

Give me a (Hallmark) Beat!

THE ACTS

In fiction, we have the three act structure. In television, there are more than three acts. TV and films made for TV have commercial breaks to contend with, because that's how they make their money. Even if you stream or watch a DVD, there will likely be fade to blacks where you can tell a commercial break would go. There are likely 8-12 of acts. All of the breaks are going to be surprisingly similar despite the different movies you watched. Hallmark movies mostly often has a nine act structure. Go on and count them yourself!

THE SETUP ACT

In every Hallmark movie, and generally in storytelling, the first few minutes are crucial for establishing the world and characters, known as the Set Up. The Set Up serves a dual purpose: it introduces the audience to the main character(s)'s ordinary world while also captivating them with the extraordinary aspects or situations involving the hero or heroine.

An important part of the Set Up is highlighting the main character's Needs or Wants, laying out the goal they aim to achieve by the end of the story. A Want is a false goal that they'll quest after until realizing their true Need. Whether they know their Need or fumble around over a Want, they make a Plan and take steps to put the plan in action when, unexpectedly, something goes wrong. Anything worth having is rarely, if ever, easily gained. The hero or heroine may have been smiling broadly and going about their daily lives just after the credits rolled. But inevitably, in the short moments that followed, a monkey wrench metaphorically flew onto the screen called the Disturbance.

| HEROINE | HERO |
|-------------|-------------|
| Goal | Goal |
| Need/Want | Need/Want |
| Plan | Plan |
| Disturbance | Disturbance |



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THE LET'S STICK TOGETHER ACT

Additionally, a key moment in the first two acts is the meeting of the hero and heroine, which may occur on-screen or be referenced as having happened earlier. But the viewer/reader needs to see them interact for themselves; this is the Meet Cute. Either Act One is consumed by getting to know the protagonists individually and we wait until after the first commercial break for them to meet. Or they meet early on. It's up to you, the puppet master.

This is a love story, so the hero and heroine have to spend a good portion of it together in order to fall in love. What is the point in the story that thrusts the hero and heroine together so that they can't escape each other? What is their Adhesion point?

Do they have to save the ranch from an evil developer who wants to buy the land and turn it into a theme park or mall?

Will they have to work together to save the town's beloved bake shop?

Will they have to stay up all night to decorate the Christmas tree in order to save the town?

At some point in this act does one of the characters say *No way am I going along if S/He is on the same road?* It might be the actual words. It might be a look. It might be an action. In *Romancing The Beats* by Gwen Hayes, this is called the No Way Beat. What's that moment in your story?

| MEET CUTE | ADHESION | NO WAY |
|-----------|----------|--------|
| | | |



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THE OBSTACLES IN THE MIDDLE

In the middle section of a made for television film, it's all about the Confrontations. Your heroes will try to solve the problem or achieve their goal. But with each step forward they will meet a complication that either sets them back to figure out a new plan of attack or takes them forward to meet a new, bigger problem. This can last from Act 2 to Act 6 in a television film.

There are four types of Obstacles:

Antagonist: which is a person who stands in the way of their goals, though this person isn't necessarily a "bad guy." It could be a mom who wants her daughter to get married instead of building her own business. Or a mom who wants her daughter to build her own business instead of marrying the wrong guy.

Physical Obstruction: like a car breaks down or they don't have the supplies they need.

Inner/psychological: where the hero is the heroine's best friend and he doesn't believe he is good enough for her, or vice versa.

Mystical or Acts of God: like Ebenezer Scrooge getting visited by the ghosts of his past. But if it's a Hallmark Movie then it's likely Candance Cameron stepping into the shoes of her past to relieve past wrongs

I like to plan out potential obstacles this couple could face and then pull from the list when I get to the middle acts.

| ANTAGONISTIC OBSTACLE | PHYSICAL OBSTRUCTION |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

| INNER/PSYCHOLOGICAL | MYSTICAL/ACT OF GOD |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| | |
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THE REFLECTION ACT

We saw that the First Act was all about the Set Up where the heroine and hero were introduced along with their Goals, the Meet Cute, and a Disturbance of their Ordinary World.

In the Second Act, the two heroes are now stuck together as though with Adhesive glue, even though one or both of them said No Way!

The Middle Acts were all about the Obstacles. They fought each other or a different Antagonist, as well as Physical Obstructions, Inner or Psychological issues, or perhaps even Mystical Forces or Acts of God.

Now around the Seventh Act, one or both of the heroes should take a look at their circumstances and come to a realization of what they truly want, or who they truly want to be. This is the Reflection Beat.

Oftentimes, you might even have the hero or heroine looking into a mirror to realize this is not who they wanted to be.

Or they may look around at their location, and realize it's not where they want to be.

They might look at the boyfriend or fiancée they began the story with and realize that is not who they want to be with.

Who has the reflective moment? The hero? The heroine? Or perhaps both of them? Which kind of reflection moment do they have?

| HEROINE'S MIRROR | HERO'S MIRROR |
|------------------|---------------|
| | |



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THE END IS NIGH ACT

Once your hero and heroine look at their reflection and know who they truly want to be, or where they want to be or what they want to do with their lives, that's when the lights go out.

The Black Moment is the scene of the greatest battle in an epic fantasy. It's when Jason or Freddy rise from that last bludgeoning over the head. It's when the long lost fiancée wakes from the coma or comes down from the big city after our heroes have saved Christmas. In a Hallmark movie, this typically happens in the seventh beat/act.

The Wake Up Moment, aka the Silver Lining, is a scene of revelation; it's an a-ha epiphanic moment. The Dark Night of the Soul has passed, and your heroes are on the other side of the battle. This is the moment when one or both of them will realize they made the wrong choice.

It will be either an epiphany or a revelation. Both the revelation and then the epiphany are a discovery. But in an epiphany the character comes to understand a point that they hadn't before and their opens are opened to a new (silver) light. Whereas a revelation is a communication of information. It's often something that wasn't disclosed before. One happens in the mind, the other happens in the ears. Either way, the character is changed and they will move differently from now to the end of the story.

The last scene of this great romance -the moment right before the Hallmark kiss- is a Grand Gesture. This is usually performed by the character who has changed, or lost, the most. But honestly, it's always more satisfying when the male performs this feat. The best Grand Gestures harken back to the first scene of the film making the tale end in a cyclical fashion.

| BLACK MOMENT | WAKE UP | GRAND GESTURE |
|--------------|---------|---------------|
| | | |

The End

