1) Event Title: Best Practices for Plot-Making: The Inevitable and the Surprising

2) Event Description: Fiction writers often have an easy time coming up with characters and a hard time knowing what to do with them; in other words, it's tough to create good plot. On this panel, five fiction writers will address ways to make plots feel inevitable (true to their characters and the situations they find themselves in) but also unexpected. Panelists will provide specific advice for writers struggling to determine characters' actions, while revealing their own challenges and successes in plot-making.

3) Event Category: Fiction Craft and Criticism

4) Event Organizer: Lauren Grodstein

5) Event Moderator: Lauren Grodstein

6) Event Participants & short bios:
   1) Lauren Grodstein is the author of five books, including Our Short History, A Friend of the Family, The Explanation of Everything, Reproduction is the Flaw of Love, and The Best of Animals. She directs the MFA Program at Rutgers University, Camden.
   2) Karen Russell’s novel, Swamplandia!, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She is also the author of the celebrated short-story collections, St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves, Vampires in the Lemon Grove, and Orange World.
   3) Kelly Braffet is the author of the novels Save Yourself, Last Seen Leaving, and Josie and Jack. Her writing has appeared in the Fairy Tale Review, Post Road, Vulture.com, Salon.com, and several anthologies.
   4) Christopher Gonzalez serves as a fiction editor at Barrelhouse and a contributing editor at Split Lip. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Lunch Ticket, Wasafiri, Third Point Press, Cosmonauts Avenue, jmww, and elsewhere. He currently works in book publishing and lives in New York.
   5) Tom McAllister is the author of the novels How to Be Safe & The Young Widower's Handbook, as well as the memoir Bury Me in My Jersey. He is an Associate Professor at Temple University, non-fiction editor at Barrelhouse Magazine, and co-host of the Book Fight podcast.

7) Please read the following at the beginning of your event:
   Welcome to Best Practices for Plot-Making: The Inevitable and the Surprising. A few reminders before we begin:
   • For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel (identify moderator) know and a printed copy of the presentation will be delivered to you.
   • Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
   • Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing perfume. • Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.
• We realize the lines for the bathrooms may be long, but please refrain from using an accessible stall unless you require such accommodation. Please also be aware family restrooms located on level 2 are reserved for those with disabilities or those wishing to use a single-stall restroom.
• If you have any questions or concerns regarding conference accessibility, please call or text the Accessibility Hotline (503) 455-4127 or email events@awpwriter.org.

AWP 2019 Event Outline Suggested Template ~ 10 ~ Opening moderator remarks and housekeeping announcements.

8) I’d like to introduce the speakers on our panel:
1) Karen Russell’s novel, Swamplandia!, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She is also the author of the celebrated short-story collections, St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves, Vampires in the Lemon Grove, and Orange World.
2) Kelly Braffet is the author of the novels Save Yourself, Last Seen Leaving, and Josie and Jack. Her writing has appeared in the Fairy Tale Review, Post Road, Vulture.com, Salon.com, and several anthologies.
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9) Opening remarks:
Plot is the most essential element of storytelling. It is the thing that draws us to storytelling both as writers and readers. It is the element we use when we relay gossip to our friends or tell our partners about our day. We don’t use character. We don’t use dialogue. We use plot. And we are uniquely attuned to plot, I believe - because we frame our lives in stories, because we tell ourselves stories to make sense of our lives, and these stories are sequences of events, I believe we consider the world in terms of plot.

Think about the first stories we ever paid attention to when we were children: fairytales. What are we thinking about when we think about fairytales? Not character. We know only the faintest outlines of character when we think about fairytales, the faintest representation of type. What we have, in fairytales, are the approximations of what we’re going to end up with later, in more sophisticated stories: the Innocent (a small child with a basket for her grandmother, a princess not allowed to go to the ball), the Antagonist (a wolf, an evil stepmother), and a goal (to get to grandmother’s house, to get to the ball). Do we need to know anything more
about Cinderella except that she is Good? We probably don’t - although it’s satisfying to attach all sorts of other characteristics to her, such as that she is kind and beautiful and sings and dances with small animals. She is a martyr, too, always cleaning up after her undeserving family and never daring to rebel. What happens to Cinderella is basically all plot, and very little character: we don’t ever get to know the characters behind their stock types, and yet we care. Why?

I’ve thought about this a lot, and I think we care because the story plays with our basic senses of justice and fairness, and of vanquishing evil. We care because the plot points here are universal and play upon things that people can’t help but feel passionate about. They prove that, even in the absence of real character, people will care about the fundamental equations of the human experience - good vs. evil, primarily - when laid out in a compelling-enough fashion. The romance stuff is nice, but really what we want to see is the embodiment of Good outmaneuver the embodiment of Evil. She does this with the help of magic, which is good, and there are some good set pieces, and there’s a moment when the whole thing might fall apart (what if the glass slipper fits somebody else?) but in the end what we really want to see is the abused Cinderella triumph over her crappy stepmother and stepsisters, and she does in dramatic fashion, and that, I would argue, is why we keep reading. The plot appeals to some inner notion of justice that we can’t ignore - that seems hardwired within us.

Plot, I would argue, must always do this. It doesn’t have to be the story of an abused child overcoming Cinderella-type adversity, but it does need to be a story that appeals to some fundamental sense of what other people are about. So here’s the question: what do we care about? How do we convince other people that what we as writers care about is worth them caring about too?

My suspicion here is that people tend to care about stories about other people. We’re naturally programmed to. So if we start with people (or extraterrestrial beings that seem like people, or animals that seem like people, or robots that seem like people) and give them interesting things to do, a large portion of our audience won’t help but care. For this reason, I believe in using plots that are human, and I want the plots I use in my novels (four and counting) spin from situations that are both **inevitable**, based on the nature of my characters and the place they find themselves in the beginning of the book, and **surprising** - they keep the reader interested, and don’t feel predictable.

10) Moderator questions:
1) What do you do when you can’t figure out where to go next?
2) How much do you hew to an outline?
3) What is the best way to understand your characters?
4) How much have the plots you’ve created surprised you in their creation?
11) Q&A session: At the end of the event, there will be time for a 5-10 minute Q&A session. Please pass the wireless microphone to the person posing the question or please repeat all questions into one of the wired microphones.