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SUSANNE DUNLAP  
AUTHOR & BOOK COACH

# Romancing Your Story

Susanne Dunlap



# About Susanne



- Award-winning author of over a dozen historical novels
- Author Accelerator Certified Book Coach
- PhD from Yale in Music History
- Lives in a historic converted mill in Biddeford, ME



# About this workshop

- Designed to give you a different perspective on your story
- Lots of discussion and questions
- Exercises to get you thinking and doing

SUSANNE DUNLAP  
AUTHOR & BOOK COACH

# Question #1:

What—if anything—do you like  
about the romance genre?





# Question #2:

What—if anything—do you  
**HATE** about the romance genre?





Understanding what any  
genre does well can  
improve storytelling in  
any other genre.





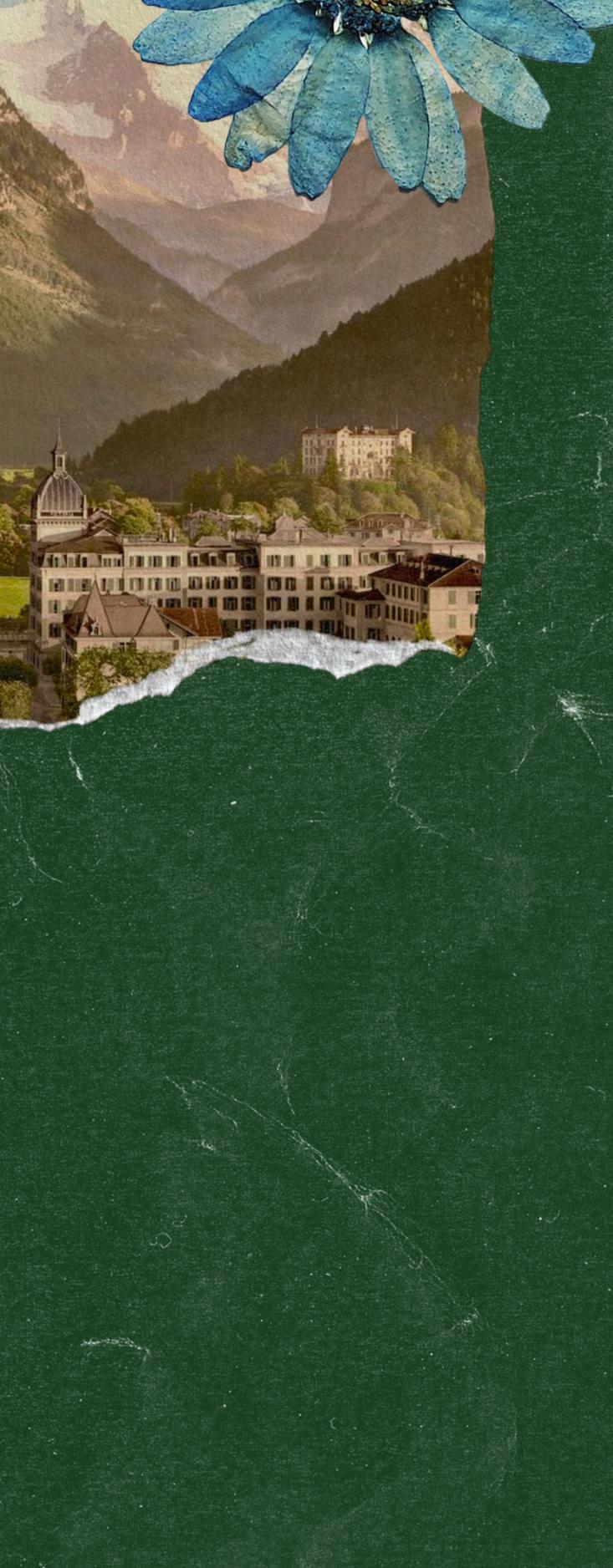
Understanding what the  
romance genre does well  
can improve storytelling in  
a few specific ways.





The trick with romance:  
Making a story compelling  
when you know what the  
outcome will be.





# What actually defines romance?

- A happy-ever-after (HEA)
- Single-minded point: the right couple ends up together
- The path to the resolution never runs smooth



# Why is it consistently the most popular genre?

- Readers know what to expect
  - Positive overall message
  - Protagonists are appealing and complex
  - Unabashed escapism
- 



Why is it consistently the  
most popular genre?

