If you put a gun onstage in Act I you must use it by Act III.
—Anton Chekhov

If there is something wrong with the third act, it's really in the first act.
—Billy Wilder

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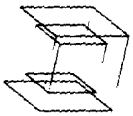


| Chapter I |

What is invisible ink?

What is invisible ink?

"There is no art which does not conceal a still greater art." – Percival Wilde

friend of mine once took an anthropology class in which she heard this story: An anthropologist was living among tribal people with little to no contact with the modern world. Wanting to share the marvels of technology with these isolated folks, the anthropologist took a photo of the chief and his wives. When the picture was processed and shown to the chief he was unable to recognize the blotches of black, white, and gray as an image of himself. He had never learned to translate two-dimensional images into recognizable three-dimensional shapes. That same chief, however, could look at a patch of grass and say what kind of animal had traversed it and how long ago with no more difficulty than you or I would have recognizing ourselves in a photographic image.

Story structure works very much this way. It is easy to see if you know what to look for, and invisible to those who don't.

Often when I listen to how people evaluate stories, I hear them talk about dialogue. When they talk about "the script" for a film, they are often talking about the dialogue. Or when they mention how well a book is written, they most often mean the way the words are put together—the beauty of a sentence.

When people speak of Shakespeare's work, they almost always talk about the beauty of the language.

These are all forms of "visible ink." This term refers to writing that is readily "seen" by the reader or viewer, who often mistakes these words on the page as the only writing the storyteller is doing.

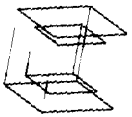
But how events in a story are ordered is also writing. What events should occur in a story to make the teller's point is also writing. Why a character behaves in a particular way is also writing.

These are all forms of "invisible ink," so called because they are not easily spotted by a reader, viewer, or listener of a story. Invisible ink does, however, have a profound impact on a story. More to the point, it is

the story. Invisible ink is the writing below the surface of the words. Most people will never see or notice it, but they will feel it. If you learn to use it, your work will feel polished, professional, and it will have a profound impact on your audience.

This book teaches you to see the elements that actually constitute story and how to apply them to your own work. Even stories that you are most familiar with will reveal their inner workings to you in ways you have never seen before.

By the end of this book, you will be able to see footprints in the grass.



| Chapter II |

Seven easy steps to a better story

Once upon a time ...

And every day ...

Until one day ...

And because of this ...

And because of this ...

Until finally ...

And ever since that day ...

Seven easy steps to a better story

 tories are not complicated. They are, in fact, deceptively simple. But like anything simple, they are difficult to create. I realize that sounds a little like Lewis Carroll, but hear me out.

One of the things that hangs us all up when writing is that we feel we need to make it more complicated. We feel that this will make it better, but it never does. It just makes it muddy.

I often hear people say, "less is more." But I don't see it reflected in their work. What follows are seven steps that make up all narratives. I was taught them by a writer/teacher by the name of Matt Smith. He learned them from a guy named Joe Guppy. And you are learning them from me.

The steps

1.) Once upon a time _____

2.) And every day _____

3.) Until one day _____

4.) And because of this _____

5.) And because of this _____

6.) Until finally _____

7.) And ever since that day _____

These steps are a kind of invisible ink. I'm sure you recognize them. They just make sense, don't they? Why didn't you know them already? You did. You just thought it would be more complicated than that.

Once upon a time ...

There are many books you can read that explain three-act structure, so I will cover it only briefly here using the seven steps as a template.

Let's look at the first two steps: Once upon a time and And every day. They are your act 1. What is the purpose of act 1? It tells the audience everything they need to know to understand the story that is to follow.

Let's look at what legendary filmmaker Billy Wilder says about the importance of a good first act: "If there is something wrong with the third act, it's really in the first act." Most of us have no problem understanding the importance of the first act of a joke. When someone tells a joke poorly it is more likely than not that they have forgotten to convey an important piece of information in the set up that makes the punch line funny. So it seems the joke is in the set up and not the punch line.

Just as with a joke, a story's set up must tell the audience everything they need to know to understand the story.

What does an audience need to know? Think of your childhood storybooks: Once upon a time there were Three Bears who lived together in their own house in the forest. Mama Bear, Papa Bear, and Baby Bear. They each had a bowl for their porridge—a small bowl for Baby Bear, a middle-sized bowl for Mama Bear, and a big bowl for Papa Bear.

We know several things just from those few sentences. Yes, we know there are three bears. We know that there are at least three major characters and we know their relationship to one another. But we also know that these bears behave as people. That is important. You could very well have a story where the bears act as animals.

Remember, when you create a story, you must let the audience know the reality of your story. It's your world.

"A duck walks into a bar and orders a rum and Coke." That joke starts by giving you a major character and letting you know the reality. Notice that when a joke starts with a duck walking into a bar, no one says, "That's ridiculous!" They accept it because it's the first thing they are told. Whatever your "talking duck" is, let people know right away.

The opening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is often talked about because it's exciting. But it is much more than that. With so many fantastical things happening right at the story's opening, the audience knows a few things about its world. We know that the story's reality is heightened—that it is not to be a story about a soldier coping with his life after Vietnam. It is a fantasy that takes place in the year 1936. We know that in this world, archaeology is much more than just digging for pieces of clay pots. We know, also, that the guy in the fedora is good with a whip and good at his job. He appears to be fearless and smart. Things don't always go as planned for him, and he sometimes survives by the skin of his teeth.

We meet Belloq, Indiana Jones's arch enemy, so we know his is a ruthless business, and men will kill for the valuable artifacts they seek.

We see that Indiana Jones does have his fears: snakes. He's not superhuman.

Which brings up something else. We know some things because they are defined by their absence. We know that Indiana Jones may be skilled, but he does not possess magical powers. In some realities, magical powers are commonplace, but not in this one. There is another Spielberg film that shows what a disaster it can be to have a poor first act: In the mid-1980s, Steven Spielberg produced a television show called *Amazing Stories*. A particular episode, "The Mission," was one Mr. Spielberg also directed.

The story takes place during WWII, aboard a B-17 bomber. B-17s had a crew of ten. One of the crewmen was positioned under the belly of the plane in a Plexiglass bubble so he could fire his machine gun at any threat coming from underneath the plane.

In this story, the "belly-gunner," as they were called, is a talented and likable guy who draws caricatures of his crewmates, much to their amusement. He wants to work for Walt Disney Studios.

The plane goes on a bombing mission and is badly damaged. When the belly-gunner tries to crawl out of his bubble and into the plane, he finds that he is trapped underneath the plane because of the damage.

