

Unintended Consequences

Michele Drier

When I'm looking for a book to read, especially from a new-to-me author, I read the blurb, the back matter if it's a paperback, and the first few pages. This smidgeon will usually tell me if I'll like the author's voice, the writing, the beginnings of the plot, the characters. I was raised to eat all my dinner, so not finishing a book is anathema to me. This cursory read is enough to make a decision—yes or no—although sometimes I'm surprised at the way the story unfolds.

When I'm writing a book, this holds true. In the first two pages, I shoot to encapsulate the plot, the characters, the tension, the challenges the reader will encounter. I want to make sure he or she stays with me.

I took a turn in my most recent book. It's a psychological thriller, a stand-alone in a genre I don't usually write. Different genres are fine with me, I have a series of traditional mysteries and another one of paranormal romance and there is a three-book cozy series itching to get out. But thrillers are another story.

As I began "Ashes of Memories," I established the main protagonist, built her fears and her world, drew a character sketch of her safe, maybe boring, life. People in two critique groups said, "where's the action?" Two chapters into the story, even I was...not bored, exactly but not on the edge of my chair. And I was writing the story for heaven's sake!

I tried rearranging scenes but all this did was make a disconnected hash. As a pantsier, I thought maybe I'd plot the first few chapters out. This gave me a road map but now I had a less-than-exciting story arc

I knew where the mystery and danger came from, a chip with thousands of bytes of empty memory, inserted into a person's brain, but the tension had to build so that the characters wanted, needed the memory boost.

Answering that question gave me a new first chapter, setting up the central tension.

CHICAGO

2023

Pain.

White hot focus.

There wasn't anything else. She lay in a ball, arms and legs pulled tight around her body, holding her right arm against her with her left hand. The arm couldn't move, the bones knocked against each other. Her head pounded, even her hair hurt, her scalp was on fire.

How long had she been here? Her mind reached for memories. Was it yesterday that he came home? Yes. He screamed at her because no food was ready then he'd snatched her pony tail, tore out the band, grabbed a handful of loose hair.

"I've told you not to pull it back." He bunched a fist and plowed it into her stomach. She doubled over, he pushed her to the table, bending her over and kicking her legs apart. A heavy arm across her back holding her down, the other hand pushing her skirt up. In a red haze she heard him swear as he ripped her panties off.

"You bitch, you never learn," as he rammed himself into her. Her body recoiled at the onslaught, tensing, the pain increasing. She felt her vagina tear and she cried out.

"You like that?" He pulled out, shoved her to the floor, leaving her there as he crashed out of the apartment.

She drifted, her mind taking her to another place, a place where there was no pain, no him. When the door slammed, she was back, back in the kitchen of the squalid apartment she spent

her days cleaning. Glass jingled as he put the bottles of vodka down. He kicked her in the stomach and went into the front room, turning the sound up on the televised basketball game.

There's a different problem now, though. The first chapter is a scene of violent domestic abuse, ending in murder, and these aren't the major characters. It's a strong scene, difficult to write, but it's not reflective of the actual story. The book is not so much violence on the page as a building of fear and anger, and I found it hard to detail the incredible pain of a beating. I worry the violence may turn some readers off before they can get to the development of the plot.

My critique group loved the book, beta readers loved the building suspense, early reviews are good.

In hindsight, I'm still not sure. I like the story. Like the book. Love the protagonists. And it certainly starts with action.



Michele Drier was born in Santa Cruz and is a fifth generation Californian. During her career in journalism—as a reporter and editor at daily newspapers—she won awards for producing investigative series. She is the president of Capitol Crimes, the Sacramento chapter of Sisters in Crime, and the co-chair of Bouchercon 2020. Her Amy Hobbes Newspaper Mysteries are *Edited for Death*, (called “Riveting and much recommended” by the Midwest Book Review), *Labeled for Death* and *Delta for Death*, and a stand-alone thriller, *Ashes of Memories*, published in 2017. Her paranormal romance series, *The Kandesky Vampire Chronicles*, was the best paranormal vampire series of 2014 from the Paranormal Romance Guild. The series is *SNAP: The World Unfolds*, *SNAP: New Talent*, *Plague: A Love Story*, *Danube: A Tale of Murder*, *SNAP: Love for Blood*, *SNAP: Happily Ever After?*, *SNAP: White Nights*, *SNAP: All That Jazz*, and *SNAP: I, Vampire*.

Ashes of Memories is available in either Kindle or paperback from

<http://a.co/4xGTkSi>

Visit her facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/AuthorMicheleDrier>, her website

www.micheledrier.com or her Amazon author page,

<http://www.amazon.com/Michele-Drier/e/B005D2YC8G/>

