

The First Two Pages of "Lewenda Gets Married"
by Francelia Belton

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." - Martin Luther King, Jr.

That is how it is for me when I begin a new story. Taking that first step and not knowing what the story is going to be about, but having the faith that by the time I get to the end, I will have a whole story. I start with a first line and from there take it line by line, step by step, until I discover what the story will be about. And that most definitely was the case with my short story "Lewenda Gets Married," which will appear in a multi-genre anthology called *Glimpse: A New World*.

Opening paragraph:

She was smarter than he gave her credit for, but that was his mistake, not hers. Lewenda saw the trap he had tried to set up for her long before he had fully conceived it. She just didn't let him know she was on to him. More than anything else, she was curious to see whether he would actually go through with it. To her disappointment, he tried.

When I first wrote my opening paragraph, I had no idea that my characters were married and definitely had no idea they were hit men. (I came up with the title for the story at the end.) After I wrote those first few lines, I was asking myself, what mistake? What was he trying to do? What was his plan? And since I write in the crime and suspense genres, the natural response was, to try to kill her, of course! And that led to the next question, but why? And why was my protagonist giving him the opportunity to even try to follow through with this so-called plan? And why is she just disappointed and not furious? After all, this is someone she obviously cares about who plans on trying to kill her. Is she reversing the plan? Is she going to kill him first? I had to write on to find out. And all these questions are the same ones that I was hoping that the reader would ask and would continue to read to find out.

Lewenda finished tying his hands and ankles to the chair and stood, inspecting her handiwork. Joseph's eyes pleaded above his duct-taped, lying mouth, but she ignored it. Did he really think she would so easily forgive his betrayal?

Ah yes, so she did reverse their roles, and she is not quite as forgiving as we may have thought. But the next question that comes to mind is, what does she do next?

She pulled a second chair from the dining room table of their hotel suite and placed it front of him before sitting down. Outside, the ocean waves pounded the beach while local vendors called out to unsuspecting tourists to come see their cheaply made trinkets and wares. She didn't let the activity distract her, but instead watched Joseph for a few minutes without saying anything as he bucked and strained against his bindings. It was a useless gesture; he wasn't going anywhere. After a few muffled, frustrated shouts, he stopped and waited in a defeated silence.

Here I am setting up the scene. Giving the reader an idea of where they are and an idea of what kind of character Lewenda is. Hopefully, she is coming across as cool under pressure and calculating because she let Joseph try to execute his plan but outplayed him, letting him realize that he never had a chance. Now Joseph and the reader wonder, what she is going to do now? Whatever it is, it can't be good. Did I sufficiently arouse the reader's curiosity to want to read on? I hope so. It was enough for me to continue

writing to find out if Joseph would be able to get out of the pickle he put himself in.

"Now," Lewenda said as she leaned forward in her chair. "I'm going to remove the duct tape, and you're going to tell me everything I want to know. It would be in your best interest to cooperate because I am not a patient person. Do you understand?"

It seemed at first that a spark of defiance reached his eyes, but Lewenda briefly let her gaze drift to the two dead men in the room with them, and the rebel in him was quelled. She had taken out what she suspected to be his best men.

It was here that I knew that they were both in some kind of crime syndicate and were killers. This is what became my character hook: I had to ask myself, who exactly was this woman who could outwit the best men in this business? I had to write on to find out. And again, here I am hoping that the reader is willing to come along with me for the ride.

A tiny smile of satisfaction played on the corners of her lips and she nodded. She reached over and tore the tape from his mouth. He gave a small yelp of protest and worked his lips. "Geez, Lewenda, is this really necess—"

She put a finger to his lips. "Shhh." When he shut up, she removed her finger. "I'm asking the questions here. You got it?"

He stared at her with calculated wariness, perhaps weighing what his chances were for him talking his way out of this. Not much. She stood and removed the jacket of the cream-colored, tailored pantsuit she had bought for what was supposed to be her special day. She inspected it closely, making sure there wasn't any blood on it before draping it on the back of her chair. There wasn't, thankfully. It would have been a pain to get the spot out otherwise, and she would have been even more pissed than she already was. She returned to her seat and idly rubbed the diamond solitaire on her ring finger, letting the sun catch the myriad cuts in the stone to sparkle and shine.

Finally, she let out the breath she didn't know she was holding and returned her attention back to Joseph, who seemed to know that all he could do was wait and see what she was going to do next. She said, "Now, what I want to know is, why did you marry me if all you wanted was to see me dead?"

Writing the opening paragraphs in a short story is a delicate balance. One must arouse the reader's curiosity in the briefest of words. Did this writer give enough to make the reader want to know more? One can only hope.



Francelia Belton is a reader, writer and lover of short fiction, with her favorite genres being crime and suspense. She was most heavily influenced by watching the old *Twilight Zone* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* television shows in her youth. Her own stories evoke in the reader feelings of horror, fascination, fear, excitement and intrigue. When she isn't writing or reading, she's watching *Dancing With The Stars*, one of her guilty pleasures in life.

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