



Revealing Plot and Emotion with Natural Dialogue

T.O. Paine



“Valerie”



Slow is Smooth, and Smooth is Fast





Unnatural Dialogue



Interrupted

Informative

Journalist

Commonplace

Who Did Valerie Become?

History

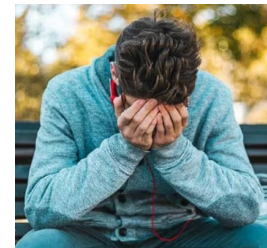
Attitudes

Motivations



History

- Location
 - Then and Now
- Economic
 - Rags or Riches
- Traumatic Events
 - Mental State



Valerie History

- Location
 - Red Oak, Iowa to Miami, Florida
- Economic
 - Her Single Mom Job-to-Job
- Traumatic Event
 - Parents Divorced



Common Character Attitudes



- Somber



- Excited



- Poised



- Sarcastic



- Indifferent

Valerie's Attitude

- Poised
 - Calm
 - Confident
 - Composed





Common Character Motivations



Revenge Power Survival Identity



Intellect

Pride

Obsession

Valerie Motivation

- Survival
 - Resilient
 - Rule-Breaker
 - Resourceful



Paul



- Location
 - Miami, Florida
- Economic
 - Trust-fund Youth
- Traumatic Event
 - Put in Boarding School
- Attitude
 - Sarcastic
- Motivation
 - Power



Cassie



- Location
 - Miami, Florida
- Economic
 - Middle Class Suburban
- Traumatic Event
 - Father Never Loved Her
- Attitude
 - Excited
- Motivation
 - Obsession



Valerie



- Location Now
 - Miami, Florida
- Economic
 - Her Single Mom Job-to-Job
- Traumatic Event
 - Parents Divorced
- Attitude
 - Poised
- Motivation
 - Survival



How Dialogue Drives Plot

Information Reveal

Hidden Motivations

Conflict and Tension



Dialogue Drives Plot

Harding: And, my friend, if you continue to demonstrate such hostile tendencies, such as telling people to go to hell, you get lined up to go to the Shock Shop, perhaps even on to greater things, an operation, an—

McMurphy: “Damn it, Harding, I told you I’m not up on this talk.”

Harding: The Shock Shop, Mr. McMurphy, is jargon for the EST machine, the Electro Shock Therapy. A device that might be said to do the work of the sleeping pill, the electric chair, and the torture rack.

Hidden
Motivations

Conflict and
Tension

Information
Reveal



Dialogue Evokes Emotion



Tone & Word Choice

Pacing and
Interruptions

Subtext

Emotion

Hannibal Lecter: You still wake up sometimes, don't you? You wake up in the dark and hear the screaming of the lambs.

Clarice Starling: Yes.

Hannibal Lecter: And you think if you save poor Catherine, you could make them stop, don't you? You think if Catherine lives, you won't wake up in the dark ever again to that awful screaming of the lambs

Clarice Starling: I don't know. I don't know.

Hannibal Lecter: Thank you, Clarice. Thank you.

Clarice Starling: Tell me his name, Doctor.

Hannibal Lecter: Dr. Chilton, I presume. I think you know each other.

Dr. Frederick Chilton: Okay. Let's go.

Clarice Starling: It's your turn, Doctor.

Dr. Frederick Chilton: Out!

Clarice Starling: Tell me his name!

Word
Choice

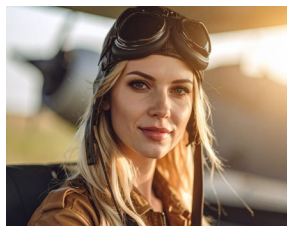
Subtext

Pacing and
Interruptions

Scene Background



Independently wealthy man who has built a successful but mysterious business in Florida.



Unable to commit to long-term, steady employment, Valerie seeks “gigs” to support herself.



Valerie's good friend of over four years. A cautious thrill seeker.



Scene Goals



Hire a dependable and permanent delivery person who will make a weekly delivery to a different location each time.



An acquaintance told Valerie about a man who pays a lot of money for simple deliveries. She's looking for a short-term gig.

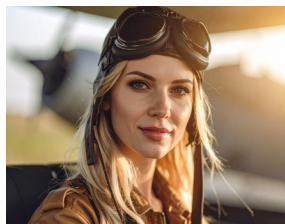


Cassie comes to the interview to protect her friend because they have never met Paul before, but they have heard rumors.

Attitudes and Motivations



Attitude: Sarcastic
Motivation: Power



Attitude: Poised
Motivation: Survival



Attitude: Excited
Motivation: Obsession



Don't Over Think



Hidden
Motivations

Word
Choice

Conflict and
Tension

Pacing and
Interruptions

Information
Reveal

Subtext



Write

Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries made."

"Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular deliveries made on a regular basis. You look safe."

"What do you mean, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what's with that smirk?"

"She looks safe. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson would be afraid of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places." **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't like this. I don't trust his grin."

"Wait," **Valerie** says, "I can make this work. How much does it pay?"

"It depends on the week. Usually between two and five hundred clams."

"That's a lot. These packages must contain something special. Guns? Drugs?"