- EMOTION ON THE PAGE!
- 



# Nora Nguyen

## *Messy, Impractical and Irresistible: In Praise of Over-the-Top Romance*

Those acquainted with the genre are familiar with the typical cadence of plot: a meet-cute bloated with meaningful looks followed by a series of mishaps that befall the couple (sometimes including that most controversial device, the third-act breakup), culminating in a resolution that is happy and tender and hopeful. I enjoyed the bookends of these novels, but it was in the messy middle that I stumbled onto the real gem of emotional reward.

There, amid the turbulence of misunderstanding and bad choices, lay the seed of what makes us human. We often want things we cannot or should not have. We are foolish and flawed in our desire. But sometimes, that desire is enough to shake us from the rote path into one that is wilder and more surprising. Yearning is messy and impractical. That's what makes it irresistible.



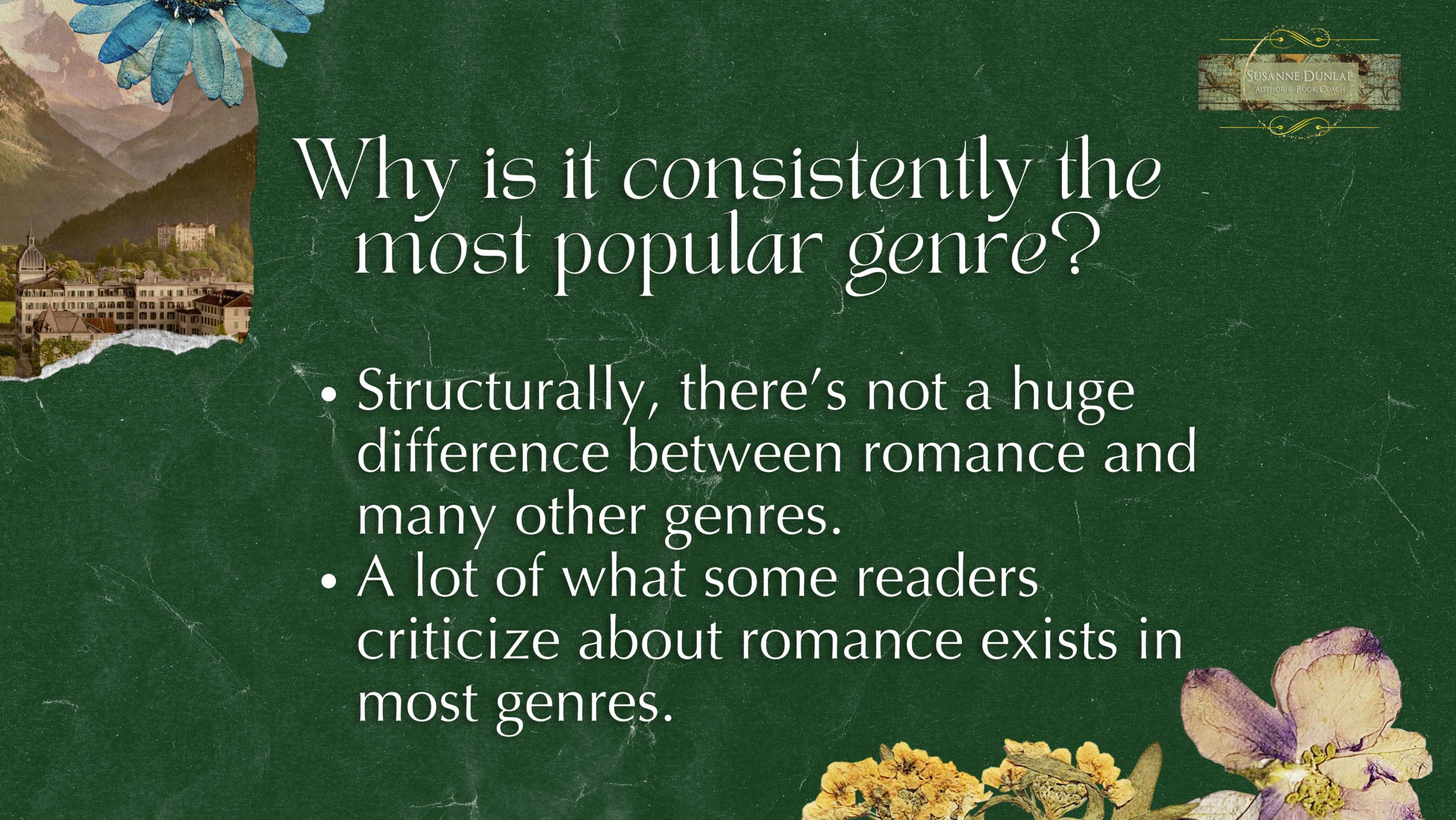
“A romance novel is a love story with an emotionally satisfying, optimistic ending. The reader knows the love interests will end up together. Similarly, in sports media, the reader often knows the final score before they read about it, and they can access the highlights with a few taps on their phones. But just like the juiciest sports journalism doesn’t exist merely to answer the question, “who won the game?” a romance novel doesn’t exist to answer the question, “do they end up together?” It exists to answer other questions: How do they end up together? What does it feel like? Why should I care?”

