

Foreshadowing

I'm a great believer in foreshadowing. Done well, at an appropriate time and with subtlety, it positions the reader to accept something that happens later in a story. Without it, the reader may be left shaking his or her head and asking "where did *that* come from?"

For example, in my book *Empty Luck*, I introduce the two Sullivan brothers, Tommy and Ricky. Tommy, the older by three years, makes a dangerous, criminal decision that requires the participation of his strait-laced brother. Logically, Ricky, a new police officer, would refuse to take part in a crime, but he gives in.

Why? Well, by foreshadowing earlier in the book that Ricky has always admired his older brother. Despite Tommy's objective faults, we can believe Ricky might well agree to help. In fact, we learn early on that, in some ways, Ricky would like to be more like Tommy, more fearless and more confident, as he perceives him. Whether Tommy really is confident and fearless is another question, but even at 26, Ricky still views his big brother with childhood eyes.

So we learn this about Ricky in an early chapter and later when he helps Tommy, although we are startled, we realize it is not completely unexpected. It is just not all that implausible based on what we learned earlier about Ricky. The younger brother following his criminal brother later, as an adult, makes a kind of believable psychological sense, because it was foreshadowed.

The goal of foreshadowing is for the reader to be surprised but then to have a lightbulb of understanding click on. They figure out from the earlier information that yes, this odd decision is after all, possible and believable.