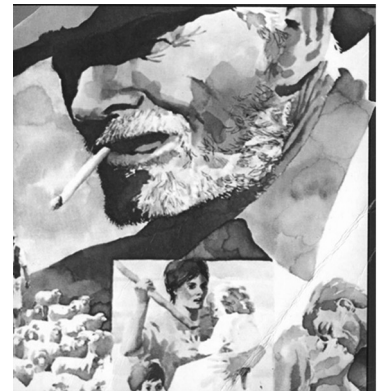


Story Model 1:

“The Drover’s Wife” by Henry Lawson



This is a shortened version.

No. 1: a third person omniscient narrator.

No. 2: an immediate and direct style that places readers right in the middle of the family’s daily struggles. Note the sparse descriptions of the home and the bush.

No. 3. Story-telling thread: The encounter with the snake frames the story. The snake, which is potentially life-threatening is a menace to the family.

No. 5: note the descriptions of the bush: it is “all around” foreshadowing the wife’s state of mind. Writing style: notice the string of negatives to build a picture of absence and loneliness.

No. 4: The drover’s wife and Tommy are captured in a stressful situation. In the absence of the father, Tommy tries to step into his shoes.

No. 6: Tommy and his mother discuss the snake. Tommy’s anxious calls generate interest. The mother’s tone of voice reflects her anxiety and provides a degree of urgency.

Notice the pertinent description — Tommy is “carrying a stick bigger than himself” — which explains a lot about Tommy. (This is also a symbol of the son trying to walk in the father’s shoes; No. 8)

The beginning

The two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy-bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, veranda included.

Bush all around – bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation – a shanty on the main road.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.

Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: “Snake! Mother, here’s a snake!”

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

“Where is it?”

“Here! Gone in the wood-heap;” yells the eldest boy – a sharp-faced urchin of eleven. “Stop there, mother! I’ll have him. Stand back! I’ll have the beggar!”

“Tommy, come here, or you’ll be bit. Come here at once when I tell you, you little wretch!”

The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells, triumphantly:

“There it goes – under the house!” and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and rushes after that snake.

He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment the boy’s club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The middle

No. 3: plot development: incrementally, Lawson reveals the dangers of the bush: a “little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died.” She is also alone.

Lawson includes a series of flashbacks that help readers imagine the wife’s difficult lifestyle and her triumph over adversity.

No. 4: The setting/weather is symbolic; the thunderstorm foreshadows more trouble for the wife.

No. 4: The wife’s nerves have been unusually rattled. Notice how Lawson rounds out details of the wife’s character by hinting at changes over time -- with remarkable sparcity. He includes scant references to her husband.

No. 7: Tension and suspense. There is not only a lot of action, but through the examples, the wife accumulates depth; we learn about the constant challenges she faces in the bush.

Each example provides a similar story to the snake — ingenuity in the face of hardships.

It is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, And Jacky protests drowsily.

Near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and, whenever she hears a noise, she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

He was a drover, and started squatting here when they were married. The drought of 18— ruined him ...

She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies’ Journal*, and, Heaven help her! takes a pleasure in the fashion-plates.

Her husband is an Australian, and so is she. He is careless, but a good enough husband. If he had the means he would take her to the city and keep her there like a princess. They are used to being apart, or at least she is. ‘No use fretting,’ she says ...

One of the children died while she was here alone. She rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.

It must be near one or two o’clock. The fire is burning low. Alligator lies with his head resting on his paws, and watches the wall ... Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks. She thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think about.

She thinks how she fought a flood during her husband’s absence.

She also fought the pleuro-pneumonia – dosed and bled the few remaining cattle, and wept again when her two best cows died.

Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide.

She also fights the crows and eagles that have designs on her chickens. Her plan of campaign is very original. The children cry “Crows, mother!” and she rushes out and aims a broomstick at the birds as though it were a gun, and says “Bung!” The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman’s cunning is greater ...

