

# Story Turns

John Brown

# Movie Time



# Story Turns . . .

- Grab our interest
- Make us want to turn the page
- Control pace

# Laffy Taffy

**Q: What do you call a cow with no legs**

A: Ground beef.

**Q: Why was the tomato blushing?**

A: Because she saw the salad dressing!

# Story Turns Are . . .

**Changes** that raise, in the reader, a **question** or an **anticipation** that something dramatic is about to occur.

# Dramatic

- Extraordinary
- Novel
- Surprising
- Dangerous
- Humorous
- Devastating
- Wonderful
- Full of conflict
- Romantic
- Tender
- Horrific
- Puzzling
- Revelatory
- Juicy, tantalizing

# Readers Want to Witness

Story Turns:

- **Raise** a question or anticipation
- **Extend** one
- or **Satisfy** one

# Readers Want to Puzzle and Worry

Extending turns  
make readers **UNCERTAIN**  
about outcomes or answers



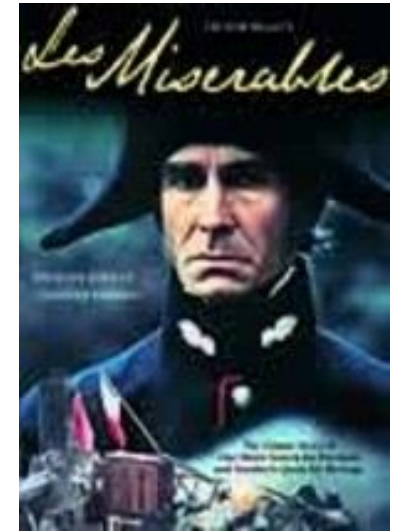
# It starts with a THOM

**T**hreat

**H**ardship

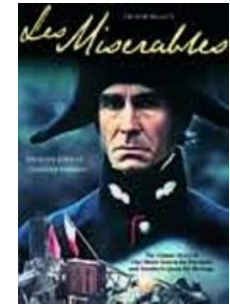
**O**ppportunity

**M**ystery



# Then?

- **Concrete Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
  - Often surprise

