

The First Two Pages: *A Matter of Blood*

By Catherine Maiorisi

It's common knowledge that the first page of a book can make or break a sale, so my overall objective for the first two pages of *A Matter of Blood* was to hook the reader as early as possible. My strategy for doing this was to introduce the main character early, paint a picture of her strength and her humanity, and raise questions to draw the reader into the story.

In the opening paragraph, the reader learns the main character is a female detective in the New York Police Department. We also learn she's being welcomed back from somewhere by an excited crowd of police officers and the media, which raises the question of what she's done to deserve such a large welcome from her colleagues and the press. An act of bravery? But in the last sentence of that first paragraph, I use words like *battle*, *military-straight back*, *marched*, and *maelstrom* and the reader understands Corelli doesn't see this as positive attention. This last sentence adds to the question. In addition to wondering what Corelli has done to have a crowd of police and the media waiting for her, the reader now wonders why Corelli feels she's going into battle.

NYPD Detective Chiara Corelli wasn't surprised to see the men and women in blue waiting in front of the station to welcome her back. She'd expected them. Just not so many. And not the media. Even a block away, the excitement of the crowd was palpable. She

took a deep breath, which at seven thirty on this oppressive August morning, was like inhaling steam. Then, as before any battle, she took a minute to psych herself, straightened her already military-straight back and marched toward the maelstrom.

Hopefully, by now the reader is curious, so I drop Corelli right into the action to give the reader enough information to understand what's really going on but not the whole story.

A shout. "Corelli." Her name passed through the crowd, becoming a chant. Her heart sped up, her hand found her Glock, but she ignored the impulse to draw it. She'd fractured the blue line and doing that had consequences. But knowing intellectually there would be anger and hatred and danger was one thing, seeing and feeling it was...unnerving. And disheartening. She steeled herself. She'd never let them see her hurt and her anger at their betrayal. Or her fear.

In the preceding paragraph, we learn more about the situation. Somehow Corelli fractured the blue line. Now the question becomes what did she do to generate hatred from her colleagues? A picture of Corelli's character starts to emerge. She marches into a situation she knows is dangerous, she feels betrayed by her colleagues, but she refuses to show any weakness.

She steeled herself. She'd never let them see her hurt and her anger at their betrayal. Or her fear.

And then we learn she has good reason to be afraid. She's already been attacked.

Head held high, Corelli fought the urge to favor the leg injured in last night's attack and maintained the steady pace she'd set for herself.

As she reaches the crowd, we see what this welcome really is. And we see Detective Chiara Corelli, despite her fear and despite the danger, plunge into a crowd of hundreds of police officers who clearly hate her.

At the opening she ignored the bright lights and shouted questions of the press and plunged into the funnel formed by hundreds of police officers with their backs to her, hissing her name. The heat, sweat and cloying sweetness of the colognes and perfumes from so many bodies crammed together nauseated her. Her gut clenched but she didn't miss a step. Nor did she miss the calls of traitor, whore and bitch that underscored the hissing that followed her, or the elbows and kicks that connected. And, though she didn't turn to look, she felt the heat of the TV lights and heard the shouted commentary of the TV reporters describing the reception provided by her brethren in blue.

We see that Corelli is brave, determined, and willing to suffer the consequences of what she did. But we still wonder what she did to fracture the blue line? What was bad enough to engender such hate? And how will she work in this kind of environment?

When she makes it inside, we learn she's new to this police station:

She'd been told the squad was up a staircase toward the back of the station house.

And then we get a sense of how the situation feels to her:

By the time she hit the first step, the only sounds were the ringing phones, the rat-a-tat-tat of her heels, and the shuffle of feet as her colleagues swiveled to show her their backs. Funny, it felt as if their eyes were piercing her back as she climbed the stairs.

As I said up front, my goal was to raise questions and introduce the courageous NYPD Detective Chiara Corelli in order to hook readers. Was I successful? You tell me.

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Catherine Maiorisi lives in New York City and often writes under the watchful eye of Edgar Allan Poe in Edgar's Café near her apartment.

A Matter of Blood, featuring NYPD Detective Chiara Corelli, is available in ebook and trade paperback at Bellabooks.com, Amazon and B&N. Her recent short story, "Love, Secrets, and Lies" is included in *Where Crime Never Sleeps: Murder New York Style 4*. Two other shorts can be found in prior *Murder New York Style* anthologies published by the New York/Tri-State Chapter of Sisters in Crime: "Justice for All" in *Fresh Slices* and "Murder Italian Style" in *Family Matters*.

Both Catherine's romance novels, *Matters of the Heart* and *No One But You*, and four of her romance short stories are currently available at bellabooks.com, Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

For information on appearances and a complete list of Catherine's publications, go to www.catherinemaiorisi.com. Catherine can also be found on Facebook and Twitter @CathMaiorisi.