

## **The First Two Pages: “Flamingo Bingo” by Terrie Farley Moran**

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As a reader I have a huge interest in the setting of a story. I want to know exactly where the action is happening and what impact the setting has on the story. And I want to know that information as soon as I start reading. It follows that, as a writer, I am particular about showing off the story setting as early as I can.

I also prefer to write the protagonist voice in first person. It’s easier for me to “become” the protagonist that way. So I often, and “Flamingo Bingo” is no exception, open a story by having the protagonist address the reader directly. Here are the first three paragraphs of “Flamingo Bingo”:

If ever someone knocked me unconscious, the minute I woke up in a rickety folding chair staring at the picture of a pink flamingo in the center square of a bingo card, I would know that my mother had me kidnapped and hauled to her condo in Sunshine Palms. Much as I missed our “mom and me” time since she moved south, hanging out in a retirement community in Florida isn’t exactly my idea of fun and frolic. Still, perfect daughter that I am, I flew from Cleveland into the Punta Gorda Airport last night to help mom celebrate her birthday. I had no inkling the festivities would include Flamingo Bingo.

“Remember,” mom whispered, “If you get five in a row, you have to yell ‘flamingo’. If you yell ‘bingo’, Henry,” she head-butted toward the number caller, a guy with a wispy beard whose tee shirt sported the pirate flag of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, “will disqualify you.”

Even without mom’s nod in his direction, Henry would be hard to miss, what with the wiggly stuffed pink flamingo perched on his green baseball cap. Every time Henry reached into the rolling drum and pulled out a numbered tile, the flamingo bobbed and fluttered.

As you can see, the opening paragraphs of “Flamingo Bingo” meet my readerly mandate for upfront setting—you know you are in a senior community in Florida—along with my writerly penchant for first person, and as an added bonus, you get to meet the main characters, a mother and daughter combo who will continue to move the story forward through their actions and conversations. And you may not be surprised to learn that Henry, the bingo caller, has a larger role in the story than sitting on a stage shouting, “B-10” or “G-47” or whatever, so I made sure he shows up in the opening paragraphs as well.

My novels are sprinkled with humor but it is a rare element in my short fiction. So to let the reader know that this story is more on the light-hearted side, I put what I hoped was a humorous tone to the first paragraph. Lest the opener not quite steer your brain to its humor side, I gave Henry a wiggling pink flamingo on his baseball cap. Of course “Flamingo Bingo” is a mystery story so some bad thing is going to happen but, if a reader is looking for a light-hearted mystery—this one’s for you.

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Recipient of both the Agatha and the Derringer awards, Terrie Farley Moran is the author of the beachside Read 'Em and Eat cozy mystery series and co-author of Laura Childs’ New Orleans scrapbooking mystery series. She has published numerous short stories in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine* and numerous anthologies.

The only thing Terrie enjoys more than wrangling mystery plots into submission is hanging out with any or all of her seven grandchildren who reside in New York and Florida.