

**First Two Pages of “Every Picture Tells A Story” in
*Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4***

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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.

As a lifelong New Yorker, I’m keenly aware of how people view the city. Many see the New York of today without knowing its backstory. Whether they admire one of its great buildings or a piece of art in one of its museums, they don’t always know how it came to be, or how its creation may have shaped someone’s life. This look into how the past impacts the future of my protagonist Chloe is what I wanted to come through.

The opening of “Every Picture Tells A Story” introduces Chloe, now an old woman, contemplating a photograph at the Museum of Modern Art. It’s a photograph of her when she was young, beautiful, and on the top of the world, taken by one of its most famous photographers. She brings the reader into the story by showing us her life as it is now, while hinting at how it used to be. In these first two paragraphs, she lets us know her story has a before and after.

Tap.Tap.Tap. The museum guard's footfalls echo on the marble as he passes behind me. I can feel his eyes on my back each time he paces the length of the gallery. The old woman who's been sitting in front of the same photograph for hours. He’s probably deciding if he should tell me to move along. Is she one of those crazy old ladies with nowhere to go? Senile? Dangerous even? I smile as the taps pass in the other direction. He doesn’t recognize me. No one does. Not anymore.

They say every picture tells a story. But not the whole story. I should know. This one told mine.

By now, I hope the reader wants to know more about Chloe’s story, to uncover what was buried in her past, and is intrigued enough to keep reading. Chloe lets us know she understands she is to blame for part of the tragedy that occurred. Part, but not all of it.

It was so long ago you'd think the world would have forgotten about it, and him, by now. But the media still dredge it up every year on the anniversary of the day it happened. Those gossip rags love to remind people about the scandal. A great photographer, one of the world’s most famous, accused of such a terrible crime. Their boldface headlines scream for attention just the way they did back then. They blamed Otto, but he wasn’t the only one at fault.

I wanted to establish Chloe as a sympathetic character but not someone to be pitied. I knew I needed to strike just the right tone with her voice to have the reader grasp this

balance. She is recounting both the glory of a life she'd always dreamed of attaining as well as its ultimate loss. Are her plans too ambitious? Are they attainable? These are questions I hope the reader will have and will want answered.

I had big plans. I was going to become a model. Soon the name Chloe would be as well known as Twiggy's. *Glamour* and *Seventeen* were my window on what was happening out there in the real world. It was the Sixties, and everything was changing, especially fashion. Miniskirts, high boots, shoulder bags, big dangling earrings. All it took was a long neck and a sexy vibe to pull it all together. That would be me. Was me, I was certain.

In the paragraphs below, I wanted the reader to feel the awe Chloe feels as she describes meeting Oscar, a world-famous fashion photographer. Maybe the person who can turn her dreams into reality.

That's when I noticed Otto watching me. Some of my Iowa shyness still stuck to me. I felt my face blush red and lowered my eyes. When I brought them up again, he stood in front of me, just a short breath away. He took my hand and kissed it.

"I am Otto," he said. "Who are you, beautiful creature?"

"Just Chloe," I replied.

"No. You are *my* Chloe, and I will make the world fall in love with you."

I chose to tell the story through Chloe's point of view since she really is the only character who knows all that happened. I hope her voice speaks to the reader with emotions and insights that bring the story to life. I'd love to know what you think.



Cathi Stoler is the author of the three-volume Laurel & Helen New York mystery series, which includes *Keeping Secrets*, *Telling Lies*, and *The Hard Way*, as well as the novella, *Nick Of Time*. She has recently completed a new urban thriller, *Bar None*, a Murder on the Rocks mystery, and *Out Of Time*, a full-length sequel to *Nick Of Time*. She is the winner of the 2015 Derringer for Best Short Story for "The Kaluki Kings of Queens." Cathi is Vice President of the New York/Tri-State Chapter of Sisters in Crime and a member of Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers. You can reach her at www.cathistoler.com.