The crew tries to get him out, but can't. No problem; they can just get him out when they land. Then someone suggests that they check the landing gear—and it doesn't work. Without wheels, the plane will have to land on its belly, crushing the helpless gunner to death.

The crew does not want to give up on their buddy and increases the effort to save him. Nothing works.

Sure that the man will die, the airbase calls a priest to be there when the plane lands.

It becomes painfully clear that the gunner is going to die and there is nothing to be done. Each of the crewmembers puts his hand down the small top opening of the bubble to say his good-byes. They are in tears as they rub the gunner's head or embrace his hand.

Without the belly-gunner's knowledge, the decision has been made to shoot him so that he won't suffer the pain of being crushed.

Slowly, one of the men pulls his pistol and lowers it down to the head of his unsuspecting friend.

The poor gunner is crying and muttering that he can't die because he's going to work for Walt Disney Studios.

The pistol creeps ever closer to his head as he busily sketches a cartoon version of a B-17. He is almost in a trance. He draws big, cartoonish wheels on the bottom of the plane.

As they approach the landing strip, the pilot decides to try one last time to lower the landing gear. His indicators tell him that the wheels have lowered.

From the bottom of the real plane, big exaggerated cartoon tires emerge. They make the sound of a squeaky balloon and are complete with a cartoon tire patch. The plane is able to land on these cartoon tires and the man is saved.

The night this show aired, I had a group of friends over to watch the show. I can tell you that we were riveted to the screen during this show. We kept wondering how the hell they were going to get out of this. The tension and suspense were palpable.

We all reacted with disappointed laughter upon the landing of the plane on cartoon wheels. So, it turns out, did the rest of America.

I can't tell you how disappointed audiences were when this episode aired. I remember how, the next day, people at work talked about how bad it was. They thought the entire episode was awful.

Spielberg had not set up a reality where cartoon tires could save the day. There are realities in which this may be possible: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, for example.

Spielberg had done such a good job with the first part of the story that we, the audience, believed the situation was dire. We were invested in the story and its world. The cartoon tires were from some other world we knew nothing about.

Just as Billy Wilder said, "If there is something wrong with the third act, it's really in the first act," so your "Once upon a time" is the reality in which your story takes place and the introduction of your major characters.

"And every day…" just supports what has already been set up. It establishes a pattern. A pattern to be broken by…

Until one day...

An inciting incident occurs. The inciting incident is the true beginning of your story. If your story is about a couple who has an affair, this might be when they meet. Or if they have already met, it is when the affair begins.

Some will tell you that this is where your conflict begins, but not necessarily. Comic-book writer and editor Jim Shooter has observed that the second act can start with conflict or opportunity. For instance, if you've got a story where the first act is about a young woman who is so poor she can't pay her rent, the first act might end when she finds one million dollars.

This step has been called many things: *act break, plot point, turning point,* and *curtain.* I prefer curtain. The reason I like the term curtain is because it comes from theater, wherein a curtain is literally dropped between acts. In live theater, they must get the audience back after intermission, so acts end on the highest point, when the stakes are at their most desperate. For me, imagining that there is a physical curtain helps me to remember to raise the stakes.

In his book, *Comedy Writing Step by Step*, comedy writer Gene Perret calls this the "Uh-oh factor." In a well-constructed sketch, the character and/or situation is established and then something happens that requires a reaction. He uses an example from the old *Carol Burnett Show* in which Carol plays a woman who has just been released from a hospital psych ward for being addicted to soap operas. She proclaims that she is cured. She says, "I don't care if Bruce marries Wanda or not." Her friend's response is, "Bruce is dead." As Mr. Perret describes it, Carol's eyes widen at this news and the audience thinks, *Uh-oh, she's hooked on soaps again.*

Drama has this uh-oh moment as well. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the king promises his entire fortune to the one of his three daughters who can prove she loves him most. That's an uh-oh moment if there ever was one.

Few people could stop watching a drama after something like that is introduced.

And because of this...

This is now your second act. When your first "curtain" goes down, that is the end of your first act. Now it is time to explore what happens as a result of your first act—everything should be cause-and-effect. If your character was diagnosed with inoperable cancer at the end of act 1, this is where he deals with it. Does he go into denial? Does he give up, lie down, and wait to die? Or is he a fighter? Will he try anything for another few days of life? Does he question how he has lived his life and try to do something worthwhile before he dies?

Whatever the character does, it must be in reaction to the incident at the act 1 curtain.

And because of this...

Act 2 is your longest act and makes up the body of your story. This act is usually split in two. I like to call this split the fulcrum. Because act 2 is so long, it can be difficult to keep an audience engrossed. It helps to cut it in half.

In Billy Wilder's classic noir film, *Double Indemnity*, a woman and her lover decide to kill the woman's husband for the insurance money. In the first half of act 2 they plan the murder. At the fulcrum, they carry out their plan and in the second half of act 2 the focus becomes: Will they get away with this crime?

Back to our character diagnosed with cancer. Let's say that when given the news of his cancer, he gives up on life and begins alienating those who care for him. But at the fulcrum something happens that makes him want to live. Now he will stop at nothing to find a cure.

Until finally...

This is your third act. When the third act curtain "goes up," it is the beginning of the end of the story. In a cop drama, for instance, it might be the clue that solves the big mystery and puts the detective on the trail of the killer. This event, whatever it is, starts the chain of events that leads to your climax.

Using our example of the cancer patient, perhaps this is where he makes peace with the inevitable and accepts his impending death. Perhaps he decides to cherish the moments he has left with family and friends and spends his time with them instead of searching for the elusive cure for his disease.

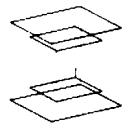
And ever since that day...

Following your climax is a short scene or two called a denouement. "They lived happily ever after" is the most familiar denouement. You shouldn't have too much following your climax, just something that lets the audience know what the life of your protagonist is like after it.

In the case of our unfortunate cancer patient, he does not survive; but maybe this is where we see how his courage in the face of death has had a lasting impact on those who survive. Or maybe how he lives on through his art. Or perhaps this death has ended old rivalries and caused others to cherish those around them.

What I would like you to do now is write down each of these steps, followed by a blank space. Then I want you to write a few simple stories using these steps. Make them as simple as possible.

What you will find is that what you have written feels like a story, but seems to lack something. They are shallow for some reason. Forgettable. It is a small matter to fix; all you need to do is have a point.



| Chapter III |

The armature

· Joke exercise

What it means to dramatize an idea

"Bundle of sticks"

Theme beats logic

The use of clones

The armature

A wise man speaks because he has something *to say; a fool because he has to say* something.
—Unknown author; often attributed to Plato

Why do people tell stories? The stories that tend to stick to our bones are those that teach us something. This, I believe, is the primary reason we tell stories—to teach.

