

**The First Two Pages of “Frog Legs of Summer” by Cathy Wiley**  
From *Murder on the Beach: A Destination Murders Short Story Collection*

An Essay by Cathy Wiley

Let’s start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. After all, beginnings are some of my favorite things to write.

I love writing opening lines and opening scenes. To me, the perfect start needs to set the tone, pique the reader’s interest, and give an insight into the characters. That’s what I aim for whenever I write.

Often, when crafting a short story, I start with the opening line, then the ending line... then have to write that huge middle section. That’s the part that’s hard for me, trying to figure out how to get from Point A to Point B.

For “Frog Legs of Summer,” the opening scene came quickly, and it came from the title of the anthology.

The concept and title of *Murder on the Beach* was the result of a brainstorming session with Karen Cantwell, when we first dreamed up publishing an anthology with other authors. The title was Karen’s idea, and I believe I laughed and said, “Like the drink. Instead of Sex on the Beach, we have Murder on the Beach.”

That drink then suggested my opening scene. Why not start with my main character being offered a Sex on the Beach drink? I quickly realized a problem: my

main character is a recovering alcoholic. The solution to that, I believe, made the opening scene more interesting and led to:

“One Virgin Sex on the Beach.”

I stared at the speaker, a tall man in khakis and a light green polo, offering me a garishly colored drink. While he was also dark and handsome, he wasn't my type...considering he was my brother. “A Virgin Sex on the Beach? Isn't that an oxymoron?”

Daniel Norwood smirked at me. “Who are you calling a moron?” When I laughed at his joke, he continued. “I know you wanted something non-alcoholic. And I thought all women liked Sex on the Beach.”

“No way. You get sand in places you don't want sand.” I knew this would embarrass him, and I wasn't disappointed when he blushed.

“Jackie!” He sputtered. “You know I meant the drink.”

I had a funny opening scene, and we were introduced to our main character and her sidekick brother. We also learned important information about them, including the main character's name, which is always difficult when writing from a first person point of view.

So, I have an interesting beginning. Good, right? No, I agonized over these opening lines. After all, this was going to be a funny, *cozy* short story anthology. Cozy mysteries have little violence, cursing, or sex... Would the actual word “sex” offend a cozy reader? It was innuendo. And it was the name of an actual drink. But I didn't want to turn off my readers.

I asked my fantastic fellow authors in this anthology, and the verdict was split. In the end, I decided to keep the line because a) it's funny and b) cozies are

getting edgier, I believe. I already had an alcoholic main character, so I was already getting into darker areas than most cozies. Hopefully, my readers will enjoy the humor and not find it too risqué.

After clearing this hurdle, I talked to a friend of mine, a fellow foodie, certified wine specialist, and cocktail connoisseur. She didn't have any problem with the blue humor; she had a problem with the fact that a chef, someone who tastes things for a living, would drink a Sex on the Beach cocktail, let alone the non-alcoholic version of one.

That led to this section:

“Well, yes, but this was more fun.” I raised the “mocktail” to eye level, inspecting it. “At least the alcoholic version did its job of making people look more attractive. But the virgin version?” I took a sip. “Blech. They've replaced the vodka, the schnapps, and the creme de cassis with generic grenadine. I've had lollipops with better balance, nuance, and less red dye Number 40.” I glanced around at my surroundings. “I guess I shouldn't expect much at a beach bar, and a temporary one at that. But you can't beat the view.”

The next paragraph describes the fictional Louisiana barrier island where the story takes place and explains the reason they are there: to attend and, in Jackie's case, be a judge at a food festival. In order to keep with a beachy theme, I created a frog legs festival where the frogs aren't the only victims of the event.

I mentioned in the beginning of this essay that the second thing I write is the ending. And forgive me for disobeying the “First Two Pages” theme by discussing my ending; it is still relevant. Often, my ending is related to those first two pages. I

try to circle back to the beginning lines or beginning scene to make a connected ending. It's a technique I've used in the majority of my short stories.

So, after my main character tries some very spicy frog legs, I end this story, and I will end this essay, on these lines:

“I'll get you a drink,” Daniel offered. “Not Sex on the Beach this time though, right?”

“No,” I croaked. “Although I suppose I'd prefer Sex on the Beach to this trip's Murder on the Beach.”

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Cathy Wiley lives outside of Baltimore, Maryland, with one spoiled cat and an equally spoiled husband.

She is a member of Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America, and the Short Mystery Fiction Society. She's written two mystery novels set in Baltimore, Maryland, and has had several short stories included in anthologies, one of which was a 2015 finalist for a Derringer Award for best short story.

She is currently working on a series featuring Jackie Norwood, a former celebrity chef trying to reboot her career. The first novel, *Claws of Death*, will be published in the fall of this year. For more information about this series and her other books, and to sign up for her newsletter, visit [www.cathywiley.com](http://www.cathywiley.com). You can also visit her author page on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/CathyWileyAuthor](https://www.facebook.com/CathyWileyAuthor).