

***Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4* (Level Best Books, September 2017) is the fourth crime fiction anthology by members of the New York/Tri-State Chapter of Sisters in Crime.**

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

Rona Bell

This month, The First Two Pages continues to feature 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.

The first three words of my short story, “Prey of New York,” are: “We are hawks.”

These hawks have been following me around as a writer for a long time.

What the professional writer knows that the student writer does not is that there is nothing better than an assignment. When I learned that *Murder New York Style 4* would involve New York City landmarks, it was a great challenge and also a relief.

I believe that every writer has a panoply of images and characters waiting to be chosen, waiting to have a home and waiting to carry the writer forward. The assignment, in this case, was a crime story featuring New York City landmarks. My mind snapped to attention and thought first of the hawk, the hawk that fell to the sky on the New York City sidewalk. Somehow, this assignment laid itself upon the image of the hawk, and I began there.

I had seen this great hawk drop from the sky onto a New York City sidewalk in a fancy part of town. In a city where everyone is bombarded with images, with the desire for the next great thing to admire and to buy, here was this hawk. The crowd noticed him only as he was right above our heads. There was gasps mixed with a car horn, and then the hawk was on the ground.

How I remembered staring at him. His wings were clasped close to his body but he was breathing, steady and deep. It was the eyes. His eyes burned out at the crowd. In that moment, I wondered if I was looking at plain fear, at the fear of death, of the surprise at the end of life, or at the middle of a battle that he had yet to win.

This is New York City, where memory and civilization and crime and nature all combine. That hawk followed me in my imagination. I thought he would be the center of the story.

In fact, he lifted me up into the story and layered himself onto the family that must deal with crime remembered. Here is the opening of “Prey of New York”:

“We are hawks,” my father said. “We select the highest point in any city wherever we buy property. The highest point.”

He still talked as though he were driving, even holding out his hands as though gripping the wheel. These were the same hands he placed flat on the windshield when I was growing up, letting the heat from his body melt ice.

But I was driving now.

“In New York City,” he said, “the highest point is in Fort Washington.”

“I know that,” I said. “You told me that when I was four years old and you took me to the new lots where we tore the buildings down in a single day.”

My father gave out a laugh, a great laugh that exploded for a few seconds before he sucked it back in. Even a laugh was too much for him, a loss of control he could not allow. I knew that.

I wonder what is the difference in reading between the writer and the reader. For me, in these two pages, I see the falling hawk—on the page, the elderly father—behind each word, even though the hawk appears mainly at the beginning.

And I was thinking of this, layered upon what I read about the prolific writers.

On *60 Minutes* recently, John le Carré spoke about the characters that follow him.

“George Smiley is my secret sharer, my companion. And I think that, because I’m given to exaggerated emotions at times, Smiley moderates me as a writer.”

That, to me, is stunning, and so indicative of aspects of the writing process where the character moderates the writer. The hawk in the first line of “Prey of New York” actually moderated this story, and whatever I thought about the real hawk on the sidewalks of New York, this image, as John le Carré said, became a “conscious companion.”



Rona Bell is the pen name of a New York business executive who has published (under other pen names) in the *North American Review*, the Akashic Books *Mondays are Murder* series, as well as such publications as *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. An essay on wartime and crime fiction appears in the current issue of *Mystery Readers International*.