Consider this: Every culture on the globe has music and stories. We all have music and we all have stories.

People who study human speech believe that humans did not invent language anymore than birds invented flight. It is in our makeup to speak. It is part of being human.

It makes sense to me that stories fall under this category. They are part of us. I've seen memory experts on television who will give volunteers a huge list of objects to memorize. Of course, this is difficult to do. Then they tell the volunteer to string the objects together in an absurd story. When this is done, the list is easily recalled. Our brains seem to retain information this way.

I have read about aboriginal tribes in Australia who use songs and stories in case they get lost. These songs contain information like a map. So if you know the words to a particular song, you can, for instance, find water in an unfamiliar area because you know the song for that area. Besides saving lives, stories can also tell us how we should live.

In Africa, they used to tell the story of a black slave-catcher who helped the English capture his own countrymen and sell them into a life of slavery. One night, after a particularly good catch, the black slave-catcher was celebrating with the English and they all got drunk on rum. The black man passed out, and when he awoke the next day, he found himself in the belly of a slave ship chained to the very people he helped enslave.

This is a cautionary tale that teaches its listener that there is a

price to be paid for betrayal.

In Bruno Bettelheim's book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, he tells of the traditional Hindi medical practice of giving the patient a story to contemplate. Through this story the patient would learn from the hero's failures and victories how to deal with and resolve his/her own problem.

This may sound like a foreign concept, but we use this even today in Western culture in the form of Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs where people share their stories in order to help themselves and others. This simple act of sharing stories helps the healing process. People learn that they are not alone in their struggle and that others have been through these addictions and survived. They may also learn things to watch out for in their own behavior to avoid falling back into old destructive patterns. Stories teach us how to live.

Take the story of King Midas. This man was so greedy that he wished all he touched would turn to gold. That is until he touched his beloved daughter and she was changed to gold. We learn that some things are more important than money. Like the aboriginal song, this story is a map—a map for living.

Look at the Bible. It could be just a list of rules, but it's not—it's stories. Stories resonate with people. Lists do not.

If you want people to hold fast to their faith no matter what, you tell them the story of Job. Job would not renounce God no matter what the Devil did to him, and in the end he was rewarded.

If you want people to stand up to power, no matter what the odds, tell them the story of David and Goliath.

If you want to teach people not to get too full of themselves, you tell them the story of King Nimrod, who thought himself so great that he tried to build a tower to God. He was put in his place when God gave all the workers different languages so they could not communicate.

The Greeks and Romans had similar stories. All religions have understood, for a very long time, that stories are powerful tools. Why is it that some stories stick with us, while others are soon forgotten? Do you remember the story I told you about the tribal chief and the

anthropologist? Sure you do. Why? It's because I had a point, a reason to tell that story. Having a point gives your stories resonance. Recall the saying, "A wise man speaks because he has something to say; a fool because he has to say something." This is true when one is crafting a story as well.

Because of my work at make-up effects houses, I've known a few sculptors. When they begin sculpting in clay, they first build an armature to act as a skeleton; otherwise, the piece would not hold its shape. It might look good for a while but would soon collapse. When an admirer of art looks at a sculpture, she never sees or even thinks about the armature that gives the piece its structural integrity. The armature is invisible but as much a part of the sculpture as the outside.

Before you begin writing, you too must build an armature. For us story-crafters, the armature is the idea upon which we hang our story. It is what has been called theme, but I find that the word theme is not descriptive enough and leads to confusion; I have found in teaching that many people bring a lot of baggage to the table when I address theme.

What is an armature, then, when talking about story craft? It is what you want to say with your piece. I was once talking to a friend who was complaining about a producer wanting to change a scene in his script. My friend was angry because the change had nothing to do with his theme. He said, "My theme is competition. And the change has nothing to do with competition!" I didn't say anything at the time, but my friend was confused. There is an old joke about marriage that goes, "Marriage is not a word, it's a sentence." It's the same with theme. My friend had nothing to say about competition. "Competition" is not a theme. A theme (or armature) might be, "Competition is sometimes a necessary evil." Or, "Competition leads to self-destruction." Saying that your theme is competition is like saying your theme is "red." It really says nothing at all.

One way to look at your armature is what is called, in children's fables, "the moral." The armature is your point. Your story is sculpted around this point.

With King Midas, the storyteller wanted to teach people that

some things were more important than money. What were his tasks as a writer? First, he had to create a character who was greedy. Then he needed to set up a situation wherein the character gets what he wants. Then he needed to turn this wish into something that would teach the character a lesson. Everything in this story is designed to make the writer's point. This should be true of your work as well.

Some of you may think this definition of theme too simplistic. *It must be harder than this*, you think. It isn't. You are also worried about being perceived as too preachy. Over the years, I have encountered many students concerned with being too preachy or blatant, but never one who was afraid of not being clear enough or that their point would not be understood.

The first thing you must do to get your point across is to understand what you want to say. I know that sounds simple and obvious, but I almost never meet writers who know what they want to say. Mostly what they want is to say something deep and profound that no one has ever said before, but they don't know what that is. Or they want to say a thousand things in one story, not realizing that to say too much is to say nothing at all.

I was once reading an interview with animation director Chuck Jones in which he talked about animating young animals versus old animals. He had observed that a puppy, for instance, would expend excess energy to perform simple tasks. This results in those floppy movements we associate with young mammals. In contrast, adult animals are more economical. Think of the clumsy hunting style of a kitten versus the precision of an adult cat. I have noticed this same thing with story crafters. Writers with the least experience and skill think that the more complicated something is, the better. But like a kitten their work comes off clumsy and unfocused. If you want to come off like a mature writer, be precise.

There is an old piece of advice usually given to someone about to give a speech: Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them. This is no different for storytellers. In fact, those three bits of advice could represent the three acts. But just how do

you put this into practice? How is your armature put together?

First, you must know where you are going or you will never get there. Then you must let the audience know where you are taking them. You show them the armature—the idea you want to build on. One way this is done is to have a character state out loud what you want to say with your story.

In *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, when Elliot says something hurtful to his mother, Elliot's older brother gets angry at his insensitivity and yells, "Damn it, when are you going to grow up and learn how other people feel for a change?" What happens next is that Elliot meets E.T. And one of the first things that happens is that when E.T. becomes sleepy, so does Elliot. Then when E.T. is hungry, so is Elliot. When E.T. drinks beer Elliot gets drunk, too.