The end

How is the tension resolved or negotiated?

What is revealed and what is left hanging?

What is ironic or unexpected?



No. 3: Plot development

Tommy sees the tears in his mother's eyes and makes his poignant comment.

His spontaneous display of emotion — “throwing his arms round her neck” — reveals a lot about Tommy, which is reinforced by his dialogue. It also shows his simple, but possibly conflicted emotions.

His heart lies with his mother, but the reader must consider whether he, too, will be forced to leave, just as his father was, and will this affect his relationship?

No. 3: Ending: Lawson leaves the reader with space to think and to come to their own conclusions.

The reader has good reasons to doubt whether Tommy will eventually stay, despite his best intentions.

Reference: *Henry Lawson: Best Stories*, edited by Cecil Mann, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1996.

The dog lies still, and the woman sits as one fascinated. The snake comes out a foot further. She lifts her stick, and the reptile, as though suddenly aware of danger, sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him. Alligator springs, and his jaws come together with a snap. He misses, for his nose is large, and the snake's body close down on the angle formed by the slabs and the floor. He snaps again as the tail comes round. He has the snake now, and tugs it out eighteen inches. Thud, thud. Alligator gives another pull and he has the snake out — a black brute, five feet long. The head rises to dart about, but the dog has the enemy close to the neck. He is a big, heavy dog, but quick as a terrier. He shakes the snake as though he felt the original curse in common with mankind. The eldest boy wakes up, seizes his stick, and tries to get out of bed, but his mother forces him back with a grip of iron. Thud, thud — the snake's back is broken in several places. Thud, thud — its head is crushed, and Alligator's nose skinned again.

She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood and watches the snake burn. The boy and the dog watch too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms around her neck exclaims:

“Mother, I won't never go drovin'; blarst me if I do!”

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over bush.

A story-telling plan

The beginning

"I think the first thing you've got to do is grab the reader by the ear and make him sit down and listen" says John le Carre.

"Storytellers constantly have to choose between showing, telling and ignoring." (Orson Scott Card)

- ◆ Your beginning must set the mood. It establishes the "voice" and the tone of your story. It also provides a framework for your insights/message.
- ◆ When a character first appears have them doing something typical or set them in right in the middle of the action. Expose their "typical" character traits.
- ◆ Include some dialogue to convey the interaction between key characters. Make it clear who is talking to whom and about what.
- ◆ Introduce a problem or recount an event or experience. Don't explain everything. Withholding details can help to maintain suspense.
- ◆ Experiment with different beginnings. Your beginning must be easy to follow, clear, engaging and immediate.

The middle

"Plot is built of significant events in a given story - significant because they have important consequences." (Ansen Dibell)

"If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one eighth of it being above water." (Ernest Hemingway)

- ◆ Drive the plot forward through the struggles of your main character(s). Include an opponent/antagonist who obstructs their wishes/desires. Ask, "who wants what and why can't they get it"?
- ◆ Develop your character through flashbacks, reflections and recounts. These must show different aspects of your character's consciousness.
- ◆ Keep the description to a minimum so that you can maintain pace and interest.
- ◆ Build your story towards a climax which provides the ultimate test of character.
- ◆ Leave gaps in the narrative. Include questions which are avoided or unanswered. Raise doubts and suspicions in reader's minds about the character's behaviour or actions.
- ◆ Depending upon the main "voice", you may consider ways of embedding a different perspective (an extract from a poem, a diary or a novel).

The end

"There are no makeovers in my books. The ugly duckling does not become a beautiful swan. She becomes a confident duck able to take charge of her own life and problems." (Maeve Binchy)

- ◆ Resolve the problem exposed at the beginning — revealing something unexpected. Often one problem is resolved but it hints at another.
- ◆ Point to a deeper message or something the character has learned - perhaps conveyed through a (moral) spokesperson or a well-known quote.
- ◆ Leave the reader with space to reflect and to come to their own conclusion.