



*story***bold**  
CRAFT YOUR STORY

*unlock the emotional  
texture of a scene!*

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# *story***bold**

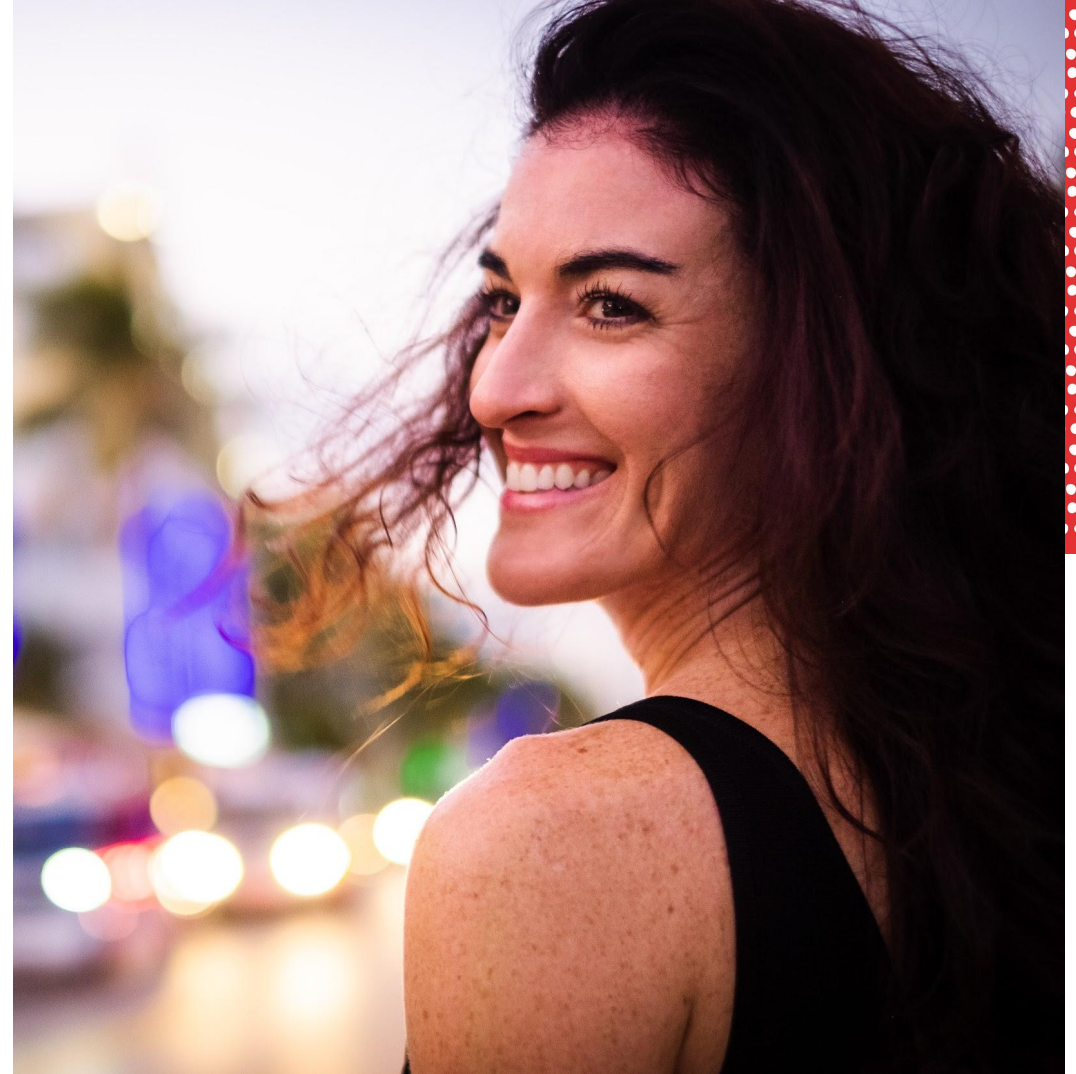
CRAFT YOUR STORY

## *my coaching*

community experience  
one-on-one coaching  
self-study course  
live @5pm EST on Instagram

## *forthcoming*

workbooks for writers  
another self-study course





# *official call-to-action*

1. try a new approach that may not be familiar to you
2. remember that we are usually not writing with as much emotional texture as we think we are
3. get excited about what's to come





## *what's on tap*

1. a quick note on when my approach will best serve you
2. an overview on how emotions work inside stories
3. anatomy of a scene
4. three-step strategy for unlocking your story's emotions
  - a. without "taking them on" and getting swallowed whole
5. how to apply your insights to writing a new scene or enhancing an existing one



## *when will this strategy best serve you?*

1. when you have at least some baseline information about your main character
  - a. past experiences before start of the story
  - b. goals, desires, values, beliefs, motives
2. when you have these parts of your plot identified
  - a. MC's goal
  - b. roadblock standing in the way
  - c. actions the MC takes to achieve the goal
  - d. result of those actions
3. when you have given some thought to the individual moments along the MC's journey
4. when you have drafted some of those moments
5. when you are starting to think of the drafts of these moments as scenes





# *overview on emotions in storytelling*

## **What we want:**

1. to write scenes, chapters, and whole books that connect emotionally with readers
2. to elicit a guttural, visceral response from readers:
  - a. laugh out loud
  - b. cry buckets of tears
  - c. want what the character wants
  - d. feel love, hate, anger, and more on behalf of the character
3. for readers to sit on the edge of their seats to find out what happens
4. for readers to root for the main character, from a deep sense of empathy, justice, concern, etc.





