

Begin, Again
Examples of two drafts of the same story opening

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Leonard Twitty, Savior of Lost Children

Unpublished version – Draft 5 of 13

“Attention, attention, could we please get your attention, please!” Overhead the voice continued to lull on, as Leonard Twitty scanned the various trays of Chinese food, bubbling in succulent leathery sauces. “Attention Mall of America shoppers, may we please get your attention? Thank you. Do your feet hurt? Need a shoulder rub?” The loud speakers asked these questions –not expecting an answer– but expecting you to take notice. The even unemotional tone, of a middle-aged woman’s voice, directed shoppers to a day spa on the 3rd floor next to Hects. It was a plain, unemotional voice, which sounded out every word, just so you could hear it over the rustle of bags and discussions moving back and forth through the crowds. “We ask for your attention please, would Molly Beets please join her party at the information desk on the second floor next to TGI Fridays, Molly Beets, please join your party at the information desk.” Leonard Twitty pushed his hand through his five-day growth and massaged his scruffy shin, staring at the Beef Cho Mein at Wop Tzu’s take out, while the overhead speakers cackled to an end of the announcement. The saliva oozed into his mouth, triggered by the wafts of the steaming Chinese buffet waiting for him. He shook his head pushing the beef out of his mind and settled on the chicken.

“Yeah, umm, can I get uhh, the Chicken Lo Mein, with an egg roll? They’re good Egg rolls right?” He asked, while he padded his greasy black hair down with his left and stroked his stubbled chin with his right.

“Yes sir, they are yummy,” the Asian girl said, and then in the next breath said something in Vietnamese directed to to her colleague, sitting down next to the desert freezer. Her friend laughed and looked at Leonard, then continued in earnest with Leonard, “Anything to drink?” Not seeing any reaction, the girl shook her head, muttering something under her breath and grabbed a Styrofoam plate. He watched her scoop out a hefty portion of the noodles, baby corn, water chestnuts and beautiful, succulent chicken into his large creamy plate. Finally, when Leonard was twitching in anticipation, she walked back, and carefully (ever so delicately) put the plate atop the metal divider between the two of them and let the register sing.

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He smoothed out his daily allowance on the counter of Wop Zsu's. He pet it twice and then turned over to Honest Abe's nice beard and stern eyes. Leonard Twitty bent down and whispered to him. It was the same conversation he had every day, whether he talked to Honest Abe in front of the Burger King, Sparro's or Kentucky Fried Chicken, it was always the same.

Leonard would always say, "Goodbye Lincoln, you did great things, so I can do great things with my life."

So, he handed over the sweat-laden bill over, his hand shaking slightly and snuck another glance at the little pixy with unicorn earrings that was waiting in line behind him.

"That'll be 4.85, what kind of drink you want, sir?" she said to Leonard, "and sweetie, it's 1.07 total for an egg roll with tax. What drink did you want, sir?" The girl stamped her feet. Leonard smiled at her again, reaching for his duffel bag. She was a cute girl, a cherub, really not like video-private-time-cute but cute.

"I only have a dollar," she whined her rainbow unicorn earrings dangling up and down, catching Leonard's attention.

"Can you fill this up with Coke, no ice, please?" Leonard produced a large plastic red mug out of his duffel bag, the circumference larger than his face.

"Uhh, what is this thing?"

"It's my campaign mug," Leonard said, turning the mug around so that girl behind the counter could see the nametag. It said, HELLO MY NAME IS Twitty for Governor!

"I've talked to your manager about it before," Leonard said, "Please?" The woman sighed and turned away.

The whir of carbonation filled their ears as the steaming meal sat in front of Leonard when he felt a tug on his arm.

"Mister," unicorn girl said, her beautiful lips breaking into a smile full of straight little teeth. He thought he could see a little mole near her nose and thought of tickling, "can I have your change for my egg roll?"