Later, when Elliot introduces E.T. to his brother, he says, "I'm keeping him." This without any regard for what E.T. wants. But he is beginning to empathize with others, as is evidenced in the scene in which Elliot feels for the frogs in his science class, and sets them free before they can be dissected. By the end of the film, Elliot "feels what other people feel," enough to send E.T. home even though he will miss his friend. Everything in the film is built on the armature stated by Elliot's brother at the beginning of the story.

The Iron Giant is an amazing animated film directed by Brad Bird. On its surface, this film is like E.T. in many ways. It is about a boy who befriends a being from outer space (in this case, a giant robot). And, as in E.T., the government is seeking the alien. So what's different about it, you might ask. It's the armature. As a matter of fact, I heard very few people compare the two films. They each had something different to say, so the similar stuff on the surface didn't matter much.

In the story of *The Iron Giant*, the robot is damaged when it gets to earth. Later, after befriending the boy, the kindly robot remembers that it is programmed to be a weapon of mass destruction. In fact, it nearly vaporizes the boy by accident. Now, the robot has an internal conflict. Will it give in to its programming (its nature) or rise above it? I understand, when Mr. Bird pitched the story, he said, "What if a gun

had a conscience and didn't want to be a gun anymore?" That was his armature. In the film it is stated this way: "You are who you choose to be."

The success of *There's Something About Mary* sent Hollywood rushing to produce toilet-humor comedies. But the Farelly brothers had made other shock comedies, why did this one become a megahit that almost everyone seemed to love? I thought the film was so good I saw it three times in the theater. If you knew me, you'd know that I like few films. And I certainly don't like sophomoric humor. So again, why this film? It had an armature.

I don't believe that audiences care much about the genre of a story; they just want to be moved in some way. And they respond over and over again to stories with an armature.

In *There's Something About Mary*, Ben Stiller's character is dishonest to Mary and to himself. He is a stalker, and until he realizes it, he is not worthy of Mary's love.

A film like James Cameron's *Terminator* would seem, on its surface, to have a flimsy armature, but it really has something meaningful to say. If you recall, Sarah Conner was an ordinary 20th-century woman with a stressful low-wage job at a burger joint. In the first act of the film, Sarah is having a particularly bad day at work when her coworker says to her, "Look at it this way, in a hundred years, who will care?"

As it turns out, Sarah's life is about to be turned upside down. A robot from the future has been sent back in time to kill her, to prevent her from giving birth to her son, who is a threat to Skynet (the computer that rules the future earth). She is, according to the film, one of the most important people ever born. So this mundane life that she lives does, indeed, matter. In a hundred years, everyone will care who Sarah Connor was.

This is not unlike *It's a Wonderful Life*, wherein George Bailey thinks it would make little difference to the world if he had never been born. He learns, of course, that his life has had a great impact on those people around him, and even on some he has never met.

These two movies would, on the surface, seem to have nothing

in common, but they share a common armature: none of us knows how important our mundane lives may prove to be.

Yes, these are all high-key fantasy films, but armature also applies to straight dramas. They can also state their armature out loud. In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, a story in which Dustin Hoffman's wife, played by Meryl Streep, walks out on him and leaves him with their child, Dustin is speaking with a neighbor who tells him that what Meryl did took a lot of courage. His response is: "Oh, yeah, how much courage does it take to walk out on your child?" By the end of the film, that question is answered for Dustin and for the audience. Watch it and see.

In the *The Wizard of Oz* the armature is stated: "There's no place like home." But it might more accurately be said: "You may already have what you are looking for." How do we know that this is so? Is it because it is said? No, it's because it is dramatized.

Remember that your armature is the foundation that holds up your story. Everything hangs on top of it. Every decision you make should be based on the idea of dramatizing your armature idea.

Joke exercise

I like to use jokes as an instructional tool because they are short stories of a type and are great for teaching structure. One can learn much about invisible ink from the study of jokes. Just as all elements of a joke support the punch line, so should every element of your story support its armature. Good story structure means that nothing is extraneous; every element leads to an inevitable, yet surprising, conclusion.

Choose the appropriate punch lines for the following jokes.

Joke Number One:

A seaman meets a pirate in a bar. The two men take turns boasting of their adventures on the high seas.

The seaman notes the pirate has a peg leg, hook, and an eyepatch. He asks, "So how did you end up with the pegleg?"

The pirate replies, "We were in a storm at sea, and I was swept overboard into a school of sharks. Just as my men were pulling me out, a shark bit my leg off."

"Wow!" said the seaman. "What about your hook?"

"Well," replied the pirate, "while my men and I were plundering in the Middle East, I was caught stealing from a merchant. I was arrested and my hand was cut off."

"Incredible!" remarked the seaman. "How did you get the eyepatch?"

"A sea gull dropping fell into my eye," replied the pirate.

"You lost your eye to a sea gull dropping?" the sailor asked incredulously. "Incredible!" remarked the seaman.

"Well," said the pirate,

A.) "In a pig's eye!"
B.) "I've seen bigger."
C.) "It was my first day with the hook ..."
D.) "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!"

Joke Number Two:

A guy goes into a bar, orders twelve shots of their finest Scotch whiskey, and starts drinking them as fast as he can.

The bartender says, "Dang, why are you drinking so fast?"

The guy says, "You would be drinking fast if you had what I had."

The bartender says, "What do you have?"

The guy says:

A. "75 cents."
B. "A green tuxedo."
C. "A trip to the moon."
D. "I wanted to see time fly."

Joke Number Three:

A duck walks into a bar and asks, "Got any grapes?"

The bartender, confused, tells the duck that no, his bar doesn't serve grapes. The duck thanks him and leaves.

The next day, the duck returns and says, "Got any grapes?"

Again, the bartender tells him that, no, the bar does not serve grapes, has never served grapes, and, furthermore, will never serve grapes. The duck, a little ruffled, thanks him and leaves.

The next day, the duck returns, but before he can say anything, the bartender begins to yell: "Listen, duck! This is a bar! We do not serve grapes! If you ever ask for grapes again, I will nail your stupid duck beak to the bar!"

The duck is silent for a moment, and then asks, "Got any nails?" Confused, the bartender says no. "Good!" says the duck, then says:

A. "That's a funny name for a mouse."
B. "Then whose monkey was it?"
C. "Got any grapes?"
D. "What did you order?"

Joke Number Four:

As a butcher is shooing a dog from his shop, he sees $10 and a note in his mouth, which reads: "10 lamb chops, please."

Amazed, he takes the money, puts a bag of chops in the dog's mouth, and quickly closes the shop. He follows the dog and watches him wait for a green light, look both ways, and trot across the road to a bus stop. The dog checks the timetable and sits on the bench. When a bus arrives, he walks around to the front and looks at the number, then boards the bus. The butcher follows, dumbstruck.

