



THE CONVICTION ENGINE DIAGNOSTIC™

The fuel in this chapter is real—
*and you spend the ending in the
first paragraph.*

PREPARED FOR	MANUSCRIPT	MATERIAL READ	DATE
Avery Quinn	<i>The Grain of the Wood</i>	Chapter 1 — "The Lesson of the Ledger" (3,900 words)	August 2026

The Verdict

This chapter opens by telling the reader what it means, and the thirty-nine hundred words that follow can only agree with it.

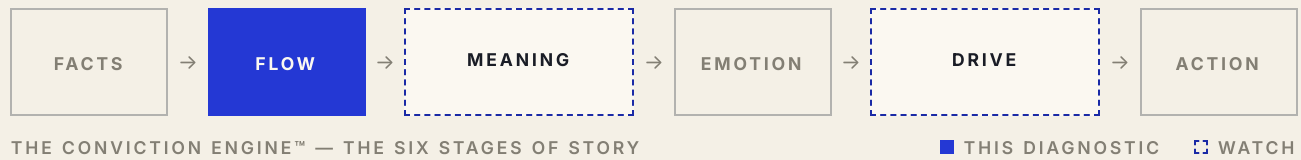
"Craftsmanship is a decision you make before you pick up the tool, and this chapter is the story of learning that the hard way."

<I>THE GRAIN OF THE WOOD</I>, CHAPTER 1, FIRST SENTENCE

Start with the material, because the material is the reason this reading is worth having. The ledger lines from the first year. The commission that came in at four hundred dollars under cost. The \$11,000 mistake in year six and the exact way it was discovered. A reader can tell the difference between an author who researched a trade and an author who worked in one, and this chapter never leaves any doubt about which it is. The Facts stage is firing.

The chapter then puts that material to a use it cannot carry. The opening sentence names the conclusion—craftsmanship is a decision—and the decade arrives in the order it happened, each year confirming a claim the reader accepted on page one. There is no question open. Without a question, the years become exhibits, and the reader reads them the way anyone reads exhibits: to verify, not to find out.

The consequence shows up at the end of the chain. A reader who was told the point can respect the point. A reader who arrived at it has something to do with it. This chapter produces the first reader.



Where the Chapter Stalls: Flow (the chronicle)

The shape here is a straight line: claim, then chronology. It runs from the first paragraph to the last page without a break, which is what makes it worth naming. A chapter that states its lesson and then documents it is a record of the thinking. The reader needed the thinking itself.

“Craftsmanship is a decision you make before you pick up the tool, and this chapter is the story of learning that the hard way.”

OPENING LINE — THE DESTINATION, SPENT BEFORE THE TRIP

Everything after that sentence is in service of it. Year one supports it. The first hire supports it. The \$11,000 mistake in year six—the only event in the chapter that actually changed the builder—supports it too, arriving on page nineteen as the strongest piece of evidence for something already settled on page one.

That mistake is the chapter. It has a cost the reader can feel, a decision that could have gone another way, and a person who has to live with the outcome. It is currently doing the work of a footnote.

Here is what the order costs. A reader who is told the lesson first spends the chapter checking the author's work. A reader who watches the mistake happen spends the chapter wondering what it will cost—and reaches the lesson holding it as something they figured out. Same words, same decade, same \$11,000. The difference is who owns the conclusion when the chapter ends.

3 REPAIRS — ALL USING MATERIAL YOU ALREADY HAVE

1 Open inside the mistake.

Begin in year six, in the shop, on the morning the error surfaces—before the reader knows the number and before anyone knows what it will take to fix. The ledger lines you already wrote then arrive as consequences rather than exhibits. Nothing new has to be researched or invented; the material moves, and the shape changes with it.

2 Move the opening claim to the last page.

The sentence about craftsmanship being a decision is the right sentence. It is in the wrong place. Said after the mistake, it reads as something the chapter earned. Said before, it turns the next thirty-nine hundred words into a receipt for a purchase the reader already made.

3

Give the reader one thing to hold that is still open.

The chapter answers every question it raises within the same paragraph that raises it. Pick one—whether the shop survives the error, or whether the builder tells the client—and let it stay open across a section break. One unanswered question is enough to convert a record into a story.

What to Watch Next

Two stages further down the chain are running on the structure's problem rather than their own. Both should improve on their own once the order changes—but they are worth watching in the next chapter you write.

WATCH Nº 1 — MEANING (STAKES)

The \$11,000 has a number but not yet a weight.

The figure appears, and the chapter moves on. What it meant is left to the reader to infer: whether payroll was at risk, whether a hire was delayed, what the builder did not tell anyone that week. The number is a fact until the chapter says what it cost.

This one resolves partly on its own if the mistake becomes the opening—an event the reader is inside is harder to state and skip.

WATCH Nº 2 — DRIVE (THE CLOSED DOOR)

The chapter ends without a move the reader could make.

The last page returns to the opening claim and closes. A reader who finished it moved has nowhere to put the feeling. The chapter does not have to prescribe anything, but it should leave one question the reader can ask about their own work before the next chapter starts.

This is the stage that decides whether a reader admires the book or uses it. Worth reading your final page against.

One chapter told us where the chain breaks. *It cannot tell us whether it breaks everywhere.*

A single chapter is enough to locate a stall and to see the quality of the fuel. Both are here: the material is strong, and the order is costing you the reader's participation.

What one chapter cannot answer is whether this is a habit or a chapter. If "The Lesson of the Ledger" is the only chapter built claim-first, it is a thirty-minute fix. If the same shape repeats across the manuscript, it is the book's signature, and the repair is architectural—which chapters carry the questions, and in what order the reader is allowed to find things out.

That question is what the full Conviction Engine Report answers. Every chapter is read and scored against all six stages, the recurring pattern is named, and the repairs are sequenced against the manuscript as a whole rather than a single chapter.

[Order the Conviction Engine Report — \\$1,295 →](#)

Platte F. Clark

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About Platte F. Clark



AT THE LIONSGATE PREMIERE
OF *THE BEST CHRISTMAS
PAGEANT EVER* — 2024

Platte F. Clark has spent his career inside other people’s books. He is the ghostwriter behind more than thirty nonfiction titles for executives, founders, and category-defining experts—including much of the modern FranklinCovey leadership shelf—the novelist behind the *Bad Unicorn* trilogy at Aladdin / Simon & Schuster (250,000+ copies sold internationally), and the credited screenwriter on Lionsgate’s *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, which earned 92% from critics and 97% from audiences on Rotten Tomatoes and a Top 40 box-office finish in 2024.

Before ghostwriting full-time, he built behavioral curriculum for FranklinCovey, VitalSmarts, and ZengerFolkman, and served as Chief Learning Officer for a training company partnered with Tony Robbins. That instructional-design background is the engine under the architecture: books built to change what the reader *does* after the cover closes, not just what they know.

Today he leads Straw Dogs Development, the two-person editorial shop behind this diagnostic, hosts the *Author Unknown* podcast, and is an active WGA member. B.S. in Philosophy; M.S. in English and Instructional Technology.

WHAT THIS REPORT IS BASED ON

Every diagnostic applies the Conviction Engine™—the six-stage framework taught in full in Platte’s book *The Conviction Engine: The Six Stages for Building Stories That Move People*—to your pages. The framework was built across three decades of manuscripts, distilling why some books move readers to act while others merely inform them. Your report was generated against that framework and personally reviewed before delivery.

THE STUDIO	THE PODCAST	LINKEDIN	WRITE DIRECTLY
strawdogsdev.com	authorunknown.fm	linkedin.com/in/platteclark	platte@strawdogsdev.com



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