



Story is basically a narrative tale. This happened, then this happened, then this happened.

Episodic writing is what happens when you have only story. Event after event with no cause-and-effect sequence. The events may or may not be connected and fail to move forward towards a goal. There is little, if any, motivation, conflict, or urgency.

Plot is the cause-and-effect sequence of events. A causes B which causes C which causes D.

Ronald Tobias ([20 Master Plots and How to Build Them](#)) says: "Plot involves the reader in a game of why."

Debra Dixon ([Goal, Motivation & Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction](#)) reminds us: "Regardless of what you call GMC, the bottom line is that these three topics are the foundation of everything that happens in our story world. And what happens in our story world is called PLOT."

Ansen Dibell in his book, [Plot](#), tells us: "Plot[ting] is a way of looking at things. It's a way of deciding what's important and then showing it to be important through the way

you construct and connect the major events of your story. It's the way you show things mattering."

It has been said that there are a finite number of plots. Some theorists suggest seven basic plots, others nine.

After having the opportunity to attend a workshop by Ronald Tobias, I am inclined to follow his twenty master plots from his book **20 Master Plots and How to Build Them**.

They are:

1. **Quest**-search for a person, place, or thing.
2. **Adventure**-action or journey plot.
3. **Pursuit**-one-character chases another.
4. **Rescue**-triangle quest: protagonist-victim-antagonist.
5. **Escape**-protagonist confined (literally and or psychologically) and wants to escape.
6. **Revenge**-retaliation for a real or imagined injustice.
7. **The Riddle**-the modern mystery tale.
8. **Rivalry**-two entities in competition.
9. **Underdog**-two entities in competition & one has a disadvantage and overwhelming odds against them.
10. **Temptation**-persuaded to do something that is unwise, wrong, or immoral.
11. **Metamorphosis**-the physical characteristics of the protagonist literally changes form.
12. **Transformation**-a process of change plot where an incident/s has a cause & effect response.
13. **Maturation**-a plot about growing up (usually optimistic).
14. **Love**-Boy meets Girl....BUT. (Lovers found, lovers split, lovers reunited.)
15. **Forbidden Love**-Crossing the line to forbidden territory.
16. **Sacrifice**-Giving up something in return for accomplishing a higher ideal.

17. Discovery-The process of interpreting and dealing with life. Why am I here?

18. Wretched Excess-The protagonist driven to extremes and the effects of those extremes. Usually psychological decline related to a character flaw.

19. Ascension-The rise of human spirit in crisis.

20. Descension -The fall of the human spirit in crisis.

It is from these plots that classic romance tropes emerge.

What are tropes then?

Tropes are reoccurring literary plot devices. Reoccurring as in, used over and over again, so as to become familiar to the reader and the writer as a trope. If I say, "secret baby," you nod because you know the basic plot.

Which is why editors may tell you they want a fresh spin on a trope. Without that fresh spin, a classic romance trope becomes overused and simply a cliché.

Fresh spins would be books like *Pride, Prejudice, and Zombies*. Or how about Kerrelyn Sparks book, *How to Marry a Vampire Millionaire* (about a vampire who loses a fang and falls in love with his dentist.)

By the way, a **hook** is not a trope. A hook is a topic that for the most part guarantees the reader a particular emotional and entertainment experience. When we hear a particular hook there is a reader expectation.



Amish = Hook.

Not Plot.

Popular hooks for contemporary romance would include cowboy, rancher, baby, small children, bride, animals, Amish, and single parent/widow/widower.

Or how about cinnamon roll hero? Virgin hero or heroine?

For the historical romance we have the wallflower & rake, courtesan, spinster, Duke/Duchess, farmer, rancher. Suspense includes all those cops, sheriffs, FBI agents, U.S. marshals.

Amish is a very popular hook right now. It comes with a reader expectation.

However, all by itself, Amish is not a classic romance trope. You can write Amish until the buggies come home, but you still need a plot device to float your Amish characters.

If you have submitted a manuscript and it has babies, cowboys, brides, and Amish, but you are told you don't have enough conflict and are scratching your head; take a look at your foundational plot and/or classic romance trope.

In no particular order, here are some favorite classic romance tropes.

1. **Two Dogs. One Bone**-aka H/H discover they want the Same Job, Title, or Accolades,



2. **Star-Crossed Lovers**-aka True Love's Destiny, Missed Connections, Random Encounters, Fated-to-be-Mated.

3. **Friends to Lovers**-aka Life-Long Best Friends, Unrequited Love, Friends with Benefits.

4. **Forbidden Love**-aka Love Above One's Station (Sheikhs, Princesses) Boss & Employee, Nanny & Boss, Friend's Little Sister, Feuding Families, Honor vs. Desire.

5. **Secret Baby**.

6. **Fish out of Water**-aka City Mouse/Country Mouse, Inherits Land/House/Business, Coming Home After

Many Years.

7. **Reunited Lovers**-aka all Reunion Romances where H/H have romance history, including: Jilted, Dumped at Altar, Runaway Bride, Dear John Letters, Ex-Spouse, Ex-Lover, Baby Mamma, Baby Daddy, Childhood Sweethearts.

8. **Opposites Attract**-aka Firefighter & Arsonist, Cop & Thief, Developer & Environmentalist, Laid Back vs. Control Freak, Tidy vs. Sloppy, Politician vs. Protestor (etc.) Grumpy vs. Sunshine.

8. **May/December Romance**-aka Older Hero and Younger Heroine, or Older Heroine and Younger Hero.

9. **Ugly Duckling**-aka all makeover stories like Cinderella, or Beauty & the Beast,

Young Girl All Grown Up, Bad Boy/Bad Girl reformed, Inexperienced at Love/Dating/Romance.

10. **Amnesia**-aka Retrograde Amnesia, Post Traumatic Amnesia, Anterograde Amnesia, Disassociative Amnesia.

11. **Marriage of Convenience**-aka Mail Order Bride, Terms of a Will, Marriage for a Noble Reason, Arranged Marriages, Compromised Reputation.

12. **Secret**-aka Disguise, Fake Engagement/Marriage, Secret or Mistaken Identity.

13. **Sudden Baby**-aka Inherited Baby, Unplanned Pregnancy, Abandoned Baby.

14. **Jeopardy**-aka Real Danger, Ticking Bomb Scenario, Escape, Dangerous Quest, or Mission.

15. **Love Triangle** aka Imagined or Real.

16. **Wounded Hero/Heroine**-aka Persons with a Physical/Mental wound, Abused, Orphaned, Abandoned, Rejected, Loner, Underdog.

17. **Forced Close Proximity**-aka Stranded (Natural Disaster), Working Environment, Capture/Abduction.

18. **Sacrifice**-aka-Giving up Something for Love.

Can you see the definite conflict (either internal or external) in these tropes? Often a writer can double up on tropes to either create both an internal and external conflict or to ramp up the conflict tension.