

The First Two Pages: *When It's Time For Leaving*
by Ang Pompano (Encircle Publications)

Every type of rescue vehicle you could imagine was on the bridge. It was standard procedure, even though there was no one to rescue. I refused medical assistance a dozen times before I began the long walk off the span, leaving the mess of angry traffic and the dead druggie, who called himself Psycho, for the state cops to worry about.

A trooper called after me. "Wait up, DeSantis. I'll get you a ride."

"I'm good." I told him.

Truth was, I wasn't good. The red Mustang I had pulled from the New Haven Police motor pool looked like a Twizzler. I was amazed I got out of that twisted mass of metal alive.

"I gotta walk it off," I called back.

I took a selfie with the wreckage behind me then continued my hike to police headquarters about a mile away.

Since *When It's Time for Leaving* is my first published book, I can't even count the number of rewrites I did! I wanted to include a lot of action but also reveal enough about the protagonist to intrigue readers.

Earlier drafts of *When It's Time for Leaving* opened with a drug dealer whizzing past police detective Al DeSantis on an I-95 bridge in New Haven. The action is in linear time from that moment on. In the final rewrite I remembered being told that you should start as close to the end of a scene as possible. For this reason I started the first scene after the action was over. The first sentence tells you there has been an accident. The second tells you someone is dead. In those first few lines I wanted to establish the protagonist's name and the fact that he was a New

Haven cop. I also wanted to let you know that he's fairly young so I had him take a selfie with the car wreckage in the background.

Maybe it was the impact of the air bag, or maybe it was the mistake of looking down at the river below but the city skyline was all wavy like a mirage. At last, I reached the end of the bridge and climbed over the guard rail, slipping and sliding down the snow dusted embankment until I reached Water Street. A cruiser stopped along the way. It was Charlie Moss, an older cop and one of the nicer guys on the force.

"Hop in, Al."

I waved off his offer. "I'm on it, okay?"

"Sure. Sure, detective. I didn't mean you couldn't take care of yourself."

He took off and I continued my march toward the station looking at the picture of me and the mangled car every once in a while. On impulse, I sent it in a text to my ex.

Me: You're going to hear about this anyway.

Kim: R-U-O-K?

Me: Yeah

Kim: Then try your bartender for sympathy.

I missed Kim a real lot. I also missed the house we used to own together. She bought me out, I got $\frac{1}{4}$ and she got $\frac{3}{4}$. She lives in it now with another cop, my former best friend, Tom Donahue. He turned out to be a relationship lurker and when he saw we were having problems he hooked up with her before I could make things right. Good-bye ten-year relationship, house, and old friend.

By refusing help I hoped to show that Al is independent and proud and also give a hint from his exchange with his ex that he's damaged and he tries to cover up that hurt with a snarky attitude. But most important of all, a key plot element is foreshadowed in these lines when he tells us that he is dizzy as he walks off the bridge. Later in the story Al will suffer PTSD from the encounter and have an

unreasonable fear of bridges. I wanted to show all of this at the beginning without creating an information dump. Readers might not catch all that at first, but it would echo in later parts of the story.

A van passed me. It was the soccer mom who Psycho had cut off on the crest of the bridge just after he'd recognized me driving alongside him. He had done a double take, then swerved at me. I pulled the car to the right scraping the side of the brand-new structure. Then his souped up Honda Civic veered toward her.

"Good for you!" I called out to the mom, even though she couldn't hear me. She had done some serious maneuvering to avoid Psycho. Then she gave him the finger and floored it to get the hell out of there.

Psycho totally lost it after that. He jammed the brakes and laid rubber all over I-95. There was smoke, and screeches, and more horns than in Springsteens's "E Street Shuffle." The druggie spun his car around and headed right for me like a runaway Acela train.

Meanwhile I had that action on the bridge that I was dying to tell so I put a little of it in here. The saying is to write the fast parts slow. This was my attempt at accomplishing that.

My phone rang. The caller ID said it was Kim. I wasn't going to answer at first.

"Jesus, Al. It's already on the news. Where are you?"

"I'm talking to my bartender. Why?"

"Okay, I may have been a little harsh. But it's always something with you."

"It wasn't on me. All I was trying to do was get back to the station to log out. I still am. I'm ordering tickets for the Florida Georgia Line concert as soon as the website opens at 7:00."

"You're thinking of concert tickets. Are you in shock?"

Could be. When we hit head on, I ended up on the deck of the bridge.

"No shock. I'm fine."

They said there were gun shots."

“Not on my part. He blew out every window in the car.”

He had been shooting like it was *Grand Theft Auto* right there on the Q Bridge. And like in a video game, he didn't show the least worry about dying; and even less about killing me. They didn't call him Psycho for nothing.

“Why?” she asked.

“He was pissed that I was driving his brother's Mustang. The dude's in jail. It's not like he needs it. Then it was...” I realized I was spilling more than I wanted to.

“Shit, Al. It was what?”

“A mess. A semi barreling down I-95 took out Psycho before I had a chance.”

“You sure you're okay?”

It was the nicest she had talked to me in months. Sometimes it pays to almost get your ass blown off.

“I've never been better. Do you want to go?”

“Where?”

“To the Florida Georgia concert.”

“You know that isn't happening.”

Sure, I did. But I couldn't resist asking. “I just thought I'd ask.”

“Al, I worry about you. You're self-destructive.”

“Are you saying I caused the accident?”

“I'm saying you're always trying to prove something and you don't use common sense. Why can't you be more mature like Tom?”

I was almost killed and not only was she blaming me, but she was comparing me to Donahue, the laziest cop on the force.

“I gotta go.” I shoved the phone into my pocket.

I didn't want all of the action to be told with internal dialogue so I had Al's ex, Kim, call him. I had a couple of goals here. One was to tell the rest of the story about the shootout on the bridge. The other was to balance Al's sarcasm with actions that would make him likeable. That's where the discussion of the Florida Georgia Line concert comes in. Kim is coming down pretty hard on Al, not out of nastiness, but because she's worried about his destructive behavior. Whether she

feels guilty or not because she left Al for his best friend and took most of his money in the process isn't for me to say. I'm not interested in being in her head since this is Al's first-person story. But what I could do was use her call to make him more likeable. I will build on this in later pages when he makes a very nice anonymous gesture in her behalf that shows what kind of guy he is.

I'd like to thank Art for inviting me to The First Two Pages. I'm a great admirer of his work. I've found out that there is no one way to write a mystery. I tried to keep this in mind: to make the story as enjoyable as possible for the reader. I hope I achieved at least a little of that ambition.

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Ang Pompano has been writing mystery for more than twenty years. His most recent short story, "Diet of Death" appears in the 2019 Malice Domestic Anthology, *Parnell Hall Presents Malice Domestic: Murder Most Edible*. In addition, he has written many academic pieces including one on teaching detective fiction. *When It's Time for Leaving* is his debut novel. A member of Mystery Writers of America, he is a past recipient of the Helen McCloy/Mystery Writers of America Scholarship for a novel in progress. He is a long-time board member of Sisters in Crime New England and has been on the New England Crime Bake Planning Committee for fourteen years. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, Annette, an artist, and his two rescue dogs, Quincy and Dexter. Find out more about Ang Pompano at angpompano.com.