# Jamie Harrow, LitHub



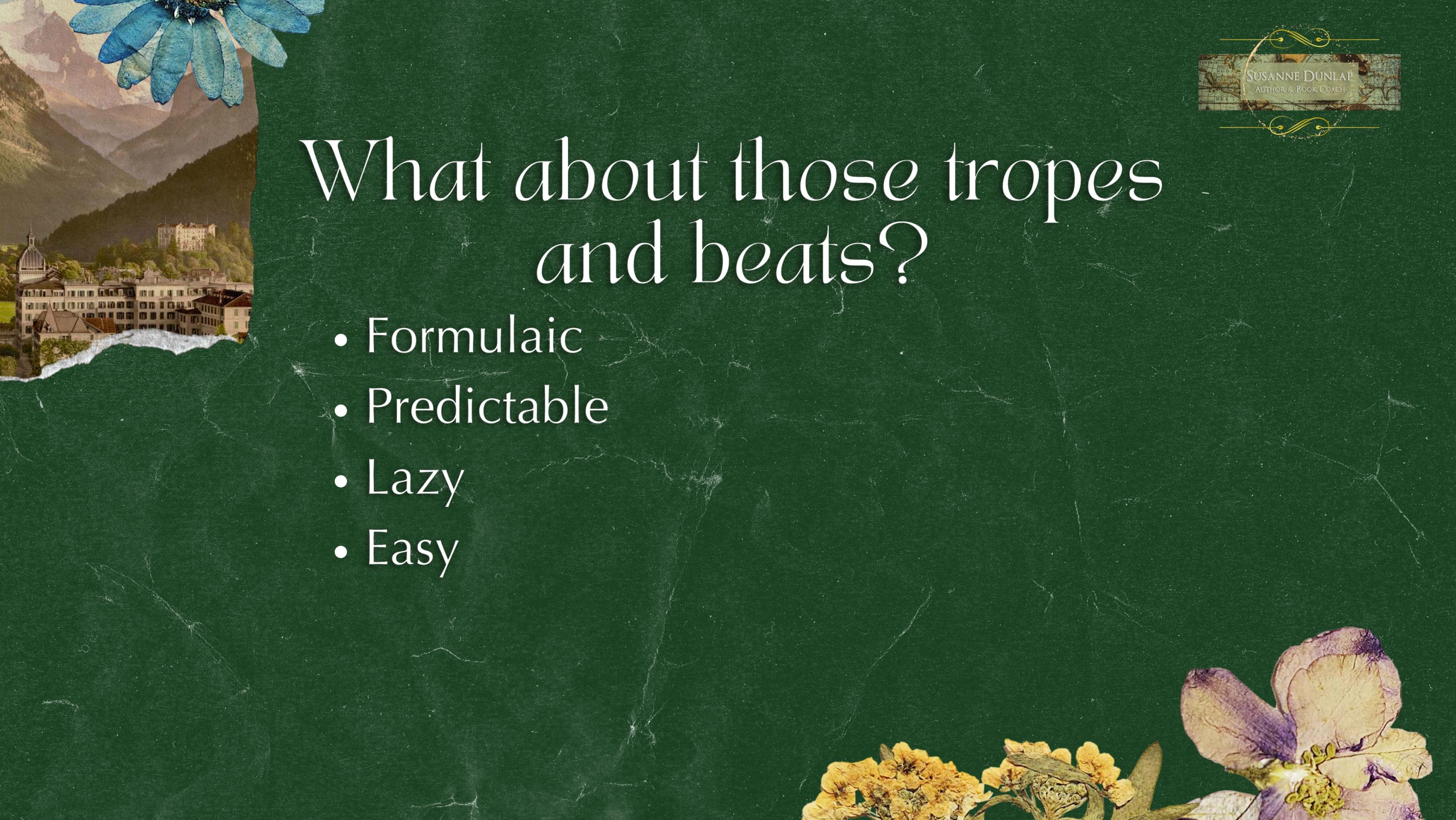
# Why is it consistently the most popular genre?

