

The First Two Pages: *Bar None*

By Cathi Stoler (Clay Stafford Books)

My goal in the first two pages of *Bar None*, A Murder On The Rocks Mystery, was to introduce the reader to my protagonist, Jude Dillane, and her bar, The Corner Lounge.

I planned the opening to accomplish several things: to give readers an instant, indelible insight into Jude's personality, to show her feelings about owning and running the bar, and to weave in some of the backstory that shaped her life. These pages had to be entertaining enough to keep readers interested in what was to come, since the mystery Jude becomes involved in doesn't happen until chapter two.

I used Jude's pre-opening chores at the bar as an analogy of her life so far. I think they portray her as a survivor who has managed to get through all the tough things life has thrown her way. The passage is filled with visual images I believed would draw people in.

Somebody had to do it and that somebody was me. The Corner Lounge was my bar and cutting fruit was my job. Even the satisfying heft of the big steel blade slicing through soft skin and pliant flesh like a guillotine chopping off a head didn't make a difference. Cutting fruit was a horrible job, and I hated it. I had bags of it to get through. Mounds of oranges, lemons and limes all needing the deft touch of my knife to turn them into a pile of colorful wedges and curls destined to garnish Margaritas, Cosmopolitans, Martinis and the like. All so they could finally disappear in the garbage with the toss of a wrist. Work

that left me with nicked fingers still stinging hours later. Really, it was a lost cause. One that I got to repeat every day.

Next, I moved on to Jude's backstory to portray how she sees herself based on the name she was given at birth. While her friends and patrons may not know this, it's important for the reader to understand this is something that swirls around her mind and comes to the surface every so often.

It was ironic when you thought about it, given that my name was Jude. I couldn't imagine what my parents could have been thinking, well, my Catholic school-reared mom that was. Did she believe saddling her baby girl with the name of the saint people call on when all else fails, when they're desperate, when they literally might not have a leg to stand on, would trick fate and keep me safely out of harm's way?

I had to say it didn't work out exactly according to plan. Not with life, so far, or for my bar and restaurant either. The Corner Lounge wasn't a lost cause; it just seemed that way sometimes. Like when I tried to keep my partner happy, the tables full and my creditors at bay.

The passage below shows how much The Lounge means to her and how important it is in her life. At the very end of the passage, I add a touch of foreshadowing as Jude waits for her friend, Sully, who hasn't appeared as expected.

I loved the bar business, really I did, and I was pretty good at it. When I opened The Lounge, I had a vision of a comfortable, friendly spot where people could hang out at the bar, get a good meal and listen to some live music on the weekends. A vision? Okay, maybe a bit of that St. Jude vibe did rub off on me. After all, everyone needed a little help now and again, right? Especially when three o'clock rolled around and it was time to cut fruit. I usually had company while I performed this chore, my buddy Sully, who occupied his favorite bar

stool while I got the place ready for business. Today he was a no-show. Now, where was St. Jude when I needed him?

In writing *Bar None*, I wanted to make sure that Jude, the driving force behind the story, was an intriguing character people would want to know more about. And, that the Corner Lounge was a place they'd want to go to. I think I've accomplished this. At least, I hope so.

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Cathi Stoler is an award-winning author. Her new urban thriller, *Bar None, A Murder on the Rocks Mystery*, featuring The Corner Lounge bar owner, Jude Dillane, will be published this October by Clay Stafford Books. A new series, with Blackjack player, Nick Donahue, includes the novel *Out of Time*, and the novella, *Nick of Time*. Both will be published next year by Black Opal Books. She is also the author of the three-volume Laurel & Helen New York Mystery series, which includes *Telling Lies*, *Keeping Secrets*, and *The Hard Ways*, and in addition to being a three-time finalist for the Derringer Award, she won the 2015 Derringer for Best Short Story for "The Kaluki Kings of Queens." Very involved in the crime writing world, Cathi serves as co-vice president of Sisters in Crime New York/Tri-State and is a member of Mystery Writers of America and International Thriller Writers. Find out more about Cathi at www.cathistoler.com, or email her at cathi@cathistoler.com.