novel-ebook/dp/B01FBZXR3K/ref=sr_1_sc_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1481239093&sr=8-1-spell&keywords=the+house+on+candleick+lane and will be released in February, 2017. She loves cooking, reading, and traveling.

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