- In romance, it's not so much the WHAT as the HOW and WHY.



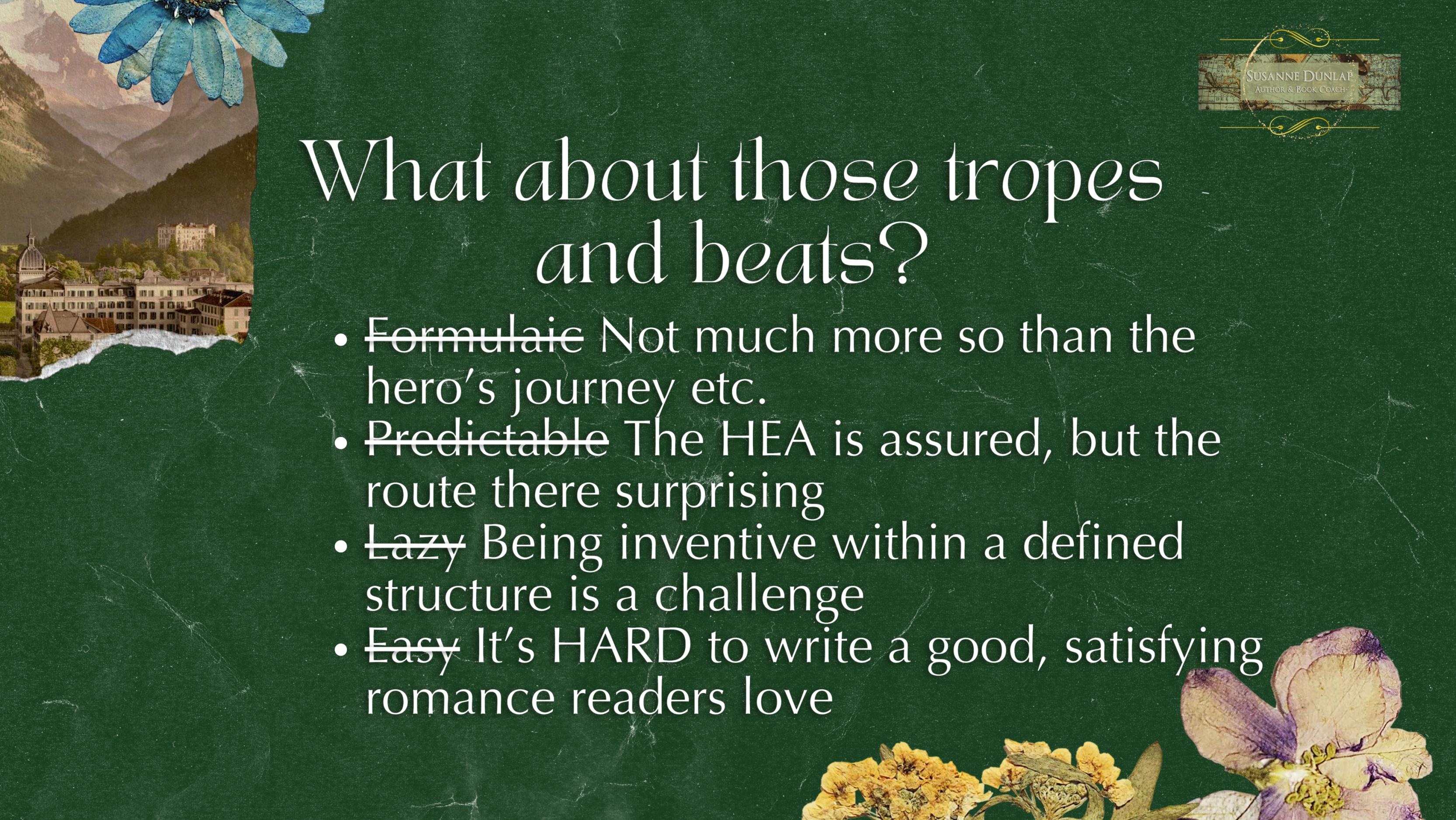
# Why is it consistently the most popular genre?

