

PLOT STRUCTURE OF HIDDEN IDENTITY TROPE

Crafting a romance story around the Hidden or Fake Identity trope can be incredibly engaging, allowing for a rich exploration of themes like trust, vulnerability, and love's power to transcend barriers. Let's outline a plot structure using the five necessary romance beats, tailored to fit this trope:

Please remember that you are both an artist and the boss of your story. You can rearrange, reorder, delete, and add points to this plot as you see fit! Also note that for ease I'm using Hero and Heroine, but this works for any gender combination as well as number of lovers.

ACT ONE

PART ONE: INTRODUCE THE LOVERS



1. Introduce the Hero in their ordinary world. Show them living in their False Identity, who they believe they are which is a far cry from their True Essence, who they will become by the end of the story. If possible, hint at the past wound or fear that has caused them to be stuck in their False Identity.

2. Introduce the Heroine in their ordinary world. Show them living in their False Identity, who they believe they are which is a far cry from their True Essence, who they will become by the end of the story. If possible, hint at the past wound or fear that has caused them to be stuck in their False Identity.

3. Introduce the World

Show the World or Setting that would allow or necessitate the need for a Hidden Identity. For example, in an Office Romance perhaps the new boss falls for the intern, but the intern doesn't know that this commanding love interest is their superior. Is this a Superhero that needs to hide from the mortals, but finds he's falling for the woman he just rescued? Maybe you're writing an espionage tale with a spy falling for her mark.

4. Inciting Incident

Show the Inciting Incident where one or both of the lovers is shown the opportunity to achieve their external goal. But in order to achieve the goal, whether it be a want or a need, they will have to put on a Hidden Identity. *Remember the want is the false goal that the hero initially goes after. Near the midpoint, the hero will realize the want isn't what they truly need to make their lives whole and become their True Essence.*

5. Introduction Tweeners

Before you move on to the Meet Cute, make sure you haven't missed a beat. Are there any supporting characters you need to introduce? Will there be a villain? If so, do they need to make an appearance early on in the story? Are you planning to have a subplots running alongside your main story? Perhaps one that belongs to the external plot of why the hero and/or heroine will need to pretend to be something or someone they are not? Decide if you need to introduce that before your hero and heroine meet.

PART TWO: MEET CUTE



6. Meet Cute

The lovers meet under circumstances that require one or both to maintain their façade of the Hidden Identity. Remember, the crux of the Hidden Identity trope is that the lovers see past the False Identity to the True Essence very early on.

However, the Meet Cute could be the protagonist acting in their True Essence, which draws their love interest to them. So that, when the love interest meets them again in the False Identity, they are turned off and confused at this person they no longer recognize. What happened to the amazing shining light of a person they initially encountered?

In either case, the Hero and Heroine always fall for the True Essence of the love interest, which they can see when no one else can.

Be sure and refer to the [Romance Roadmap] for ideas on Setting, Trope (which is the Hidden Identity), the Connection, and the Situation.

7. Adhesion

The Adhesion point often revolves around one or both lovers embracing the trope. In this instance, one or both lovers decide to maintain and move forward with the Hidden Identity to get an external goal; a job promotion, the secret information to deliver to their government, the desire to keep the heroine safe while they secretly don a cape and go off to save the planet.

8. Meet Cute Tweeners

Before you move into Act Two, are there any beats or scenes you need to address? Do you have the scenes you need to establish the supporting characters and their motives? Are the building blocks of the subplot established? Any foreshadowing you want to lay down that will be revealed in a later twist? You might not know it yet, but you can always come back and insert it into the plotting structure or as you revise your story.

ACT TWO

PART THREE: FUN AND GAMES

Let's take your characters on a date! On these dates, the conflict arises as the protagonist tries to maintain their False Identity while their True Essence keeps trying to shine through for the love interest. *Please know that a "date" is not necessarily a wine and dine outing. It's a scene or a sequence (a sequence is a group of scenes with a common theme) to illustrate progression in the story. I heard author Lisa Daly call them dates once and my brain liked it!*

More importantly, these dates are truly Try Fail Cycles. A TFC can happen in two ways. It always starts with a plan. A first step is taken to accomplish that plan, but the protagonist meets with an obstacle. They either succeed against that obstacle and progress. Or they fail and have a setback. Regardless of whether the protagonist succeeds or fails, they will take another step and meet with another obstacle. I like three obstacles or, since this is a romance, three Try Fail Dates.