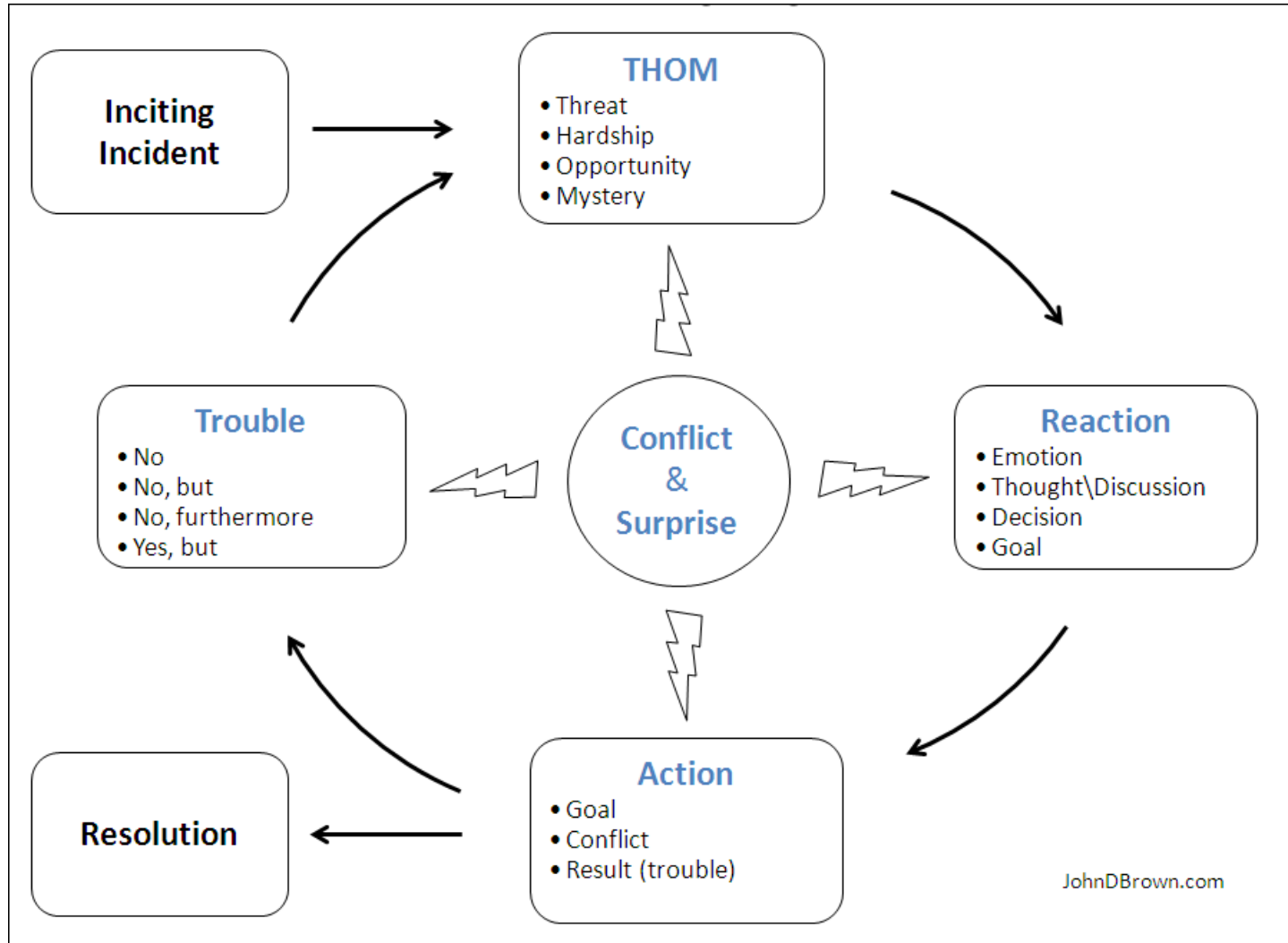


He roams between the lies.

THE **MENTALIST**



# The Story Cycle



# Example: The Guy with the Car . . .

- **THOM** (Threat, Hardship, Opportunity, or Mystery)
- **Concrete Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
  - Often surprise

# Good News, Bad News



# Good News, Bad News



# Always back and forth?

## Guy with car

- – Car rolls away with keys
- – Can't catch
- + Bike
- + Catches
- – Turn sign
- + Gets in
- – Steering wheel locks

# Example: *Hunger Games* . . .

- **THOM** (Threat, Hardship, Opportunity, or Mystery)
- **Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
  - Often surprise



# Example: *The Good Guy* . . .

- **THOM** (Threat, Hardship, Opportunity, or Mystery)
- **Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
  - Often surprise

# Example: *Pride & Prejudice* . . .

- **THOM** (Threat, Hardship, Opportunity, or Mystery)
- **Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
  - Often surprise

## **Example: *Pride & Prejudice* . . .**

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

# Example: *The Mentalist* . . .

- **THOM** (Threat, Hardship, Opportunity, or Mystery)
- **Goal**
- **Action**
- **Turns**
  - Change the situation
  - Affect progress, or
  - Raise a question, or
  - Make us anticipate
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# Keep In Mind

## Two Special Turns

The Beginning and Ending

For all questions and anticipations

## Scene and Structure Level

## Turns drive Pacing

NOT short sentences & paragraphs

## Surprise

**You think you know what's ahead. . .**



**Take the path less traveled . . .**



# Our Scenario?

## Ana Carrillo

- Mid-twenties
- Deputy Sheriff who loves bowling
- Single mom one daughter

## Ideas

- Bowling ball as weapon
- Undercover on him
- Drug lord who does Lord of the Flames, boots, bear chest and all



## Jack Straw

- Florist



# Question: What kind of story is it?

What's the main problem that needs to be solved?

