

THE FIRST TWO PAGES: *The Fallen*, by Laurel S. Peterson

First, thank you B.K. Stevens for having me back on your fascinating blog. I'm so pleased to be here. I'm going to talk about the first two pages of my second book, which I'm going to finish (yes, I am!) this summer. *The Fallen* is the second in my Clara Montague series, so the first two pages of the new book must do a lot of work in terms of introducing the reader to the previously established characters, as well as creating tension to draw someone into the new story.

I begin with a dream that my protagonist, Clara Montague, has:

The first time, the dream came in waves of violet, crimson and black, like northern lights reflecting off ice or water. The lights were distant and I was safe. But they retreated then lunged with greater and greater force, the suck and roar like my pounding heart as suffocating color exploded over me.

I woke, shaking.

Not again.

I pulled the covers to my shoulders, the silky cotton comforting against my sweaty skin. The crystal clock read 2:15 AM. I needed to sleep. Tomorrow, I had clients to see and a business to run.

As I stared at the red numerals, they intensified and became shapeless, merging with the images of the dream, waves of color rocking the bed. My breathing grew deeper and faster and louder, the air slashing in and out of my lungs like sails through midnight air. The bed tipped. My body jerked. This time, I woke fully.

I sat up, pressing my back against the raw silk head board and hugging my knees. I dreaded these warning dreams. In the past, they signaled a death: first Father's, then Mother's. Mother was still alive because, together, we had found the person who threatened our family. But I had failed my father. I'd been unable to reach him in time, and he had died of a heart attack too far from help.

Now, again.

Red and black auras signaled anger and dread, violence and destruction. Did these colors connect to someone I loved? If so, who?

No answer echoed in the darkness.

I begin here because it lets the reader know Clara is experienced with portentous dreams; they affect her physically and bring problems she must solve if she wants peace. This section also briefly reviews part of the conflict in the first book, which revolved around her mother's past and the danger it posed to them both. In *The Fallen*, Clara is unsure where the danger is coming from.

The second page introduces the reader to Clara's love interest, Kyle DuPont, a black police chief in a wealthy, white community:

Kyle had asked Clara to join him at Dominick Ofiero's house on a chilly mid-March morning. The boy had been moaning about some disease or other he couldn't identify on his roses, and while she was a landscape architect not a landscaper, Kyle figured it was close enough. Besides, she had a laugh that could blow away cobwebs and fog, a laugh that always made him feel better. He just wished he knew what to think about those dreams she had and her laissez-faire attitude toward her divorce-in-progress. He wouldn't let a divorce slide like that, not over money. He'd get it done, move on.

Because of the proximity of the dream and the POV shift to Kyle's voice, the reader understands fairly shortly where the threat lies. We also come to understand how he feels about Clara, and that this is his story rather than hers. Finally, we see why he hesitates about getting involved with her, despite his feelings, which layers one of the subplots in the book, a subplot which began in the first book, *Shadow Notes*.

I'm particularly interested in this book in exploring the psyche of a black character. There has been a lot of discussion recently about cultural appropriation, so my choice, as a white writer, is risky. But writing about Clara in southwestern Connecticut would be inaccurate without black characters. Who knows if I've got it right, but I think writers are obligated to tell the truth as we see it—after looking closely, more closely, as close as we can.

Thanks for dropping by! You can reach me at www.laurelpeterson.com, on Facebook, or on Twitter: @laurelwriter49. The first book, *Shadow Notes*, is a great introduction to these characters. You can find it at Barking Rain Press: [check it out](#). I look forward to hearing from you.



Laurel S. Peterson's work has been published in many literary journals. She has two chapbooks, *That's the Way the Music Sounds* (Finishing Line Press) and *Talking to the Mirror* (The Last Automat Press). Her full length collection, *Do You Expect Your Art to Answer?* (Futurecycle Press) was released in January 2017. She has also written a mystery novel, *Shadow Notes*, which is available through Barking Rain Press. She is a community college English professor and currently serves as the town of Norwalk, Connecticut's poet laureate.