"No, but they are special. Not like your mommy's special Jello, but more like a titillating 'entertainment' special. More like a—"

"That's it," **Cassie** says. "I can't stand his face. He has a creepy smile. Let's go."

"No." **Valerie** grabs Cassie's arm. "How much for one or two big deliveries?"

"Nothing. It pays nothing unless you do it every week. You know, I like you."

"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Plot Driven?

Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries made."

"Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular deliveries made on a regular basis. You look safe."

"Safe? On, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what's with that?"

"She's a professional. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson would be afraid of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places," **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't like this. I don't trust his grin."

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"That's it," **Cassie** says. "I can't stand this face. Creepy smile. Let's go."

"No." **Valerie** grabs Cassie's arm. "How many big deliveries?"

"Nothing. It pays nothing unless you do it every week. You know, I like you."

"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Hidden
Motivations

Conflict
and
Tension

Information
Reveal

Emotional?

Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries made."

"Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular deliveries on a regular basis. You look safe."

"What do you mean, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what with that smirk?"

"She looks safe. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson would be afraid of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places." **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't like this. I don't trust him."

"Wait," **Valerie** says, "I can make this work. How much does it pay?"

"It depends on the week. Usually between two and five hundred **clams**."

"That's a lot. These packages must contain something special. Guns? Drugs?"

"No, but they are special. Not like your mommy's special Jello, but more like a titillating 'entertainment' special. More like a—"

"That's it," **Cassie** says. "I can't stand his face. He has a creepy smile. Let's go."

"No." **Valerie** grabs Cassie's arm. "How much for one of them?"

"Nothing. It pays nothing unless you do it every week. You know that."

"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Subtext

Word
Choice

Pacing and
Interruptions

Natural - Paul



Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries." "Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular deliveries on a regular basis. You look safe."

"What do you mean, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what's with that smirk?"

"She looks safe. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson would be afraid of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places." **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't like this. I don't trust his grin."

"Wait," **Valerie** says. "How do I make this work. How much does it pay?"

"It depends on the week. Usually between two and five hundred clams."

"That's a lot. These packages must contain something special. Guns? Drugs?"

"No, but they are special. Not like your mommy's special Jello, but more like a titillating 'entertainment' special. More like a—"

"That's it," **Cassie** says. "I can't stand his face. He has a creepy smile. Let's go."

"No." **Valerie** grabs Cassie's arm. "How much for one or two big deliveries?"

"Nothing. It pays nothing unless you do it every week. You know, I like you."

"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Power

Sarcastic

Natural - Valerie



Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries." "Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular basis. You look safe."

"What do you mean, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what's with that smirk?"

"She looks safe. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson," said of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places," **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't like this. I don't trust his grin."

"Wait," **Valerie** says, "I can make this work. How much does it pay?"

"It depends on the week. Usually between two and five hundred dollars."

"That's a lot. These packages must contain something important, right?"

"No, but they are special. Not like your mommy's special. More like a titillating 'entertainment' special. More like a—"

"That's it," **Cassie** says. "I can't stand his face. He has a creepy smile. Let's go."

"No." **Valerie** grabs Cassie's arm. "How much for one or two big deliveries?"

"Nothing. It pays nothing unless you do it every week. You know, I like you."

"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Poised:
Confident

Survival:
Resilient

Poised:
Composed

Natural - Cassie



Valerie says, "My friend told me you need a couple of deliveries." "Your friend was wrong," says **Paul**. "I need regular deliveries on a regular basis. You look safe."

"What do you mean, 'safe?'" asks **Cassie**. "And, what's with **that smirk?**"

"She looks safe. She doesn't look like Mike Tyson would be afraid of her. She also looks like she would follow my orders."

"I certainly would," says **Valerie**. "What would I be delivering?"

"Oh, different things, in different places." **Paul** lowers his voice.

Cassie wrinkles her nose. "I don't trust **his grin**."

"Wait," **Valerie** says, "I can't see your face. How much does it pay?"

"It depends on the work. Usually between two and five hundred."

"That's a lot. These packages must contain something special."

"No, but they are special. Not like your mommy's special Jello, but more like a titillating 'entertainment' special. More like a—"

"That's it!" **Cassie** says. "I can't stand his face. He has a **creepy smile**. Let's go."

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"But we don't like you!" **Cassie** says. "Goodbye."

Excited

Obsession

Some Good Dialogue Practices

Include a background distraction – Traffic noise, kids playing, a couple arguing across at a table across the restaurant

Let character's deviate from the main dialogue to tell a personal story

Characters gossiping about other characters, good or bad.

Accents and non-English –
Establish a character's accent or language early with apostrophes and abbreviations, then only convey it with cadence and word choice from then on.

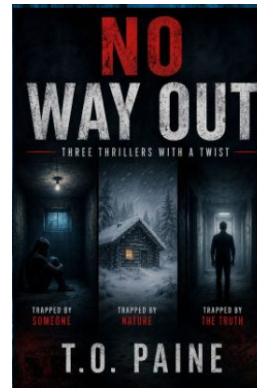
Questions?





Thank You

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