As the bus travels out into the suburbs, the dog takes in the scenery. After a while he stands on his back paws to push the "stop" button, then the butcher follows him off.

The dog runs up to a house and drops his bag on the stoop. He goes back down the path, takes a big run, and throws himself—Whap—against the door. He does this again and again. No answer. So he jumps on a wall, walks around the garden, beats his head against a window, jumps off, and waits at the front door. A big guy opens it and starts cursing and pummeling the dog.

The butcher runs up screams at the guy: "What the hell are you doing? This dog's a genius!"

The owner responds:

A. "Yesterday we were campaigning."
B. "Are you gonna eat that?"
C. "It's supposed to do that?"
D. "Genius, my eye. It's the second time this week he's forgotten his key!"

When listening to a joke, we all know there will be some unexpected twist and that everything preceding the punch line is a necessary part of the joke. We understand that the punch line can only use elements previously introduced. More accurately, the punch line must use elements previously introduced—otherwise, why introduce them? Long-form stories are no different from jokes in that they should be this precise.

What it means to dramatize an idea

Seeing is different than being told.
—African proverb

I have often had conversations with people who will like a film or story because it deals with a certain subject, such as sexism or racism. Then, later, when I see the film, I will see that the subject has not been dealt with at all, only spoken about.

Look at this scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy meets the Scarecrow:

THE WIZARD OF OZ
by
Noel Langley
Florence Ryerson
and Edgar Allan Woolf
1939

DOROTHY
... you did say something, didn't you?

The Scarecrow shakes his head, then nods -- Dorothy looks at the Scarecrow as he nods his head -- she speaks to him --

DOROTHY (CONT'D)
Are you doing that on purpose, or can't you make up your mind?

The Scarecrow explains -- shows his straw head --

SCARECROW
That's the trouble. I can't make up my mind. I haven't got a brain—only straw.

DOROTHY
How can you talk if you haven't got a brain?

SCARECROW
I don't know. But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking, don't they?

DOROTHY
Yes, I guess you're right.

Dorothy steps over the fence and into the cornfield.

DOROTHY
Well, we haven't really met properly, have we?

SCARECROW
Why, no.

Dorothy curtsies.

DOROTHY
How do you do?

SCARECROW
How do you do?

DOROTHY
Very well, thank you.

SCARECROW
Oh, I'm not feeling at all well. You see, it's very tedious being stuck up here all day long with a pole up your back.

DOROTHY
Oh, dear—that must be terribly uncomfortable. Can't you get down?

Dorothy moves around to the back of the pole—

SCARECROW
Down? No, you see, I'm—Well,—I'm—

DOROTHY
Oh, well, here—let me help you.

SCARECROW
Oh, that's very kind of you—very kind.

Dorothy examines the back of the Scarecrow as she tries to unfasten him—

DOROTHY
Well, oh, dear—I don't quite see how I can—

SCARECROW
Of course, I'm not bright about

things, but if you'll just....

Dorothy follows the Scarecrow's directions—

SCARECROW
...bend the nail down in the back, maybe I'll slip off and...

DOROTHY
Oh....

Dorothy turns the nail and the Scarecrow falls to the ground.

Here, the Scarecrow is introduced, and one of the first things he says is that he doesn't have a brain. But it is he who knows how best to get him off his pole, not Dorothy.

Here's another scene:

Dorothy and Scarecrow come forward along Yellow Brick Road. Dorothy reacts as she sees an apple orchard. She goes up to one of the trees.

DOROTHY
Oh—apples—Oh, look! Oh. Oh—

Dorothy picks an apple off—reacts as the tree takes the apple back and slaps Dorothy's hand—

DOROTHY
Ouch!

First Tree opens its "mouth" and speaks to Dorothy.

TREE
What do you think you're doing?

DOROTHY
We've been walking a long ways and I was hungry and—Did you say.…

The First Tree gestures as it speaks—

FIRST TREE
She was hungry! Well, how would you like to have someone come along and pick something off of you?

DOROTHY
Oh, dear—I keep forgetting I'm not in Kansas.

SCARECROW
Come along, Dorothy—you don't want any of those apples. Hmm!

FIRST TREE
What do you mean—she doesn't want any of those apples? Are you hinting my apples aren't what they ought to be?

SCARECROW
Oh, no! It's just that she doesn't like little green.…

The Tree reacts, makes a grab for the two—

the Scarecrow fights him off as Dorothy runs off, the Scarecrow follows her.

TREE

…you…

SCARECROW

Go—Go!

TREE

…Oh—Help—let me out. I'll give you little green worms.

SCARECROW

I'll show you how to get apples.

TREE (o.s.)

You can't…

The First tree winds up, throws apples.

TREE

…do that to me! I'll…

Scarecrow and Dorothy react as the apples begin to hit them. Scarecrow falls back to the road—

TREE

…show you!

The Trees throw apples at Scarecrow and Dorothy and Toto in the b.g.— The Scarecrow rises, dodges about—

TREES
You can't do that! You can't do that! Hey!

First Tree laughs as it throws apples.

SCARECROW
Hooray!

Scarecrow picks up the apples.

SCARECROW
Hooray! I guess that did it! Help yourself.

There it is again. It is the Scarecrow who has the plan to get the apples, not Dorothy. Some of you may be thinking that this type of writing might be too obvious. But how many times have you seen *The Wizard of Oz* and never noticed that the Scarecrow comes up with all of the plans? It was invisible to you—invisible ink.

Here is a great little scene for the Lion, the Tin Man, and the Scarecrow. Remember, the Tin Man thinks he has no heart, and the Lion believes himself a coward.

Tin Man, Lion and Scarecrow peer over the rocks.

SCARECROW
That's the castle of the Wicked Witch! Dorothy's in that awful place!

TIN MAN
Oh, I hate to think of her in there. We've got to get her out.

(cries)

SCARECROW
Don't cry now. We haven't got the oil-can with us and you've been squeaking enough as it is.

LION
Who's them? Who's them?

The Witch's Winkies marching about in the Castle Courtyard.
The Lion tries to turn back, but others grab him, push him forward—

SCARECROW
I've got a plan how to get in there.

LION
Fine. He's got a plan.

SCARECROW
And you're going to lead us.

LION
Yeah. Me?

SCARECROW
Yes, you.

LION
I—I—I—I—gotta get her outta there?

SCARECROW
That's right.

