

**The First Two Pages: “A Death in Yelapa:
A Food Lovers’ Village Short Story” by Leslie Budewitz**

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“A Death in Yelapa” is a Food Lovers’ Village short story and takes place shortly after the fifth book in the series, *As the Christmas Cookie Crumbles*. A short story can often be used to tell a tale that wouldn’t support a complete novel, to follow just one or two of the series characters, or to tell a story that occurs between the novels. “A Death in Yelapa” does all three.

Both the series and its two short stories, “Yelapa” and “Carried to the Grave,” are written in first person, in the voice of series protagonist Erin Murphy. Readers need to hear her voice in the first sentence, and begin to see the story world as she sees it.

Series readers know her and her husband, Adam Zimmerman, but new readers need to find out who they are and where they come from quickly. Since this story takes place during the young couple’s honeymoon trip to the west coast of Mexico rather than at home in NW Montana, I’ve also got to set up the two locales, and their contrast, quickly. The rest of the first paragraph and the second begin to show us the couple’s relationship and tell us when and where we are.

In fact, contrast is a key element in the story. We see it immediately in the difference between Erin and Adam's response to each other and the experience of a water taxi ride to a remote village and the reactions of their fellow tourists, Max and Parisa. Erin and Adam are newlyweds, excited by their new life together and the adventure of a trip to a place he knows well and is eager to share with her. Max and Parisa, on the other hand, seem jaded, tired of each other—he quotes from the guidebook instead of watching the dorado jump and makes lame jokes; she snaps at him to shut up and stares the other way. That contrast adds a bit of micro-tension—the reader knows we're in for a rough ride, and Max and Parisa will be part of it.

We also get a good look at Parisa and how she dresses, both of which play an important role as the story unfolds. How the two couples talk, how they pack, even how they get out of the boat tells us who they are. One couple welcomes adventure while the other seems to resist, so why are they here? It's a small question, but a key one.

Finally, this is a cozy—a mystery with no graphic sex or violence, and a compelling sense of community—as the words “food” and “village” in the series title suggest. But while there's no food in these first two pages—trust me, it will show up later—and the village doesn't come into view until the bottom of page 2,

Erin's voice, the word choices, and even the topics of conversation set the tone. We know we're in a kinder, gentler mystery, despite the expectation of a murder, or at least a death. Another story set in the same region could open with machine gun-toting federales forcing hapless tourists into a boat on their way to a cinder-block jail cell, instead of honeymooners counting fish as they jump and a village dotted with old-world haciendas, colorful beach umbrellas, and romantic casitas.

In other words, it's all a matter of perspective—what you see, and what you don't.

The First Two Pages of “A Death in Yelapa”

The waves broke over the bow of the water taxi and the cold salt spray misted my face. I smiled up at my husband. The sea breeze whipped his dark curls, his sunglasses reflecting the diamond glint of a January day off the western coast of Mexico.

My husband. Adam and I had been married all of twenty-three days, but our Christmas Eve wedding on a dude ranch in Jewel Bay, Montana felt like another planet.

“Bahia de Banderas is the seventh largest bay in the world,” said the blond man seated in front of me, his voice rising above the roar of the outboard motor. “The name means the Bay of Flags.”

His wife, her highlighted hair tied back with a black chiffon ribbon, turned her gaze the other direction.

“Erin, look.” Adam pointed at a school of fish leaping through the water, not thirty feet off starboard.

“Dolphins?” I asked.

“Dorado,” he said. Adam had spent a few months in Mexico after college, hiking and kayaking. He'd planned our slightly-belated honeymoon himself, telling me to make sure my passport was current and that I had a good bathing suit. Then, three days ago, he'd said

we'd be vacationing in our own private casita on the most unspoiled beach in western Mexico.

Is there any wonder I'm head over heels for the man?

"Mahi-mahi. Dolphinfish." The man rested his arm on the back of his wife's seat and spoke over his shoulder. "Not to be confused with Flipper." He cackled.

"Oh, shut up, Max," his wife said. "No one wants to hear your stupid jokes." In profile, I could see her prominent cheekbones and strong jaw, makeup so expertly done you almost couldn't tell it was makeup. Full lips in a trendy red-orange, though I suspected the pout came naturally. Chic tortoiseshell sunglasses. I was sure I'd seen her browsing in an art gallery off the Malacon, when we were in Puerto Vallarta.

The two women sitting next to us raised their eyebrows, and one winked.

Max faced forward with another chuckle, and Adam and I exchanged a quick smile before turning our attention back to the jumping fish.

Twenty minutes and a hundred fish later, we landed in Yelapa. My mouth fell open, literally, at the sight of the picture-perfect village wrapped around the calm, blue inlet. A row of three-story haciendas, each a different color, faced the water. Some were private homes, others small hotels. Then came the charming casitas with their deep porches and a cluster of open-air bars and restaurants. Bright umbrellas dotted the beach.

Adam and I scrambled on to the pier—new since his last visit—and grabbed our backpacks. Max stood in the boat, surveying the surroundings, while his wife tried to disembark. Her white skirt was too narrow for her to get both feet on the pier easily and she stumbled, hands flailing as she shrieked, one cork-soled sandal flying.

Adam caught her. I rescued the errant sandal.

Leslie Budewitz blends her passion for food, great mysteries, and the Northwest in the Food Lovers' Village Mysteries, set in Jewel Bay, Montana, and the Spice Shop Mysteries, set in Seattle's Pike Place Market. The first Food Lovers' Village mystery, *Death al Dente*, won the 2013 Agatha Award for Best First Novel. Leslie is also a practicing lawyer, and her nonfiction guide for writers, *Books, Crooks &*

Counselors: How to Write Accurately About Criminal Law and Courtroom Procedure, won the 2011 Agatha Award for Best Nonfiction, making her the first author to win Agatha Awards for both fiction and nonfiction. Her short stories have appeared in *Ellery Queen*, *Alfred Hitchcock*, *Thuglit*, and other magazines. A past president of Sisters in Crime, she serves on the board of Mystery Writers of America. She lives in NW Montana. For excerpts and more, visit her website, www.LeslieBudewitz.com