- Structurally, there's not a huge difference between romance and many other genres.
- A lot of what some readers criticize about romance exists in most genres.



# What about those tropes and beats?

- Formulaic
- Predictable
- Lazy
- Easy



# What about those tropes and beats?

- ~~Formulaic~~ Not much more so than the hero's journey etc.
- ~~Predictable~~ The HEA is assured, but the route there surprising
- ~~Lazy~~ Being inventive within a defined structure is a challenge
- ~~Easy~~ It's HARD to write a good, satisfying romance readers love



# A deeper dive into tropes and beats



# What is a trope?

A literary trope is a commonly used theme, device, or convention in storytelling that conveys a recognizable pattern or motif.





# Why do writers use tropes?

- Storytelling shorthand
- Shared understanding / quick communication
- Versatility



# Where are tropes used?

- Plot structure
- Characterization
- Settings
- Analysis





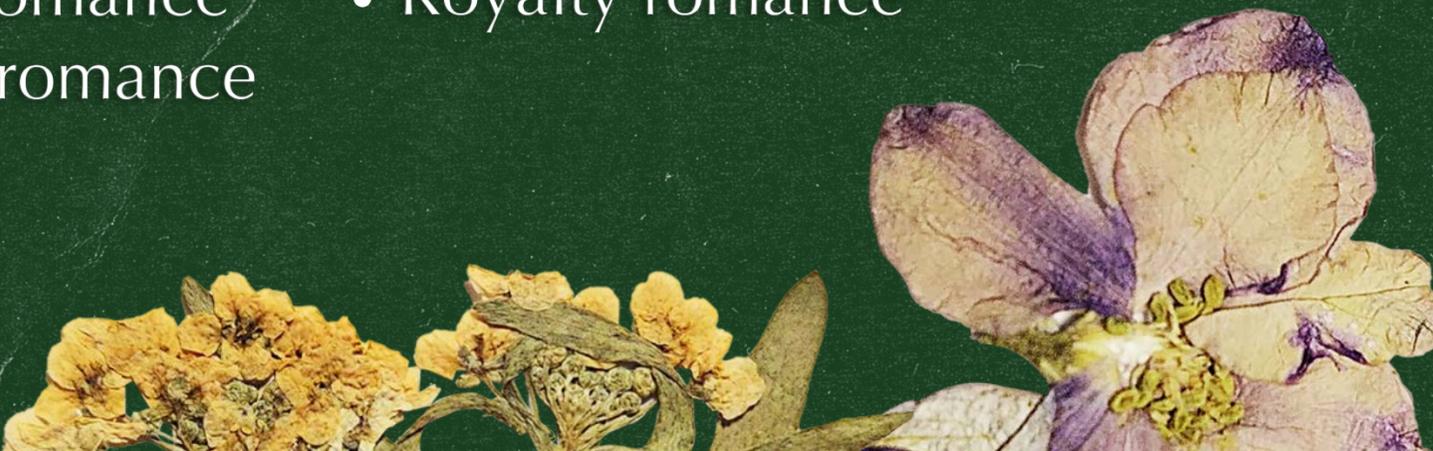
# What gives tropes a bad name?

