

Hooks and Transitions



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Hooks and transitions turn your story in new directions. Hooks often provide an unexpected change. Transitions smooth the way into the next idea you want to develop. Consider the following:

“We’ve loved having you, girls, but Pansy has homework, and you do, too.” Grandma Pearl began to clear leftover snacks from the round kitchen table, her hair a white halo in the yellowish light.

Seven-year-old Pansy stayed in the thick of her friends as they all pitched in. Their happiness over shared chocolate chip cookies and hot cocoa felt like the warmest coat she’d ever tried on. After Grandma kissed each girl goodbye, Pansy walked the three of them to the front door. Her friends turned to wave at her grandma like they didn’t want to leave.

“Bye, Mrs. Blane.”

Grandma waved back, smiling, as friendly as the lady in the shop where she bought all her dresses.

“Thank you,” said Leah Davis. Her mom reminded her about manners a lot.

“See ya tomorrow at school, Pansy.”

Pansy’s best friend, Katie, grabbed her hand. “It’ll be all right,” Katie whispered, kinda loud.

“Hurry now, Katie,” Grandma Pearl said. “The other girls will leave you behind.”

Pansy tried to let her friend go. She couldn’t help holding on to Katie’s sleeve until the other girl had to yank to get outside.

“Pansy, baby, we’re heating all outdoors.”

Pansy shut the door and turned. Grandma was already headed for the pantry door. They didn’t use it as a pantry now. Back when Pansy first came to live with her grandmother, cans of food had been stacked on the shelves, and a big old bottle of oil stood on the floor.

She still smelled oil sometimes.

“I told you I wanted the girls to go home at four.” Grandma opened the pantry door and looked at her watch. Pansy stared at the thin towel wadded into a lump beneath the lowest shelf. “Four o’clock was an hour and a half ago, Pansy.”

Keeping her mouth shut, Pansy marched into the pantry. Grandma shut the door. She hadn’t noticed yet that light got through the thin crack between the

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door and the floor. Pansy stared at the light while she carefully smoothed every wrinkle out of the towel and then laid down on it.

She curled into a ball. Grandma would be back, but if Pansy was really small the hitting didn't hurt as much.

In the first paragraph, Grandma Pearl starts the action with an immediate transition--clearing the table. The girls help her, continuing the story's action into the second paragraph, the stage where Pansy's friends all start home, reluctant to leave her idyllic grandmother.

The story's next phase starts with a hook. When Katie grabs Pansy's hand, you start to sense something's wrong. The oil provides a transition between normal life and Pansy's world. The final hook--Pansy tries to make herself small, and the reader dreads Grandma's coming back.

Use transitions to develop character movement as well as passage of time and story tone. Use hooks to make the reader curious about what happens next.

Anna Adams most recent release was *Maggie's Guardian*, a September 2002 Harlequin Superromance. She's currently working on a trilogy for Superromance, *The Calvert Cousins*. Look for the first cousin in *The Secret Father*, out in September 2003.