LION
All right, I'll go in there for Dorothy—Wicked Witch or no Wicked Witch—guards or no guards—I'll tear 'em apart.
(growls)
I may not come out alive, but I'm going in there. There's only one thing I want you fellows to do.

SCARECROW AND TIN MAN
What's that?

LION
Talk me out of it.

Again, we see that the Scarecrow has a plan, but we also see that the Tin Man has a heart because he tears up. And the Lion gets a chance to show his courage in the face of fear.

By the time we get to the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, we know (at least, subconsciously) that the foursome of the Lion, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, and Dorothy already have what they've been seeking. We, as an audience, were able to figure it out, and with that comes satisfaction. This almost happens on a subconscious level.

This is what is meant by dramatization. It is showing rather than telling. We know that those things to which we have an emotional connection stick with us better than those for which we have none. Dramatization is a way to get your intellectual ideas across to your audience emotionally.

Do you think anyone watching *Terminator* for the first time thought to themselves: The theme of this film is that none of us knows how important our lives might be? Of course they didn't. What they thought was: RUN! Get the hell away from that thing! But believe me they got the message of the film, whether they can articulate it or not.

Don't be afraid to entertain—a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down.

Jaws is another example of a film that dramatizes, in a very entertaining way, its theme. The character of Chief Brody is terrified of the water. It is something we learn about him early on. At the end of the film, after he has killed the shark, his last line is, "You know, I used to hate the water." He learned that to face his fear was to conquer his fear. The shark was an external representation of Brody's internal fear. If you think that this is something I'm reading into the film, look at the evidence and ask yourself, why would killing a shark rid Brody of his fear of water? It doesn't make any logical sense, but it makes all the sense in the world, thematically.

The following is a story by Aesop.

"Bundle of sticks"

Once there was a farmer whose many sons were always bickering and fighting with each other. One day the farmer called his sons together. He had with him a bundle of sticks tied together.

He commanded each son to take the bundle and break it in half. In turn they tried and failed. The farmer then untied the bundle, handed each son a single stick and told them to break the sticks now, which they did with ease.

"You see, my sons," said the farmer, "if you are of one mind and unite to assist each other, you will be unaffected by all the attacks of your enemies; but if you are divided among yourselves, you will be broken as easily as these sticks."

Armature (moral): in unity there is strength.

Aesop lived nearly 3,000 years ago and his stories are still told. Not only are they told, they thrive. They are part of our everyday lives. Everyone knows what we mean when we say someone is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Or if we say someone has sour grapes. Or if we say of someone that he's crying wolf. All of these sayings are from Aesop's stories.

Why have stories told so long ago stuck around? It is because they had something to say about living as a human being in society, and people haven't changed much since 600 BC. And believe me, as long as there are people, we will have the same problems we have always had.

Aesop's armatures are often called morals, but whatever you call them, it all boils down to the fact that he had a point. Not only that, but he dramatized his point. The farmer in the "Bundle of sticks" story demonstrates his point to his sons rather than just telling them. This also demonstrates Aesop's point to the reader.

Just as with a joke, these short-form stories have no excess elements. Remember that this is true of any well-crafted story, regardless of length.

I included this story to *dramatize* the ideas of dramatization and armature.

Theme beats logic

Don't give me logic, give me emotion.
—Billy Wilder's instructions to his writing partner, I.A.L. Diamond

Let's start to explore this idea of *theme* versus *logic* by looking at the film *Raising Arizona*. Nicolas Cage and Holly Hunter play a couple desperate to have a child. They eventually resort to stealing an infant from a couple with quintuplets.

When the hapless couple brings the baby home, they all pose for a family photo. This snapshot of the new family is followed immediately by a shot of a man's head popping out of a small mud hole. The man screams at the top of his lungs as rain pours down upon him. In the background, we can see a prisón wall and searchlight. This man is escaping from prison. Is there any logic at all that says that a man escaping from prison should or would scream as he makes his escape? In fact, logic tells us just the opposite—a man escaping prison would be as quiet as can be. So why is it in the film? It's because theme beats logic, and the mud-soaked screaming man makes a thematic point.

Look where the scene falls in the film—right after the snapshot of the happy family. So what? Think about it: Everything in the scene about the screaming man is made to resemble a birth. The man pops up headfirst. They could have started with his fingers pushing up out of the mud. That would make more sense, logically, if the man is digging, but this scene is not about logic. The head, covered with dripping mud, emerges from a small hole. The man screams and screams and screams as he is "born" into the world. This is an ugly birth; there is something wrong with this birth. That's the thematic point that beats logic. Nothing good happens for the Nick Cage and Holly Hunter characters after they steal the child. In fact, the escaped convict, along with another, seeks refuge at the couple's home. Hunter and Cage have no choice but to house the criminals because the criminals know about the kidnapping and threaten to expose their secret. The couple has no end of trouble until, at the film's conclusion, they return the child to his rightful parents.

This is a situation in which the armature is not spoken but is evident in every decision made by the storytellers. The armature could be stated: It is wrong to deprive others of their happiness to gain your own. Or it could be stated: Nothing good can come from a bad deed.

You may have your own way of putting the film's armature into words; make sure you can back it up with solid, consistent evidence in the story's structure.

Groundhog Day and *Tootsie* have similar armatures: When the protagonists use their inside information to get the object of their desire into bed, it doesn't work. In both cases the plan should work, but doesn't, because it isn't right thematically.

In *Tootsie* the armature is set up very well. What you see in the first act is that Dustin Hoffman's character is a good actor, and what makes him a good actor is that he can't lie when he's acting. He has to be true to his character. In life he is a liar, particularly to women. Through living the life of a fictional woman who can be nothing but honest, Dustin's male alter ego learns to be honest with women.

One of my favorite examples of this is the story of *Groundhog Day*. I read somewhere that the studio wanted some kind of explanation as to why Bill Murray's character was reliving the same day over and over again. They wanted a gypsy curse or something along those lines. From what I understand, it was written and then cut because it didn't work. The reason, I think, is that it doesn't need a logical explanation. The audience understands why it is happening. It is what is supposed to happen thematically to teach Bill Murray a lesson. When he learns his lesson, the phenomenon stops and we all know why. We understand that "ever since that day" Bill Murray is a better man.

Remember that dramatizing the armature is a way of getting an intellectual idea across emotionally. If you learn to do this you'll move more people more often and more deeply.

Another favorite example of mine is in the 1968 version of *Planet of the Apes*. Here the armature is that "Man" is a violent and self-destructive creature. This point is hammered home again and again, topped off by the ending, which reveals that humans destroyed their own world.