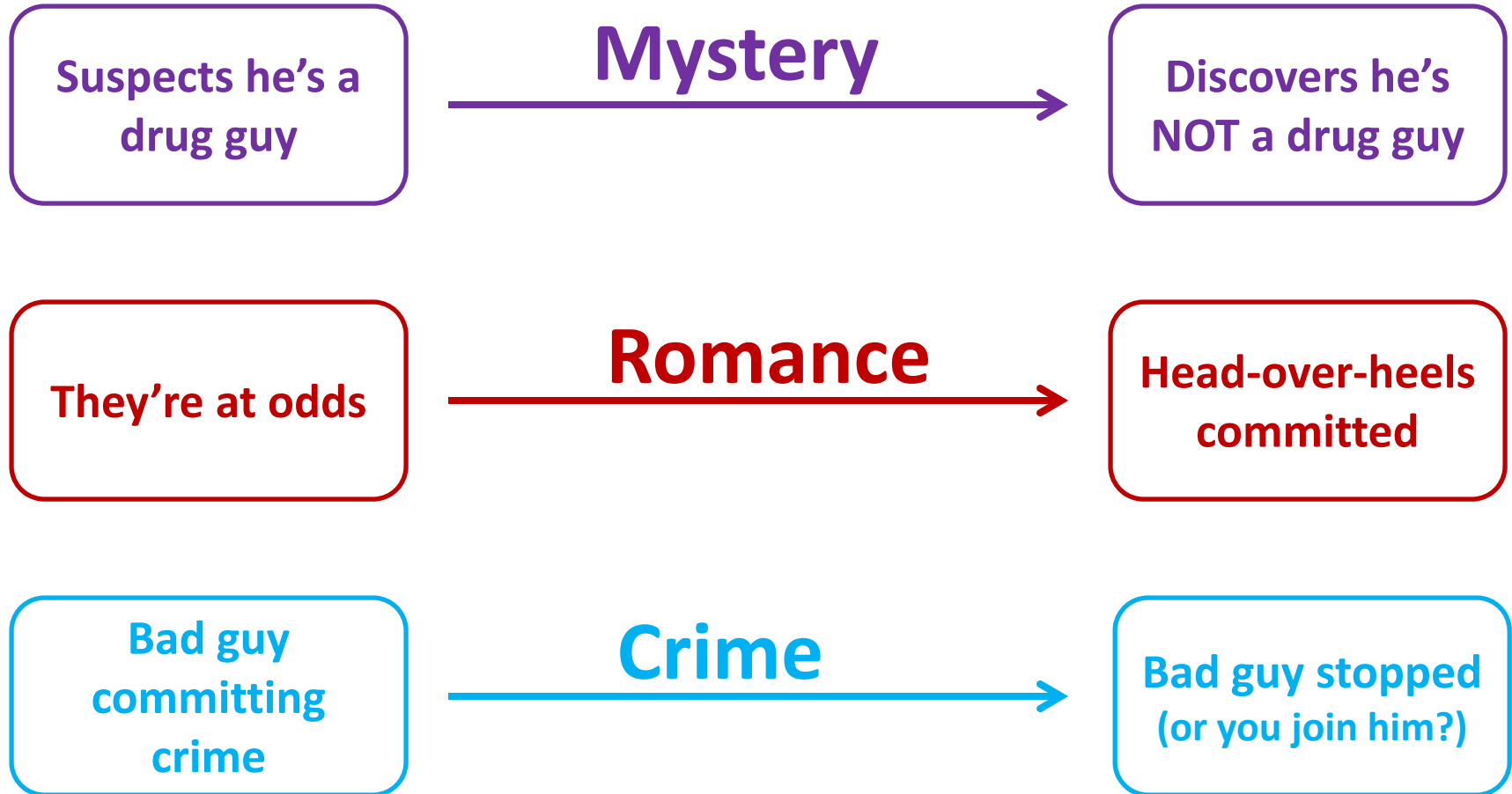
What's our main question?

What's our main anticipation?

What's the main THOM?

- **Mystery?**
- **Romance?**
- **Crime?**
- **Other?**
- **Multiple story lines?**

# Question: What is the End and Beginning State?



# Tool 1: Progression Pattern

Different Story Types → Different Patterns



# 5 Types of Turns

1. Present THOM
2. Progress and Setback
3. Troubles and Help
4. Locked On
5. Mystery and Insight

# Tool 2: Sample Turns

## 1. PRESENT THOM

## 2. PROGRESS & SETBACK

- Plans go awry, Plans succeed
- A threat is eliminated
- Antagonist foils hero, hero foils antagonist

## 3. TROUBLES & HELP

- Unforeseen obstacle
- Obstacle way worse or different than expected
- Unexpected disadvantage or threat arises
- An unexpected external conflict arises
- A dilemma arises
- A threat we thought was eliminated isn't
- A threat becomes more intense (significant, immediate, probable, or specific)
- A time limit is introduced
- Antag gets info or takes steps that give him advantage
- Characters switch sides
- Unexpected help arrives—for hero or antag
- Hero or antagonist recruits help

