

## **The First Two Pages of “The Bridge” by Abby L. Vandiver**

From *Midnight Hour: A Chilling Anthology of Crime Fiction from 20 Authors of Color*,  
edited by Abby L. Vandiver (Crooked Lane Books)

An Essay by Abby L. Vandiver

I have always been in awe of people who could write short stories. I think them genius. To write an entire story, an entire concept, in so few words amazed me. It still does. Because of that, I decided I wanted to write one, one no more than five thousand words long, only I knew that writing a short story—writing an entire tale in less than forty or so thousand words—didn’t come naturally to me. So, I devised a plan. I wrote several stories, each being fewer words than the previous one. “The Bridge” was my fourth attempt. When I finished it, it was just over five thousand words. A little editing brought it down under my goal.

So that is how my contribution to the *Midnight Hour* anthology came to be. An attempt to better my craft. I learned a lot about writing, in general, along the way. As for short stories, however, I found they couldn’t be delivered in a slow-burn fashion like the full-length, eighty-thousand ones I was used to telling. It had to be set up quickly and a lot of information given at the onset.

The first line in my short sets the story up. “He’ll be dead by midnight, and I’ll meet you at the bridge.” It tells the reader that there is going to be a death, most likely a murder. And that it’s a conspiracy.

I am big on setting. It is a literary element—essential to every story, so much so that it often becomes a character. In my stories I write settings to invite my reader in. To surround them in my tales. In stories of longer lengths, a setting can be revealed in bits and pieces. I do that because I feel it’s the way we take in our surroundings in real life. You go someplace new, you just don’t see everything at once. In a short story, you don’t have the time or words to do that. For half of my first two pages in *The Bridge*, I talk about the bridge. I described it so as to make it central to the plot of the book. To give it life. “The bridge was old like me . . .faded painted black steel . . . the floorboards uneven . . . the waterway underneath . . . long . . . dried up.”

And then, in the last half of my first two pages, I introduce the characters, Evie and Cy. And of course, being wound up and set in the world I’d created in the first half of my first two pages, they carried the rest of the story.

### **The First Two Pages of “The Bridge”:**

“He’ll be dead by midnight, and I’ll meet you at the bridge.”

That had been the plan. Probably not a good one. But it was what we’d come up with.

The bridge was old like me, the area dark, and while it was abandoned it was near a main thoroughfare. A truss, faded black painted steel, the top and bottom cords rusted and dismantled, the floor boards uneven, some ripped out, and the vertical and diagonal poles dangling and scattered about along with the rivets that used to hold it all in place. The waterway underneath had long been dried up and beyond it, nothing. Littered, debris filled grounds. Abandoned buildings. No place to hide. No place to escape into. Nowhere else to go from there. If we were seen or chased, we’d be trapped.

Well, I would. Me. I would be the one trapped. Chased. Because I was the one who was going to kill someone.

“I can’t. Not anymore,” she had said, not one tear dropping from her glistening eyes. “He’s sucking all the air from me. My insides have shriveled into a tiny, hard ball.” She folded her fingers in making tight fists. “There will be nothing left of me.” Her voice fading away, I could barely hear what came next. “You are my only hope.” She spoke in a strained whisper. “The only way I can get out.”

I grabbed her hands and held onto them. Willing her my strength. “Leave him.”

“He won’t let me do that,” she’d said. “He’d rather see me dead.” Her whole body trembled. “He’d kill me first.” She buried her head in her hands. “I swear!” She sobbed. “He’ll kill me!”

But it was she who had the murderous intent.

I met Evie at the Red Door Saloon. She occupied the last seat of the long oak, L-shaped bar that ended at the wall, pushing her body into it as if she wanted to disappear inside of it. Hunched over a drink, it seemed she’d given up and given in, waiting for that dingy wall to suck her through. The rest of her said she wanted to be alone.

So I went over to say hello.

“I’ve been there,” I said as I slid onto the stool next to her. “But I found my way back.”

“There’s no coming back from where I am,” she’d said, not looking up from her drink, the ice tinkling as she stirred it with the little red straw.

“Talking about it helps.”

She sighed and pushed herself further against the wall. “Talking is what got me into it in the first place.”

“And maybe talking can get you out.”

For the first time her eyes met mine. “There’s no way out.”

I saw it as soon as she looked at me. At least I thought I did. A flicker in her eye. Something lost inside trying to get out. A small glimmer of life. It seemed to be overcome by an emptiness that was trying to consume her.

I thought maybe I could help free her soul.

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Abby L. Vandiver, also writing as Abby Collette, is a hybrid author who has penned more than twenty-five books and short stories. She has hit both the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* bestseller list. Books one and two, *A Deadly Inside Scoop* and *A Game of Cones*, from her latest cozy series, *An Ice Cream Parlor Mystery*, published by Penguin Berkley, are out now.