

**“The Quirky Quiz Show Caper”
by Sally Carpenter**

LOS ANGELES 1993

Chapter 1: Monday, Monday

Since my stories are always set in the past I always start with a header naming the location and year to get readers on board right away. Otherwise, they’ll assume it’s a contemporary setting and wonder why the characters aren’t using cell phones and other modern conveniences.

Since my protagonist is a musician, all my chapter headers are song titles (this one is from The Mamas and The Papas). It’s an easy way for me to keep track of the action in the chapters and it’s fun looking for titles that have a connection to the story. This chapter, obviously, takes place on a Monday.

Strange that the music I’d made popular in the 1970s sounded unbearably cheesy when played on a four-manual Wurlitzer theater organ.

Right away we have a good idea where we are: inside an old stage theater equipped with an organ. I love listening to theater organs. This book originally started in an office building and this chapter was chapter two. But office buildings are boring and old theaters are far more interesting.

When the protagonist says “music I’d made popular,” he must have been a celebrity in his day. “Unbearable cheesy” indicates we’re not talking classical music, and that our hero is not pleased at what he hears.

And we have an audio soundtrack going. I like to write for all five senses, and this sentence engages the ear.

For a few moments I stood in the center aisle of the art deco auditorium (built in the 1930s, fallen into disrepair, and restored decades later) and listened while the nine Greek muses watched me from the wall murals. Overhead crystal chandeliers hung from the soaring ceiling, not the best decorating choice in earthquake-prone Southern California.

Brief description to get the reader into the setting. The “nine Greek Muses” and “crystal chandeliers” paint a specific picture. Also, “Southern California” narrows our location.

Were my songs really smaltzy, or was the organist deliberately sabotaging the music? I believed the latter.

Some conflict is starting between the protagonist and the organist.

The organist, seated on the organ bench to my left facing the stage, had his back to me. But he couldn’t see me anyway, not with the house lights off and only the stage work lights on. His slim fingers danced effortlessly over the keyboards. Much as I hated to admit it, this guy was good.

In spite of his dislike for the organist, the protagonist admires the man’s skill.

The lush wine-red carpet of the Terpsichore Theatre muffled my footsteps as I limped my way up the aisle, slowed by a cane and a busted ankle.

Another word picture in “lush wine-red carpet.” And why is the protagonist injured so early in the tale? Inquiring minds want to know. As he moves closer to the stage, the reader knows the two characters will meet soon and anticipation builds. The reader will soon learn more about these guys.

I climbed the stairs at the front of the stage, stepped behind the organist and poked him in the ribs.

Our protagonist is playful tease! He must know the organist well to do this.

Warren yelled and nearly jumped into the overhead catwalks. I stepped around the organ to face him.

He scowled. “Ernest, what are you doing here?”

At last we have names for our characters. Personally, I dislike starting stories with “Hi, my name is . . .” I prefer to make identifications come naturally. The conflict tightens. Warren is not happy to see Ernest.

“Is that any way to greet your brother?”

Aha, the family relationship is established. This adds depth to the conflict. These two know each other too well. Family squabbles are good stuff for writers. Plus, we don’t need to waste time for introductions; the characters jump right into the story.

“I’m very busy. And you know I hate interruptions when I’m practicing.”

Warren hadn’t changed since the last time I’d seen him. Same short, nerdy haircut. Same fastidiously trimmed beard and moustache. Same natty suit and tie (in contrast to my casual attire, windbreaker and blond ponytail). At age thirty-five, a mere three years younger than myself, his dishwater blond hair sported only a touch of gray and a bit of hairline recession. His eyes were a darker blue than mine. Only a few creases in his ruggedly handsome features but same sour disposition.

Description is deadly stuff. A laundry list of traits can be boring but my characters have specific looks; they’re not a generic “dark hair and eyes.” This description is funny because of the way Ernest says it. “Same” means the brother hasn’t changed in years. “Nerdy haircut,” fastidiously trimmed,” “natty suit” and “sour disposition” indicates how Ernest feels about his brother. And we sneak in a look at Ernest himself (“casual attire” and “blond ponytail”). These brothers are polar opposites. And they haven’t seen each other in a long while (“since the last time”).

