

**First Two Pages of “Legends of Brooklyn” in
*Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4***

Triss Stein

In September and October, The First Two Pages features posts by some of the authors who contributed stories to Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4 (Level Best Books, September 2017), the fourth anthology of crime and mystery short stories by members of the New York/ Tri-State Chapter of Sisters in Crime.

With the original theme of this new anthology the inclusion of an iconic New York place or event, I had the perfect subject just a few miles from where I am writing this. That famous bridge has been saying Brooklyn all over the world for more than a century. Further, the next book in my series will take place in Brooklyn Heights, the neighborhood where the bridge begins. I had already learned more odd and interesting facts than I would ever be able to use in one book.

Setting is where I usually start, but once I have that, I *really* have to start. That is, I have to find a way to open the story. I’ve learned to begin my novels with an attention-getting first few sentences. The goal is to involve the reader immediately. In fact, I need those sentences myself to open up the story in my mind. Any necessary background, buildup or details can be slipped in as we go.

I find this more challenging with a short story. There won’t be a lot of space to fill in the background or set the scene, yet those elements may be necessary to tell the tale.

In “Legends of Brooklyn” the narrator is my series character, Erica Donato, a historian in training with a low-level, part time job at the (semi-fictional) Brooklyn History Museum. How much of that did I need to explain? And did I need tell all about her life and history? No, I decided. I only needed as much as this short story required. What I did need was to create place and immediacy with her voice:

I wonder if Parisians stop noticing the Eiffel Tower and Romans the Coliseum? Do long-time DC residents look up at the Washington Monument each time they pass it? Probably not. I work near the Brooklyn Bridge, but I don’t think about it or even notice it every day. It takes an event to make me stop and see, again, its beauty and grace, and to remember, again, its history.

I added in the necessary few sentences to give her some involvement in the events:

The most recent event was an announcement at the Brooklyn History Museum, where I work, that the 150th anniversary of the groundbreaking for the bridge was coming up

soon. Not as significant as the date of completion, fourteen long years later. But we would have an exhibit to mark it, and some events, which would need lots of planning. That is where I came in. In a part-time job only a step above intern, preliminary research was one of my assignments. I would spend the next weeks digging up depictions of the bridge in legend, art and literature. Not everyone's idea of fun, but it was mine.

Now that we have the where, the who, and the why, it was time to move us out of Erica's mind and into the actual world. I sent her for a walk. Like any famous attraction, there are reasons the Brooklyn Bridge is so memorable:

There it was, that soaring arc of stone and steel, thrown out across the water like a rainbow. It's not the magic it seems, though. Men died in its construction. When it opened, people were so nervous about whether it would hold that elephants were borrowed from the circus and paraded across to prove it was safe. Now crowds of people walk across it daily, marveling at the vastness of the river, the harbor and the sky."

By the end of the second page, Erica is pondering a mysterious old newspaper clipping, the original publication of a poem about the bridge by an author who vanished after his single appearance in print.

That's just the sort of impossibility that intrigues a scholar, and it soon opens the door to a crime that needs to be explored.



Triss Stein is the author of the new mystery *Brooklyn Wars*, described in *Publishers Weekly* as "a colorful tale of love, loss, greed and murder," the latest in the Erica Donato series about Brooklyn neighborhoods, in which the historian heroine investigates both old and modern secrets. The others are *Brooklyn Bones*, *Brooklyn Graves*, and *Brooklyn Secrets*. Triss has had stories in all four Murder New York Style anthologies. Her website is www.trissstein.com.