

# The First Two Pages of *Just Another Termination* – Hook

## ‘Em Early and Often

by Linda Thorne

When I was scheduled to appear on B.K. Stevens’ renowned *First Two Pages* today, I thought of using one of my short stories from an anthology who accepted four stories from the six I submitted. The anthology, *Soundtrack NOT Included* was published in 2012. After reading some of the first pages of other shorts on this specific site—some nominated or having won awards and all lengthier than mine—I didn’t think my stories lent themselves to a good enough dissection of the first two pages. I have to admit also being humbled by the strength of the short stories already posted on this blog.

So, I returned to my comfort level, the novel, which I honestly find easier to write than short stories. Here, I’ll review the first two pages of *Just Another Termination*, the first book in the Judy Kenagy mystery series. This is the story of a career human resources manager with a history of horrific bosses and nightmare work situations. Judy had recently started working for a good employer and believes her days of running from bad bosses and guilt-ridden memories are finally over. Not so. The book opens with the start of a work day in which her new workplace will be spun into more turmoil than Judy ever imagined and her false sense of security shattered. After reading the first two pages, the reader should be well aware something’s going awry soon.

When the plant manager told me Alma Guerra hadn’t shown up for work, I should’ve walked away from my quarter-century long career in human resources. But the thought didn’t enter my mind. Why would it? I couldn’t recall a single incident of a no-call-no-show amounting to much more than some trifling issue. Sure, you get those who’ve quit without notice, but they’re always the ones you’re glad to see go.

A great deal of information is conveyed in this first paragraph, as it should. The mention that she should’ve walked away from her entire career is more than a hint something bad is about to happen. The character tells us what job she has and, due to the length of time in her career, we know she is at least in her forties. Unless the reader has not read a blurb about the book (unlikely), there is nothing yet to denote the sex of the character. Judy then “protests too much” about a no-call-no-shows being trivial; thus, the reader should think this will be anything but.

Not more than an hour after his announcement, Andy Holman waltzed back into my office with a new issue. “Judy, we’ve got to term Lester Robichaux.”

“What now?” I asked. In Lester’s mere six-weeks of employment, he’d already damaged two machines, putting them out of operation for weeks.

“He dropped a motor on the plant floor. It’s done for, and so is he.”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “I’ll prepare the discharge papers and meet you in your

office.”

The lead’s name of Judy is given, which clarifies the character’s sex. What better place to start my book than with a termination. This is not the termination(s) reflected in the title, but I think the reader will figure that out and any discharge contributes to the termination theme.

I’d gotten as far as opening the blank termination form and typing in Lester’s name when Millie Landry rapped on my doorframe. “I’m worried about Alma. I’ve been calling her all morning.”

Having a bout of hot flashes, I didn’t want to deal with it so I waved her off. “Maybe she overslept, or had car trouble.”

Readers already know this no-call-no-show will be a huge deal. I’m just reinforcing their thought processes. Also, the hot flashes, hone in more on the character’s age range of late forties.

But I knew Millie couldn’t be pacified. She was Alma’s supervisor, and a motherly one at that. No doubt she had visions of Alma getting in a car accident, or a random fire at her house. Millie cited a list of possible calamities before dropping dramatically into one of my straight-back chairs.

“Alma was due in at seven. Judy, I’m telling you something’s wrong.” Her Southern Mississippi drawl cut across my desk without losing a note. “For land sakes, the girl’s worked here ten years with no attendance issues.”

I gulped. “Ten years?”

“Yes. If you knew her, you’d be in a panic, too.”

I’d worked for this packaging manufacturer less than two months and hadn’t yet met most of the two hundred plus employees.

Millie scooted closer, her dark hair, chocked-full of gray, hardly moving. “I’m going to drive over.”

The manufacturing work environment and Judy’s tenure there are revealed, along with more about the no-call-no-show. At this point, the reader is aware the setting is in the South. Millie Landry is introduced, a character sorely needed throughout the book to provide Judy with information that only she can get through her connection with the local police department. The reader should be certain by now that Alma Guerra will be found dead. I’m sneaking needed information into the dialogue and the protagonist’s thought processes, so the reader gets it as part of the action without slowing down the story.

I held up a hand to keep her in her seat. “Let’s pass it by Andy first.” I leaned toward the phone, hit the speaker button, and tapped in Andy’s extension. When he answered, I said,

“Millie’s here, upset about Alma, and—”

“You mean she still hasn’t shown? Alma’s never late.”

“I want to check in on her,” Millie piped in.

“Hold off,” he said. “Judy, look through Alma’s file. Try her emergency contacts. Millie, we’ll get back to you, but right now we’ve got another issue.”

Alma had listed her parents on the company’s personal information form. At the time, they’d lived here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, but she’d noted a change later, showing their address updated to Texas, along with a new out-of-state phone number. I flipped through the rest of her file, looking for local contacts, then went back to completing Lester’s termination form.

With the papers in hand, I pushed open the door leading out to the plant. Rows of machines stretched out before me. Their warning lights flashed, reflecting off the rusting, thirty-foot ceiling, while an array of noises roared in my ears.

Millie stood near a cluster of box-folding machines, holding a clipboard, a stocky, uniformed woman beside her. “Millie!” I called over all the grinding and clacking. She glanced up then transferred the clipboard to the woman and serpented around the machines.

I led her to a slightly quieter spot. “Her parents are her only contacts, but they’re out of state. I’ll get back to you after Andy and I handle this other matter.”

Millie bit down on her lower lip. “I don’t like this. I don’t know of anyone who could look in on her ’cept me or one of her co-workers.”

Okay, so you now know the more specific geographic setting, the Mississippi Gulf Coast. You also may have the idea that Alma, the no-call-no-show, is that “termination” in the title *Just Another Termination*, because dead people must also be terminated from company records. But then I add the information below suggesting there may be more than one significant termination.

“Are you okay?” Millie asked, laying a hand on my shoulder.

“It’s kind of hot in here,” I said. Memories of Jolene Cromwell threatened to permanently carve themselves into my psyche, my being. I shook my head to clear it. I couldn’t let myself get trapped in the past. I had a termination to deal with. Holding the papers up in my hand, I said, “Anyway, I’ll get back to you once I’ve taken care of this.”

So, from the first two pages, the reader should get the idea that there’s more than one plot line. An employee is going to be discharged, surely the no-call-no-show will be found murdered, and

what's all this history of another young woman that bothers the lead character?

There are actually several subplots in this novel, but they come later. The first two pages are only to hook the reader to stay with the story long enough for the next hook, then another until the entire journey is complete.

Biography:



Like her lead character, Linda Thorne is a career human resources manager (currently in between jobs). She began pursuing her true passion, writing, in 2005 and her debut novel, *Just Another Termination* was published in August 2015. Thorne has published numerous short stories in magazines and one anthology. Linda Thorne's second book in the Judy Kenagy mystery series, *A Promotion to Die For*, is close to complete. She lives in Hermitage, Tennessee a suburb of Nashville with her husband and two border collies (fur people) Abby and Mo.

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