

First Two Pages – Double Duplicity: A Shandra Higheagle Mystery

The book I am focusing on today is *Double Duplicity*, my first book in the Shandra Higheagle Mystery series.

The reason I picked this book to use for the first two pages is due to the fact I had to really “stew and brew” the beginning. I use the stewing and brewing process with all my books. However, because this was a new series, I wanted to capture the reader’s attention in the beginning while giving information to make the reader wonder about Shandra Higheagle. The beginning of the book had to do two things—Draw the reader in and make them interested in the main character.

I started the book with this line.

The Bluetooth in Shandra Higheagle’s Jeep rang, interrupting the memories and drumbeats swirling in her head.

It lets the reader know she is driving and the “drumbeats in her head” will hopefully make them want to know what that is about. My hope was because of her last name, Higheagle, they would understand the drumbeats were Native American and not some rock ‘n roll drummer banging away.

*She shook the past couple days off and pushed the green phone icon on the radio screen.
“Shandra.”*

My goal with this sentence was to set up where she’d been coming from, make the reader curious.

“Hi Shandra, this is Paula Doring. I know this is short notice, but I really would like to speak with you if you’re coming down off your mountain today.”

Again, hoping the “coming down off your mountain” would intrigue the reader enough to want to know if Shandra owns a mountain, if she’s a hermit. Why it sounds like she doesn’t come down very often.

Shandra rolled her eyes. Of all the gallery owners in Huckleberry, Paula was her least favorite. The woman didn’t understand artists and thought only of the dollar.

Set up for conflict. She isn’t crazy about the woman who called.

“I am off my mountain. I should be rolling into Huckleberry in about twenty minutes.”

“Perfect. Could you swing by my gallery? I have a new acquisition, and I think a couple of your vases would look wonderful partnered with it. See you in twenty.” Paula hung up.

This tells the reader Shandra is an artist. First, because she is talking to a woman who owns a gallery and two, because she wants Shandra’s vases. This is a way to show what Shandra does without telling it outright.

“Great! One more thing to interfere with getting my vases to Ted and Naomi.” Ted and Naomi Norton, owners of Dimensions Gallery, were expecting her to deliver more vases for the art event beginning tonight. They were her best supporters and showcased her vases in their gallery.

She only had one piece at Paula’s gallery, aptly named after her, Doring Art Gallery. Paula was known to only take in artists she felt would propel her gallery to a status, rather than taking in artists that she liked. But she’d insisted on having at least one piece of Shandra’s art so she could also say she had one thing from all the local artists.

As much as she didn't care for Paula, who was a backstabber, she did want her pieces seen and having more than one in the Doring Gallery for the upcoming art event that was the most publicized show in the Pacific Northwest was a good move on her part. Her latest gourd-shaped pieces were recently the focus of a story in the Northwest Art Magazine. The exposure had garnered her more sales and attention. While she liked traveling to shows, right now, her heart was at home with her animals and her clay.

This section showcases her relationship to the two galleries and tosses in there is an art event happening in their area this weekend and gives even more of a glimpse at who Shandra is. And if the reader is real astute you can probably guess who is going to come up murdered.

The resort village of Huckleberry Mountain sat fifteen miles off Idaho I-90 at the base of the Bitterroot Mountains.

This is showing where the story will be set and where Shandra lives.

Shandra turned onto Huckleberry Highway and soon slowed to turn right toward the town. Turning left would take her to the Ski Lodge. Art collectors who had gathered at the resort for the event would be dining at the Lodge's five-star restaurant tomorrow night after schmoozing over cocktails and appetizers with the local artists.

Shandra didn't care for the schmoozing, but the people who bought the high priced art sold in the galleries wanted to be on a first name basis with the artists who envisioned their pieces.

This sets up the event that will be integral to the story and again more about Shandra. As in, how she feels about the event and attending.

As I said in the beginning I use what I call a stew and brew process. After I discover who my main character is, I write up a bit about that person and the conflict I see arising for them. Then I set up different scenarios in my head over a length of time. (I'm always working on the next book in my head while writing the current book) When I believe I've figured out my ending to the book and then played our various beginnings, I finally settle on the one scene that best shows the character and has an opening that catches the reader and makes them wonder about a few things. I use curiosity to keep them reading. I think that is what makes a good book opening. When the writer has ignited the reader's curiosity enough to make them continue reading the book. Not a bunch of direct questions but little tidbits that are not completely cleared up. And hopefully, the writer does a good job of keeping that curiosity piqued all the way to the end.

You can download this first book of the Shandra Higheagle Mystery series for free. It's my way of introducing you to Shandra, Crazy Lil, her employee, and Detective Ryan Greer, as well as Sheba, her large, shaggy dog.

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Paty Jager is an award-winning author of 25+ novels and over a dozen novellas and short stories of murder mystery, western historical romance, and action adventure. She has a RomCon Reader's Choice Award for her Action Adventure and received the EPIE Award for Best Contemporary Romance. Her first mystery was a finalist in the Chanticleer Murder and Mayhem Mystery Award and is a finalist in the RONE Award Mystery category. This is what Mysteries Etc says about her Shandra Higheagle

mystery series: “Mystery, romance, small town, and Native American heritage combine to make a compelling read.”

All her work has Western or Native American elements in them along with hints of humor and engaging characters. Paty and her husband raise alfalfa hay in rural eastern Oregon. Riding horses and battling rattlesnakes, she not only writes the western lifestyle, she lives it.

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