You could do less than three dates, or more. It's your story, your characters, and up to you.



9. Try Fail Date 1: Show a glimpse of the True Essence behind the Hidden Identity.

As the hero and/or heroine decide to take on the Hidden Identity, we see a glimpse of them briefly touching or embodying their True Essence, which is who they will become by the end of the story. The lover will react positively to the person they see while on this date.

10. Try Fail Date 2: Hide the True Essence completely behind the False Identity

This time when the lovers interact, the protagonist suppresses their True Essence and showcases only their False Identity. This confuses and upsets the love interest and they retreat. While the

protagonist loses ground with the love interest they will likely make strides towards the external goal.

11. Try Fail Date 3: Hybrid Self between True Essence and Hidden Identity

In this interaction, the protagonist tries to balance the two sides to themselves. Once again, the love interest sees through the False Identity to the True Essence of the protagonist and the love is rekindled.

12. Midpoint Revelation or Twist

A close call or an external threat nearly exposes the protagonist's true identity, increasing the stakes and tension but not fully unveiling the secret of the Hidden Identity. However, at this point, the protagonist is questioning if they want to remain Hidden or show their True Essence.

13. Fun and Games Tweeners

Before your protagonist decides whether or not they're ready to reveal their true selves to their love interest, double check and see if you need any tweener scenes. Check in with your supporting characters and subplots. They have mini arcs and ups and downs too. Their tales should be raising the stakes.

ACT THREE

Some authors like to put the Dark Moment at the end of Act Two. Others prefer it at the top of Act Three. Your book, your decision. But you'll see that structurally, it's in the same spot in the line up.

PART FOUR: DARK MOMENT



14. Bad Guys Close In

Things come to a head. The protagonist is going to have to make the decision to reveal themselves or not. To give up their goal or grab for it. The bad guy doesn't have to be an actual person. It can be the protagonist's guilty conscience, the antagonist's actions, or a critical event.

15. Dark Moment

The Dark Moment is internal. It revolves around feelings and emotions. When the identity is revealed, one or both lovers are betrayed. The love interest thought they knew the protagonist at their True Essence. Now they believe it was a lie when the protagonist's Hidden Identity is revealed, either through their own confession, the

antagonist's actions, or a critical event. This revelation leads to a breach of trust, causing a rift between the protagonist and the love interest.

16. All Is Lost

Now we face the external consequences. The protagonist has likely lost the love interest due to the deception. They've also either lost the goal and are left feeling hollow. Or they get the goal and it is not what they were expecting.

17. Dark Moment Tweeners

Before your protagonist can get their happily ever after, you have to close all the side quests of side characters, as well as all of the subplots. Don't leave anything dangling, unless this is a series and you'll address the dangling bits in another episode or book.

PART FIVE: HAPPILY EVER AFTER



18. Wake Up Epiphany or Revelation

Separated from the love interest, the protagonist reflects on their deceit. They realize the depth of their feelings. Finally, they decide to make amends, demonstrating growth and a willingness to embrace their True Essence.

19. Resolution

Before heading off to get the love interest back, you need to resolve the goal. Does the protagonist achieve the goal? Perhaps in an expected way? They might even decide to give it up because having love would mean more.

20. Grand Gesture or Sacrifice

The protagonist makes a significant sacrifice or gesture that proves their love and commitment, showcasing their change and addressing the wrongs their deception caused. Please see the [Romance Roadmap] for an array of Grand Gestures to choose from!

21. Happily Ever After

The love interest forgives the protagonist, recognizing the sincerity of their change and the depth of their feelings. The story concludes with the couple overcoming the deceit, and focusing on their future together. This might include a glimpse into how they navigate the challenges brought on by the protagonist's true identity now out in the open.