- Overuse
- Predictability
- Repetitiveness



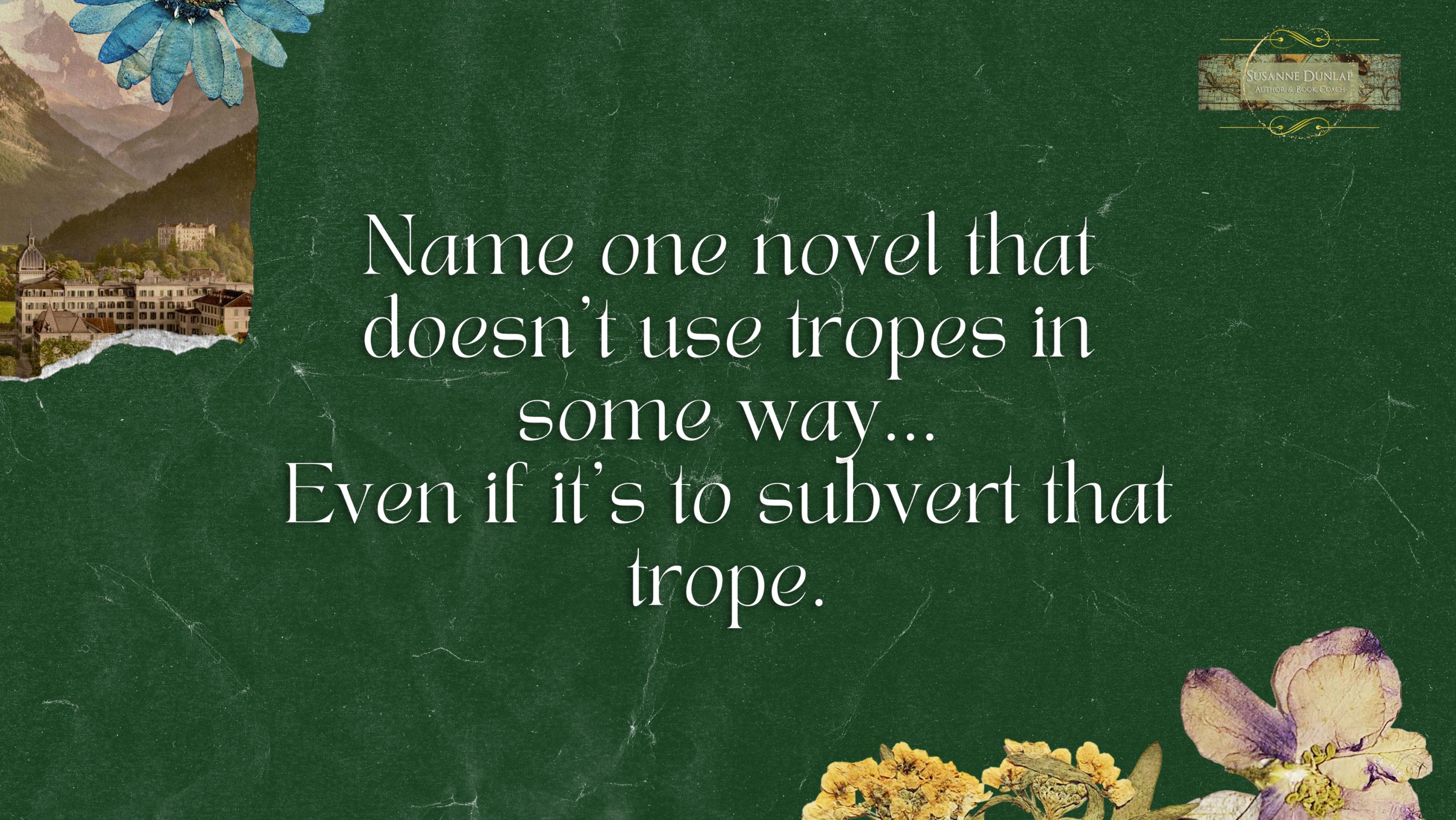


# Common romance tropes

- Enemies to lovers
  - Friends to lovers
  - Fake relationship
  - Forced proximity
  - Second chance romance
  - Love triangle
  - Opposites attract
  - Soulmates/Fated mates
  - Forbidden love
  - Secret identity
  - Slow burn
  - One bed
  - Marriage of convenience
  - Grumpy/sunshine pairing
  - Billionaire romance
  - Small town romance
  - Office romance
  - Age gap
  - Best friend's sibling
  - Reunion romance
  - Bodyguard romance
  - Mistaken identity
  - Amnesia
  - Love at first sight
  - Royalty romance
- 

# Common non-romance tropes

- The Chosen One
  - Fish Out of Water
  - Rags to Riches
  - The Quest
  - Coming of Age
  - The Hero's Journey
  - Good vs. Evil
  - Man vs. Nature
  - Dystopian Society
  - Time Travel
  - Alternate History
  - The Underdog
  - Revenge Plot
  - Redemption Arc
  - Forbidden Knowledge
  - The Mentor
  - The Trickster
  - The Reluctant Hero
  - The Antihero
  - The Ensemble Cast
  - The Heist
  - The Conspiracy
  - Alien Invasion
  - Post-Apocalyptic World
  - The Chosen Family
  - The Prodigy/Genius
  - The Fall from Grace
  - The Transformation
  - The Sacrifice
  - The Journey Home
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Name one novel that  
doesn't use tropes in  
some way...  
Even if it's to subvert that  
trope.