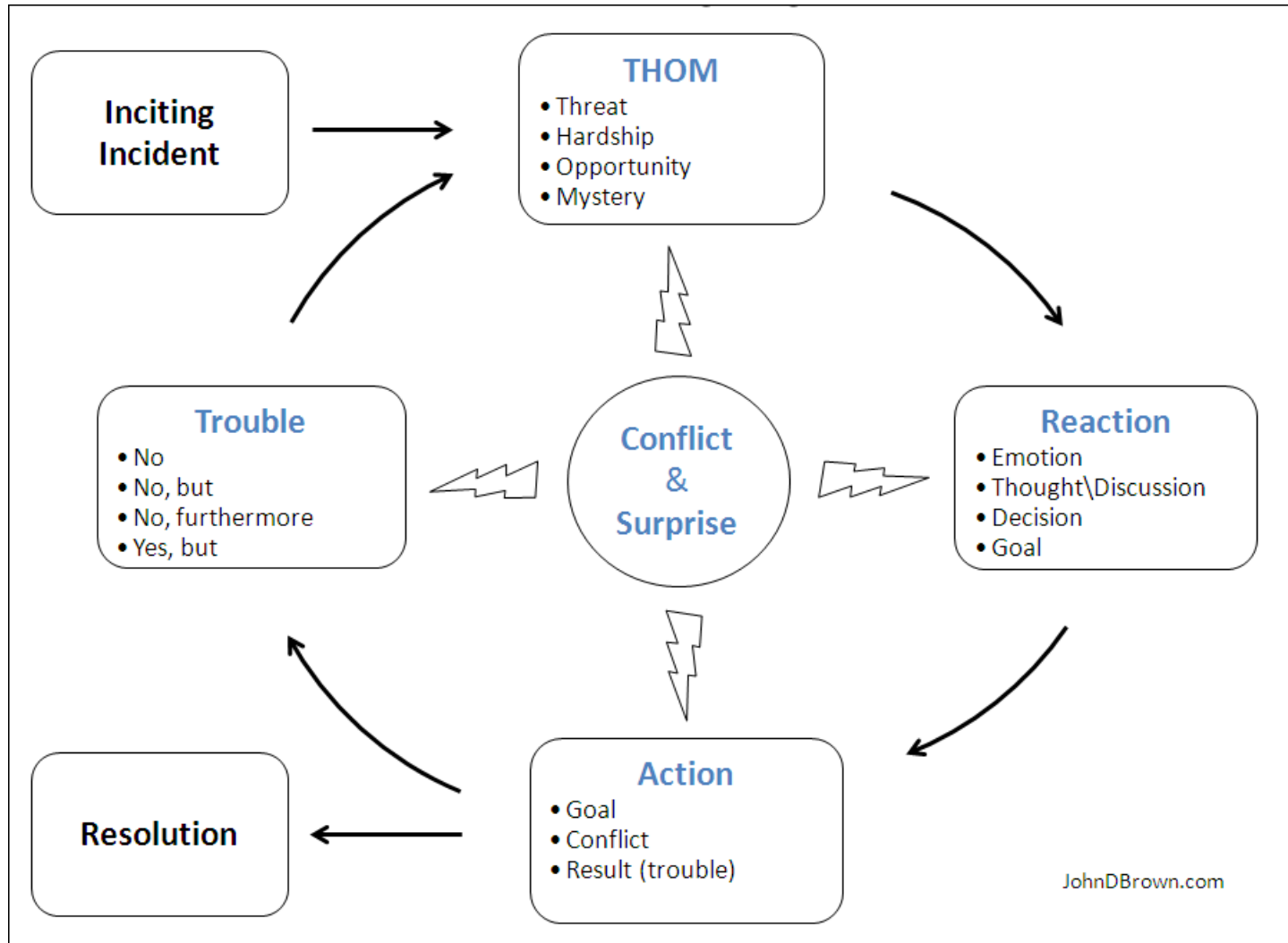
## 4. LOCKED ON

- The hero makes a decision that will propel him into a dramatic event
- An event forces the hero into a dramatic event

## 5. MYSTERY & INSIGHT

- A new question or mystery is posed
- Something odd or puzzling happens
- Someone acts in unexpected way
- Hero finds a clue
- Hero finds that the clue really was nothing
- Hero was wrong
- Answer to question revealed
- A discovery leads to insight
- A discovery complicates the puzzle
- A discovery completely reverses what we thought was going on

# Tool 3: The Story Cycle



# Next Steps

## MAKE YOUR OWN OBSERVATIONS

- Scene
- Chapter
- Book
- Movie
- TV Episode

## READ SOMEONE ELSE'S INSIGHTS

- *The Secrets of Action Screenwriting* by William C. Martell
- *Master Class* at [Ken-Follett.com](http://Ken-Follett.com)
- *Writing and Selling Your Novel* by Jack M. Bickham
- *Scene & Structure* by Jack M. Bickham