# *overview on emotions in storytelling*

## **What makes all that a challenge:**

1. When we first start a project and are still writing the functional version of a scene:
  - a. “First the character did this. Second he did this ...” and so forth
2. We tell rather than show
  - a. labeling emotions
  - b. instead of showing the effects of the emotion
3. We don’t provide readers with the “in real time,” “here and now” experience of the character
  - a. and instead simply summarize what happened
  - b. and then explain / analyze what it means from the author’s standpoint
4. We hold ourselves back from feeling the emotions ourselves
  - a. we may not be aware that we’re doing this
  - b. we may THINK we’re actually providing an emotionally rich experience





# *overview on emotions in storytelling*

## **The result of everything I just listed:**

1. Staying unaware:
  - a. Watered down scenes
  - b. Emotionally shallow storytelling
  - c. Emotionally stunted storytelling
  - d. Holding readers at arm's length
2. Becoming aware:
  - a. Slapdash attempts to add emotions
  - b. A bunch of exclamation points
  - c. Gratuitous shock value that has little to do with the story's themes
  - d. Over-the-top behaviors of the character that don't stem from who the character is





# *overview on emotions in storytelling*

## **What we need to do going forward:**

1. Clarify the emotional journey of the whole story, start to finish
2. Unlock the emotions that already exist in every scene
3. Let readers experience the emotions as the character experiences them
4. Use the strategy I'm about to lead us through
5. Remember that every scene needs emotional texture even if the emotions the character feels are not all that intense
  - a. Every scene can't be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth
  - b. Even everyday moments in the life of the character can and should make an emotional impact on readers



# *what is a scene, exactly, and what does one do inside a story?*

1. one single moment in the life of the character
2. identifiable down to a single day, a single hour, an entrance or exit, a single effort on the part of the character, or a single idea / theme
3. chapters are made up of several scenes, in many cases.
4. the story is made up of many scenes that chart the progress of the main character along the journey as a whole
5. each scene reveals new things about:
  - a. who the character is
  - b. how the character responds to the world
  - c. the actions your character takes toward a goal
  - d. progress toward reaching the overall goal





# *the anatomy of a riveting scene*

1. character has a goal specific to the moment
2. this goal relates to what the character is after throughout the story as a whole
3. there is something or someone in this specific scene that is making it difficult for the character
4. the character attempts to succeed any number of times, as the roadblock persists AND even magnifies
  - a. what are those attempts? specify them.
5. before the scene is over, there is a result of the character's efforts: either some version of success or some version of failure, or both
  - a. specify the result to the moment
6. there is also a sense as to how much closer or further from the overall goal the character is





# *step 1: clarity and planning*

- Pick out a scene from your writing project:
  - What is the character trying to do here?
  - What stands in the way?
- Identify your character's emotions in this one scene:
  - a primary emotion (such as rage)
  - any secondary emotions wrapped up in or undergirding the primary one (such as shock mixed in with rage)
  - emotions the character is aware of (such as excitement about a goal)
  - emotions the character is not aware of (such as feeling inadequate and using the goal as a way to feel worthy)





# *step 1: clarity and planning*

- Identify how the character's emotions might shift within the scene, as a result of what happens. For example:
  - Excitement turning into disappointment
  - Annoyance turning into hostility or contempt
- Connect the emotions of the one scene to story as a whole
  - What emotional journey does the character go on? (like self-loathing to self-acceptance and everything in between)
  - Where does the one scene you picked out fit into this?





## *step 2: sensory details*

- How do the emotions you just identified show up in and on the body, involuntarily for the character? For example:
  - Tension in the face, shoulders, stomach
  - Movement of the hands
  - Shaking the foot under the table
  - Pacing the room
  - Needing to fiddle with something
  - Heart racing or hyperventilating
- How does the character attempt to control his/her physical movement? For example:
  - Not letting face reveal an expression
  - Taking deep breaths
  - Trying to meditate or pray
  - Screaming into a pillow
  - Staring into space and tuning out
- How does the character perceive sensory details when in an emotional state?
  - Hearing only one sound and blocking out everything else
  - NOT perceiving how hot or cold the temperature is
  - NOT feeling hunger or thirst, even though the character hasn't consumed anything in a while -- perhaps refuses others' offers of food





## *step 3: voice*

- How do these emotions determine how your character speaks to other characters? For example:
  - Subtle shifts in tone, diction, cadence
  - Monosyllabic answers
  - Silence
  - Sighs and heavy breathing
  - Pausing before answering a question
- How do these emotions determine your character's thought structure? Examples:
  - Mind chatter
    - Going over prior conversations and thinking of what he "should have" said to win an argument
    - Over-analyzing text messages, "Why hasn't he messaged back? It must mean ..."
  - Self-limiting beliefs (usually rote and repetitive)
    - "It'll never work."
    - "Who am I kidding?"
    - "God, I'm such an idiot."
    - "Why did I do that?"
  - Repeating thoughts when something bad / good happens.
    - "Oh no, oh no, oh no." or "Yes, yes. This is great."
    - "I can't believe it. I can't believe it."

\*\*Usually, rational, grammatical sentences will go out the window when emotions are heightened. It's not until AFTER THE FACT that humans can make sense of things and reconnect to their language faculties.



*apply 1 or 2 new  
insights to a scene*





*for every scene you  
write, take a  
moment to plan ...*

1. What I learned about the scene's emotional potential is: \_\_\_\_ (1 or 2 new insights).
2. Here is how I will show these emotions in my chosen scene: \_\_\_\_.
3. In this one scene, the character is trying to: \_\_\_\_ (goal specific to the moment).
4. In this one scene, the roadblock in the way is: \_\_\_\_.
5. In this one scene, the character will try to overcome the roadblock and achieve the goal by \_\_\_\_.
6. The result of the character's action is: \_\_\_\_.
7. From start to finish, the character will feel \_\_\_\_.





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