Near the middle of the film, before the audience knows that the planet is, indeed, Earth, there is a courtroom scene. You see, the sentient apes of this world have discovered that Taylor (Charlton Heston) can speak. Humans on this world are mute. The courtroom scene takes place following this discovery.

Up till then, Taylor had been kept in a cage. There is no logical reason to have this scene in a courtroom. Why not have the scene at Taylor's cage? It all goes back to the armature that Man is a violent and self-destructive creature. This scene, ***thematically,*** is about putting humanity on trial. The storytellers even make a point of stripping Taylor of his clothes to make him appear more Adam-like. And it is no mistake that this scene ***immediately*** follows the discovery that Taylor possesses speech. Just ***being*** human, it seems, is a crime. It is a beautifully crafted scene that abandons logic for theme to support its armature.

The use of clones

Once upon a time there were three little pigs. . . ."

What I am calling *clones* have been called other names—*mirror characters* and *reflection characters*—but, whatever you call them, they are useful tools of the storyteller's craft.

A *clone* in story terms is a tool for showing, not telling. Clones are characters in your story that represent what could, should, or might happen to the protagonist if he or she takes a particular path. Two of the Three Little Pigs are clones. It is the failure of the first two pigs that allows us to measure the success of the last pig. This is a simple use of clones, and one of the most obvious to see.

But clones exist in more complicated stories as well. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the pitiful character of Gollum is used to show what might happen to the hero Frodo if he is seduced by the power of a magic ring. Just as in the story of the three pigs, we measure the success of one character by the failure of another.

In *Tootsie*, the woman who is the object of Dustin Hoffman's desire is dating a lying womanizer. In one scene, Dustin, as a woman, confronts the womanizer and tells him that he understands his womanizing ways better than he thinks. This is a way for Dustin to "see" and confront himself.

The television show *ER* uses clones to great effect. Often a character will have a problem that is then mirrored by a patient. If a doctor has a drinking problem, for instance, the next thing you know she is treating a drunk driver. With that, she, and we, see what might happen if the character doesn't change her ways.

Going back to *The Wizard of Oz*, all three of Dorothy's companions are clones. They, like she, are looking for something they already have. Having clones is a way of dramatizing ideas; again, a way of showing instead of telling. As I said earlier, the audience sees that Scarecrow has brains from the very first scene and it is reinforced throughout the story. Perhaps you remember the line, "Don't cry, you'll rust again," said to the

Tin Man. Hmm, turns out he does have a heart, after all.

John Steinbeck uses a cast of clones in his novel *Of Mice and Men*. The armature of that story is that people need companionship. It is dramatized as well as stated. If it has been awhile since you've read it, I suggest you reread it soon. It is amazingly well-crafted. He knows what he wants to say and says it over and over again in different ways. And he does give you an intellectual idea on an emotional level.

In the story, George and Lennie are two migrant workers who travel and work together. Lennie, being mentally challenged, is a lot of trouble for George, but George's need for companionship and his love for Lennie make the relationship worth the trouble. Other characters even comment on how strange it is for these two to travel together.

One of the first things to happen is that George discovers that Lennie is petting a dead mouse he is keeping in his pocket. Lennie is a huge man who has no sense of his own strength and had killed the mouse by accident. Lennie enjoys the companionship of small, soft animals, and is obsessed with one day having rabbits to take care of.

When the duo reaches the ranch where they are to work, one of the people they meet is the boss's wife. She often flirts with the ranch hands because her husband doesn't pay attention to her—she craves companionship.

On this ranch there is also an old man who has on old dog. The other hands in the bunkhouse think the dog is worthless. A man named Carlson suggests that the old man shoot the stinky old dog because it has, as he puts it, "'Got no teeth,' he said. 'He's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you.'"

The scene goes on with Candy, the old man, protesting, but Carlson won't let go of his idea that the dog should be shot:

> "Candy looked about unhappily. "No," he said softly. "No, I couldn't do that. I had 'im too long."
> "He don't have no fun," Carlson insisted. "And he stinks to beat hell. Tell you what. I'll shoot him for you. Then it won't be you what does it."

Candy threw his legs off his bunk. He scratched the white stubble whiskers on his cheek nervously. "I'm so used to him," he said softly. "I had him from a pup."

"Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive," said Carlson. "Look, Slim's bitch got a litter right now. I bet Slim would give you one of them pups to raise up, wouldn't you, Slim?"

The skinner had been studying the old dog with his calm eyes. "Yeah," he said. "You can have a pup if you want to." He seemed to shake himself free for speech. "Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I get old an' a cripple."

Candy looked helplessly at him, for Slim's opinions were law. "Maybe it'd hurt him," he suggested. "I don't mind takin' care of him."

Carlson said: "The way I'd shoot him, he wouldn't feel nothing. I'd put the gun right there." He pointed with his toe. "Right back of the head. He wouldn't even quiver."

At last Carlson said: "If you want me to, I'll put the old devil out of his misery right now and get it over with. Ain't nothing left for him. Can't eat, can't see, can't even walk without hurtin'."

Candy said hopefully: "You ain't got no gun."

"The hell I ain't. Got a Luger. It won't hurt him none at all."

Candy said: "Maybe tomorra. Le's wait till tomorra."

"I don't see no reason for it," said Carlson. He went to his bunk, pulled his bag from underneath it, and took out a Luger pistol. "Let's get it over with," he said. "We can't sleep with him stinkin' around in here." He put the pistol in his hip pocket.

Candy looked a long time at Slim to try to find some reversal. And Slim gave him none. At last Candy said softly and hopelessly: "Awright—take 'im." He did not look down at the dog at all. He lay back on his bunk and crossed his arms behind his head and stared at the ceiling.

> From his pocket Carlson took a little leather thong. He stooped over and tied it around the dog's neck. All the men except Candy watched him.
> "Come, boy. Come on, boy," he said gently. And he said apologetically to Candy: "He won't even feel it," Candy did not move nor answer him. He twitched the thong. "Come on, boy." The old dog got slowly and stiffly to his feet and followed the gently-pulling leash."

Carlson takes the dog out to shoot him, and the old man lies on his back looking at the ceiling, and after an agonizingly long time, a shot is heard in the distance. With this, Candy rolls over in his bunk and faces the wall.

We see how much this stinky, old dog means to this man. The dog and the old man are clones of Lennie and George.

How do I know that I'm not reading all of this into the story? One way to know is the repetition of the armature. It is dramatized over and over again. The scene where they shoot the old man's dog is a well-written scene, but what makes it great is that it nails home the armature using emotion to do so.