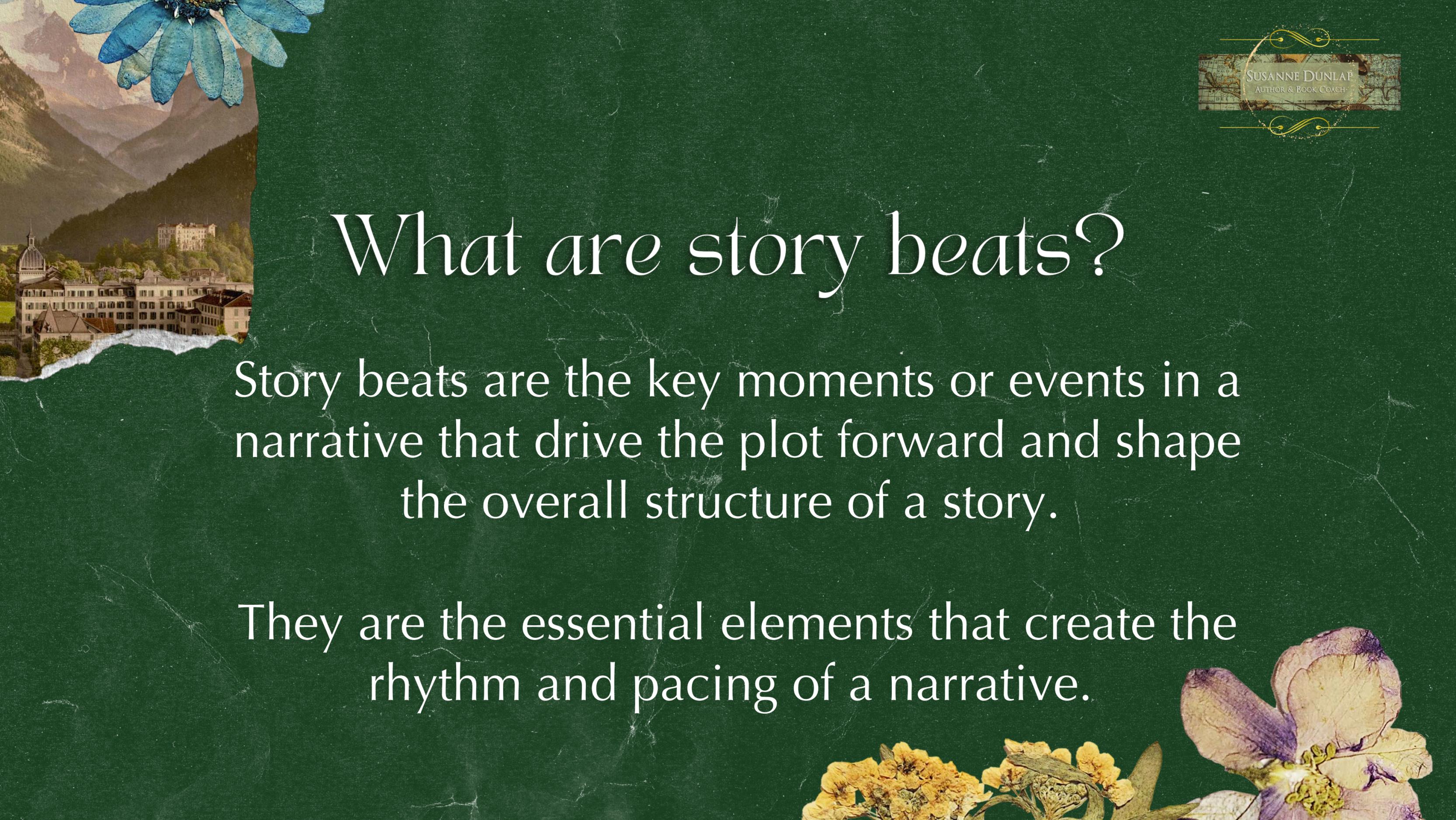
News flash:  
Readers generally aren't  
looking for something  
completely new.





They're looking for new  
twists on familiar,  
relatable story  
archetypes.

And that applies to  
memoir, too



# What are story beats?

Story beats are the key moments or events in a narrative that drive the plot forward and shape the overall structure of a story.

They are the essential elements that create the rhythm and pacing of a narrative.



# Some popular “beat” methods:

- *Save the Cat*—Offers a detailed structure that works for some writers
- *Story Grid*—A deeper look into the mechanics of story—very useful as an analysis tool





Even if you're not  
consciously using beats in  
your story,  
the beats are there.



