

Technical linguistic nuances—The Story of Your Life by Ted Chiang

A Writing Journal Series—Entry # 1.2



The Story of Your Life by Ted Chiang

*I remember what **it'll** be like watching you when you are a day old. Your father **will have gone** for a quick visit to the hospital cafeteria, and **you'll be lying** in your bassinet, and **I'll be** leaning over you. So soon after the delivery, **I will still be feeling** like a wrung-out towel. You will seem incongruously tiny, given how enormous I felt during the pregnancy; I could swear there was room for someone much larger and more robust than you in there. Your hands and feet will be long and thin, not chubby yet. Your face will still be all red and pinched, puffy eyelids squeezed shut, the gnome-like phase that precedes the cherubic. **I'll run** a finger over your belly, wondering if silk would abrade your body like burlap. Then **you'll writhe**, twisting your body while poking out your legs one at a time, and **I'll recognize** the gesture as one I had felt you do inside me, many times. So that's what it looks like. **I'll feel elated** at this evidence of a unique motherchild bond, this certitude that you're the one I carried. Even if I had never laid eyes on you before, I'd be able to pick you out from a sea of babies: Not that one. No, not her either. Wait, that one over there. Yes, that's her. She's mine.*

Upon finishing *The Story of Your Life*, my initial reaction that of surprise that the daughter of Dr. Banks and Dr. Donnely had not yet been born at the end of the story, even though Dr. Banks knew of her daughter's future death. However, upon closer examination, I realized that the story was written in the future tense and future perfect tense, which indicated that it was actually a recounting of the daughter's life. This use of linguistic technicalities was a clever choice by Chiang and something that I had not fully appreciated until I took the time to look more closely at the text, as suggested by Kain (1998). While there are certainly other aspects of the story that could be critiqued, such as the

connotations and the level of detail used to describe the daughter and her memories, I wanted to highlight this less-discussed aspect of the story. This experience reminded me of the words of Gladys Knight, who said, “Sometimes the best things are right in front of you; it just takes some time to see them.”

By [Carl Kho](#) on [December 26, 2022](#).

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