Another way the point is nailed home is in the scene wherein George has gone to town with some of the other ranch hands, leaving Lennie alone. Lennie stumbles on Crooks, the black stable hand, in his shed next to the barn. Crooks is not allowed in the bunkhouse because he is black, and as a result is lonesome. During their exchange Crooks says this to Lennie:

> Crooks said gently: "Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's goin' to come back. S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunk-house and play rummy 'cause you was black. How'd you like that? S'pose you had to sit out here an' read books. Sure you could play horseshoes till it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody—to be near him." He whined: "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make

> no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. I tell ya," he cried, "I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick."

As you can see, the armature is stated. I read or see stories all the time in which characters say wise things and the audience nods knowingly, but it means nothing if the structural elements of the story don't back it up. Every decision one makes when constructing a story must contribute in some way to the armature, or why is it there? Steinbeck makes good use of clones in this story. And if you doubt for a minute the old man's dog isn't a clone for Lennie, at one point Crooks speculates about Lennie without George: "Want me ta tell ya what'll happen? They'll take ya to the booby hatch. They'll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog."

Steinbeck was a master at the use of invisible ink. He understood how secondary characters could help solidify his armature and dramatize his point. One of the ironies of invisible ink is just how blatant one can be when applying it. The audience will never see it unless they have been trained to see the footprints in the grass.

Another master of invisible ink was storyteller Paddy Chayefsky. He used clones with deft skill in his teleplay and movie *Marty*.

Marty was a television play written in the 1950s. It made such a huge impact that the network was deluged with letters asking that it be performed again. This was in the days of live television, and there were no such things as reruns. Not only was it performed again, but also it was made into a film that won the Best Picture Oscar™.

Marty is about an Italian-American man who can't seem to get a date. He is considered ugly, and in his world he is also considered the male equivalent of an old maid. He lives with his mother, who pesters him to get married. These elements are the conflict in the piece. So, at the fulcrum of the story, Marty finds a woman who likes him. Problem solved. This is what both Marty and his mother have wanted. But here's the thing about drama; lack of conflict kills it. So where does the conflict come in now? Marty's mother has a clone, her sister. So what Chayefsky does now is brilliant. After Marty meets his girlfriend, and it looks like things are going well, Chayefsky cuts to this scene:

Then the mother addresses herself to Aunt Catherine.

MOTHER
We gotta post card from my son, Nickie, and his bride this morning. They're in Florida inna big hotel. Everything is very nice.

AUNT
That's nice.

MOTHER
Catherine, I want you come live with me in my house with Marty and me. In my house, you have your own room. You don't have to sleep onna couch inna living room like here.

The aunt looks slowly and directly at the mother.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Catherine, your son is married. He got his own home. Leave him in peace. He wants to be alone with his wife. They don't want no old lady sitting inna balcony. Come and live with me. We will cook in the kitchen and talk like when we were girls. You are dear to me, and you are dear to Marty. We are pleased for you to come.

AUNT

Did they come to see you?

MOTHER

Yes.

AUNT

Did my son Thomas come with her?

MOTHER

Your son Thomas was there.

AUNT

Did he also say he wishes to cast his mother from his house?

MOTHER

Catherine, don't make an opera outta this. The three-a you anna baby live in three skinny rooms. You are an old goat, and she has an Italian temper. She is a good girl, but you drive her crazy. Leave them alone. They have their own life.

The old aunt turns her head slowly and looks her sister square in the face. Then she rises slowly from her chair.

AUNT

[Coldly] Get outta here. This is my son's house. This is where I live. I am not to be cast out inna street like a newspaper.

The mother likewise rises. The two old women face each other directly.

MOTHER

Catherine, you are very dear to me. We have cried many times together. When my husband died, I would have gone insane if it were not for you. I ask you to come to my house because I can make you happy. Please come to my house.

The two sisters regard each other. Then Aunt Catherine sits again in her oaken chair, and the mother returns to her seat. The hardened muscles in the old aunt's face suddenly slacken, and she turns to her sister.

AUNT

Theresa, what shall become of me?

MOTHER

Catherine.

AUNT

It's gonna happen to you. Mark it well. These terrible years. I'm afraida look inna mirror. I'm afraid I'm gonna see an old lady with white hair, like the old ladies inna park, little bundles inna black shawl, waiting for the coffin. I'm fifty-six years old. What am I to do with myself? I have strength in my hands. I wanna cook. I wanna clean. I wanna make dinner for my children. I wanna be of use

AUNT (CONT)
to somebody. Am I an old dog to lie in fronta the fire till my eyes close. These are terrible years, Theresa. Terrible years!

MOTHER
Catherine, my sister…

The old aunt stares, distraught, at the mother.

AUNT
It's gonna happen to you! It's gonna happen to you! What will you do if Marty gets married! What will you cook?! What happen to alla children tumbling in alla rooms?! Where is the noise?! It is a curse to be a widow. A curse! What will you do if Marty gets married?! What will you do?!

She stares at the mother—her deep, gaunt eyes haggard and pained. The mother stares back for a moment, then her own eyes close. The aunt has hit home. The aunt sinks back onto her chair, sitting stiffly, her arms on the thick armrests. The mother sits hunched a little forward, her hands nervously folded in her lap.

AUNT
[Quietly] I will put my clothes inna bag and I will come to you tomorrow.

The camera slowly dollies back from the two somber sisters.

[SLOW FADE-OUT.]

This starts to worry Marty's mother and she changes her attitude about his getting married. It's very skillfully done and keeps the conflict, and therefore the interest, going.

Understand that not all stories use clones, but they are useful tools to put in your storyteller's toolbox. A storyteller should know why every character in their story exists. They should not be there just to "flesh out the world," as I often hear my students say.

In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Jimmy Stewart plays a man with a broken leg who doesn't want to marry his girlfriend, Grace Kelly.

Jimmy plays a photojournalist who lives a life of high adventure. In fact, he broke his leg while shooting a racecar accident. The reason he doesn't want to marry his fashion designer girlfriend is that he feels she doesn't have enough backbone. He feels they would be incompatible in a happily-ever-after situation.

Jimmy is confined to a wheelchair and so he passes the time by looking out his window and spying on his neighbors. The thing is, all of the neighbors are clones. They are all in various stages of romantic relationships. There is a honeymoon couple, an older childless couple, a sexy woman who has men fawning over her, a woman who can't get a date, and a couple that is always arguing—each one a distorted clone of Jimmy and Grace.

By the way, Jimmy changes his mind about Grace when he believes that one of his neighbors has murdered his wife and he sees just how much backbone she has as she throws herself into the adventure.

To the untrained eye, clone characters appear to be nothing more than secondary characters populating the story's world. But in the hands of a skillful storyteller, they are the invisible ink that helps illuminate the story's point.