

## The Proper Ending

By Azalea Dabill

The end of your story should come at its natural point; no earlier, and no later. Story threads should be wrapped up by the end, or most of them; some threads you may leave loose for a sequel or series, and not all questions are always answered. Above all, your ending needs to satisfy the expectations aroused throughout the story. If your ending flows out of changed people, fascinating places, and the conflicts in your story, you need have no fear.

What your main character discovered, (or did not), what was gained, (or lost), and what the character's new world looks like must be told in a good ending. Making a satisfying ending will take work, digging deeper into your characters' reactions to each other and to the climax. Toss different possibilities around in your mind.

In *Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Brian Stableford says,

Happy endings always seem less artificial if they are slightly qualified. Your upbeat conclusion will seem less formulaic – and hence more personal as well as more profound – if you take care to stress that it has not been won without cost, and might still be infected by some fatal flaw. . . . Although some editors would not agree with me, I believe that the best way to end a story is to extrapolate the sequence of events to its most fitting conclusion, and then to pay careful attention to both its upbeat *and* its downbeat qualities. If you want to insult the intelligence of your readers it is better to do it with a carrot than a stick, but it is best not to do it at all.

Sound advice. And don't worry about the end until you get there. It tends to grow and change organically out of the story you write. A basic outline, a direction for your writing, is necessary, but a detailed obsessive-compulsive blueprint stifles your creativity and freedom of expression. Robert Olen Butler says in *From Where You Dream*,

. . . by *thrumming* to the work of art. Like the string of a stringed instrument, you vibrate inside, a harmonic is set up. So to edit your work, you go back and thrum to it. And you go *thrum, thrum, thrum, twang!* And when you go *twang!* as a reader, mark that passage. And you thrum on and twang on and thrum and twang and thrum and twang. Then you go back to the twangs and instead of looking at the twangy spots and analyzing them in lit-crit ways, instead of consciously and willfully applying what you understand about craft and techniques, you *redream* those passages. Rewriting is redreaming. Rewriting is redreaming til it all thrums. . . . The compost heap of the novelist, that repository that exists apart from literal memory, apart from the conscious mind, is mostly made up of direct, sensual life experience. But it is also the proper place for all the fiction craft and technique that you properly and necessarily consciously learned. It is also the proper place for all the wonderful fiction you've read. All of these things must first be forgotten—at least while you are in your creative trance—before they can be authentically engaged in the creation of a work. . . .

For me, a good ending leaves a strong sense of hope: a clearer picture of ourselves and our world, and a truer picture of God.

The end should be specific to the story. One ending cannot wrap up all pictures of life, but it can capture your particular series in one snapshot that pulls them together and holds the whole in unity, beauty, and brave hope. Write the kind of ending you enjoy. Here is C.S. Lewis' ending from *The Last Battle*.

And soon they found themselves all walking together—and a great, bright procession it was—up towards mountains higher than you could see in this world even if they were there to be seen. But there was no snow on those mountains: there were forests and green slopes and sweet orchards and flashing waterfalls, one above the other, going up for ever. And the land they were walking on grew narrower all the time, with a deep valley on each side: and across that valley the land which was the real England grew nearer and nearer.

The light ahead was growing stronger. Lucy saw that a great series of many-coloured cliffs led up in front of them like a giant's staircase. And then she forgot everything else, because Aslan himself was coming, leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty.

And the very first person whom Aslan called to him was Puzzle the Donkey. You never saw a donkey look feebler and sillier than Puzzle did as he walked up to Aslan; and he looked, beside Aslan, as small as a kitten looks beside a St. Bernard. The Lion bowed down his head and whispered something to Puzzle at which his long ears went down; but then he said something else at which the ears perked up again. The humans couldn't hear what he had said either time. Then Aslan turned to them and said:

“You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.”

Lucy said, “We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.”

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

“There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

*Note: He's good. By this I mean C. S. Lewis is a great writer, that now he is perfectly good, and that Aslan is good. And in view of Him, that this is a good day to begin being good on, to be washed in His goodness. In writing and in life.*

*In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.*