



by Kristopher Zgorski

*The First Two Pages* (<https://arttaylorwriter.com/category/the-first-two-pages>) is a unique blog that was started by award-winning short-story writer B.K. Stevens. Following her untimely passing in 2017, Art Taylor—another award-winning short-story author—took over running the series and moved *The First Two Pages* to his own blog. At its core *The First Two Pages* features craft essays in which an author does a deep-dive analysis into the opening section of one of their stories. These are truly invaluable examinations of the art of the short story. Every essay approaches the assignment differently, so not only do you learn something about the act of writing, the reader also learns more about the personality of the author. Most readers know that with short stories, every word choice matters because of the brevity of the final piece, but rarely does one get a chance to see how the authorial mind works when crafting a successful opening to a story. New essays are posted just about every Tuesday, so *The First Two Pages* can and should become a regular stop for any writer looking to improve their craft. And thankfully, the essays from B.K. Stevens's tenure also remain available at the following URL: <http://www.bkstevensmysteries.com/category/the-first-two-pages>

Long-term crime-fiction fans will remember Aunt Agatha's bookstore in Ann Arbor, MI. The store itself moved online—selling their inventory via [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com)—in 2018, however many people don't realize that the website is still active (<https://auntagathas.com/aa>) with reviews posted by owner Robin Agnew. Robin's reviews are well-written and constantly display her knowledge of the genre as a whole. The website also features an archive of reviews from as far back as 2011, so readers can research and read books they may have missed over the years. The reviews on the site cover the depth and breadth of subgenres under the crime-fiction umbrella. In addition to the reviews, fans can also find interesting interviews and essays which are well worth checking out. There is also the tab linking to the online store for those looking to expand their personal library.

*The Hard Word* (<https://www.thehardword.org>) is a blog run by beloved member of the crime-fiction family Scott Montgomery. Since its inception in 2017, Scott has posted quality content, but only sporadically. But 2023 has seen more regular postings with something to enjoy at least each month. Scott's reviews always arrive with a firm history of the crime-fiction genre as their base before delving into what makes the book under scrutiny worth a reader's time. Equally as exciting are Scott's interviews. They feature incisive and revealing questions in a format that feels more like a conversation than a

journalistic endeavor. What is probably most exciting is that Scott Montgomery often chooses to highlight books that may not be getting much attention from other sites. Only time will tell if this recent appearance of regular content will continue, but readers will certainly be the winners if that is the case. Either way, the content that is on *The Hard Word* is always worth checking out.

© 2023 by Kristopher Zgorski