“You need more practice,” I said. “You sound like a cross between Lawrence Welk and Liberace.”

Ernest intends this as an insult. He wouldn’t be caught dead listening to either one of these artists.

“Hmmp.” Warren fiddled with the sheet music on the organ stand. “The so-called greatest hits of Sandy Fairfax.” He pronounced my stage name as if it burned his tongue to say it.

Now we finally have the protagonist's primary name that is used in the book. Only family and close friends call him Ernest, his birth name. The public and his co-workers call him Sandy, his stage name. This makes a great dual personality conflict, such as Bruce Wayne/Batman. To the public Sandy's confident and charming. He's quite different at home. Sandy's family is not impressed by his fame. Warren, in particular, resents Sandy's rock-n-roll life.

"Same three basic chords in all the songs. A six-year-old beginning piano student could play this."

"Fine. You go home and I'll find a six-year-old to fill in."

Warren insults Sandy, who defends himself. The brothers throw zingers back and forth. Of course deep down they love each other, but they refuse to let the other one get the upper hand or admit that the other one is right. They're like two dogs marking their territory and warning the other not to cross over.

"How can you stand to sing this drivel?"

"This drivel, as you call it, has paid for my house and a pretty decent lifestyle."

"And also the pot and the booze and the women and the bail money and the drugs."

"I never did drugs. Not hard drugs. Okay, maybe a few tabs of LSD."

A way to sneak in back story without an info dump. Sandy became rich from his music, but he didn't spend it wisely. In retaliation to the quip about drugs, Sandy admits he'd taken more than a few puffs of weed. We also learn that Sandy's been in jail ("bail money"). Also, Warren is clear on how he feels about his brother's music—it's not up to his impossibly high standards. Warren also overlooks Sandy's talent/accomplishments and focuses only on his shortcomings. We have a flawed protagonist.

We're spending time with these two characters because they both play a significant role in the story.

Warren eyed the cane in my hand. "What happened to your leg? Did you get your foot caught in a bar door at closing time?"

"Ha ha. Last week I was on a cruise ship and I got in a fight with a murderer."

This incident took place in to the previous book. Hopefully readers will want to read "The Cunning Cruise Ship Caper" to find out more. We also have the first reference to Sandy's alcoholism.

"That sounds like something you'd do. You never outgrew playing that kid spy on TV."

I could find a cure for cancer and bring world peace, but I'd never live down my starring role over two decades ago in the 1970s hit TV series "Buddy Brave, Boy Sleuth."

An important "info dump." Sandy played a detective on TV and now he's an amateur sleuth in real life. "Two decades ago" helps to place the story in the 1990s. And a bit of character development: Sandy realizes he's hopelessly typecast as Buddy Brave. Over the arc of the series, he's learned to accept Buddy, his TV role, as part of his life, no matter how much he wants to move on to other things. We also see that Warren looks at Sandy as the brother who never matured.

That's the first two pages. Hopefully the reader will enjoy these characters enough to stick around to see how they resolve their differences and solve the murder. In case you're wondering, the body shows up at the end of this one.



Bio: Sally Carpenter is native Hoosier now living in Moorpark, Calif.

She has a master's degree in theater from Indiana State University. While in school her plays "Star Collector" and "Common Ground" were finalists in the American College Theater Festival One-Act Playwrighting Competition.

Sally also has a master's degree in theology and a black belt in tae kwon do.

Her Sandy Fairfax Teen Idol series is comprised of "The Baffled Beatlemaniac Caper" (2012 Eureka! Award finalist for best first mystery novel), "The Sinister Sitcom Caper," "The Cunning Cruise Ship Caper" and "The Quirky Quiz Show Caper."

She has short stories in two anthologies: "**Dark Nights at the Deluxe Drive-in**" in "Last Exit to Murder" and "**Faster Than a Speeding Bullet**" in "Plan B: Omnibus."

She penned chapter three of "Chasing the Codex," a group mystery written by 34 authors with Cozy Cat Press.

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