# Story beats in a thriller:

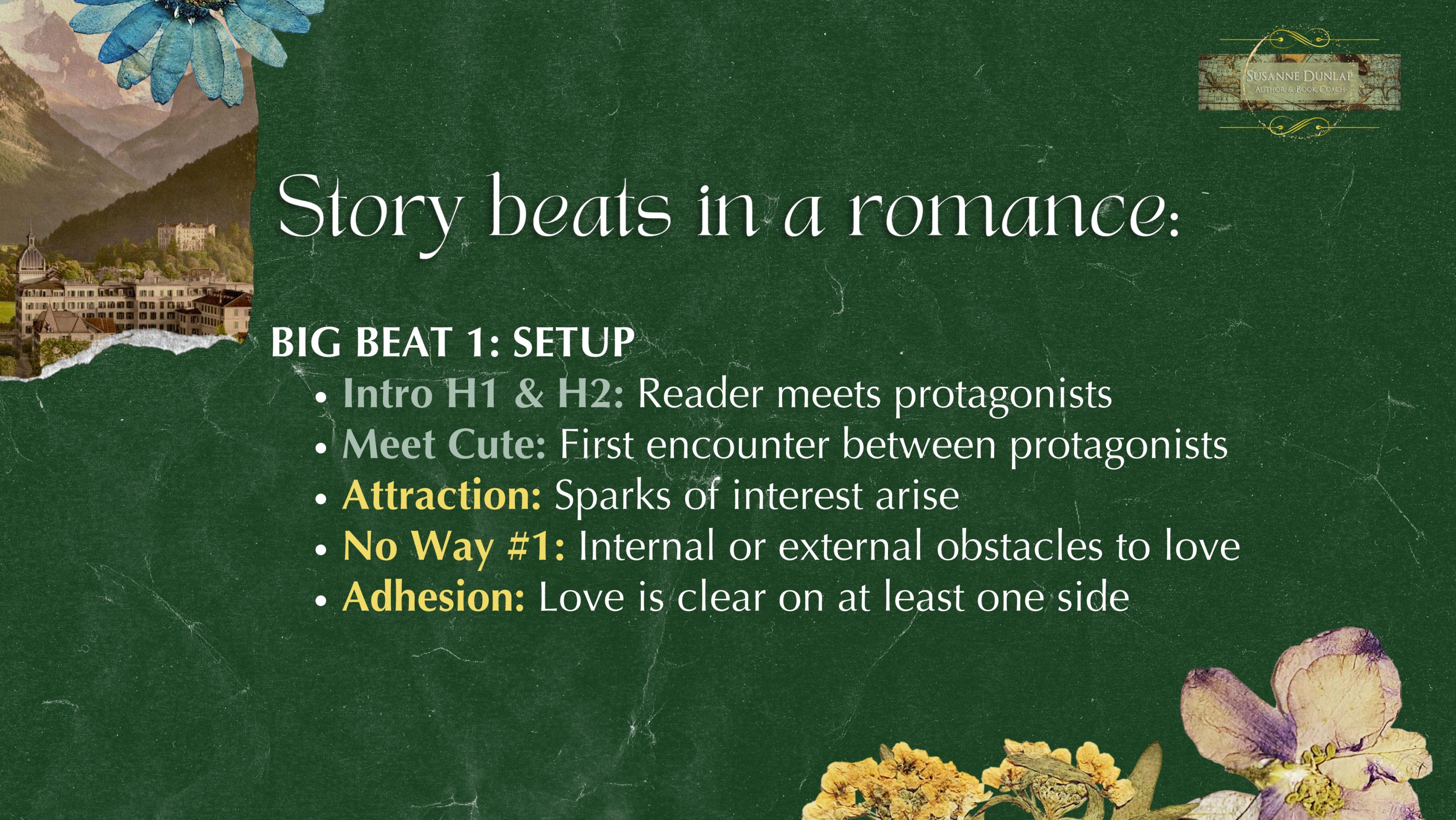
- **The Hook:** Audience attention grabber
- **Inciting Incident:** Disruption that sets the plot in motion
- **Rising Action:** Events that intensify the tension and stakes
- **Introduction of the Antagonist:** The reveal of the main threat

# Story beats in a thriller:

- **Complications:** Unexpected twists and obstacles that hinder the protagonist
- **Red Herrings:** False leads or misleading clues
- **Mounting Pressure:** Ticking clock
- **Setbacks:** All is lost
- **The Big Reveal:** A revelation that changes the understanding of the story

# Story beats in a thriller:

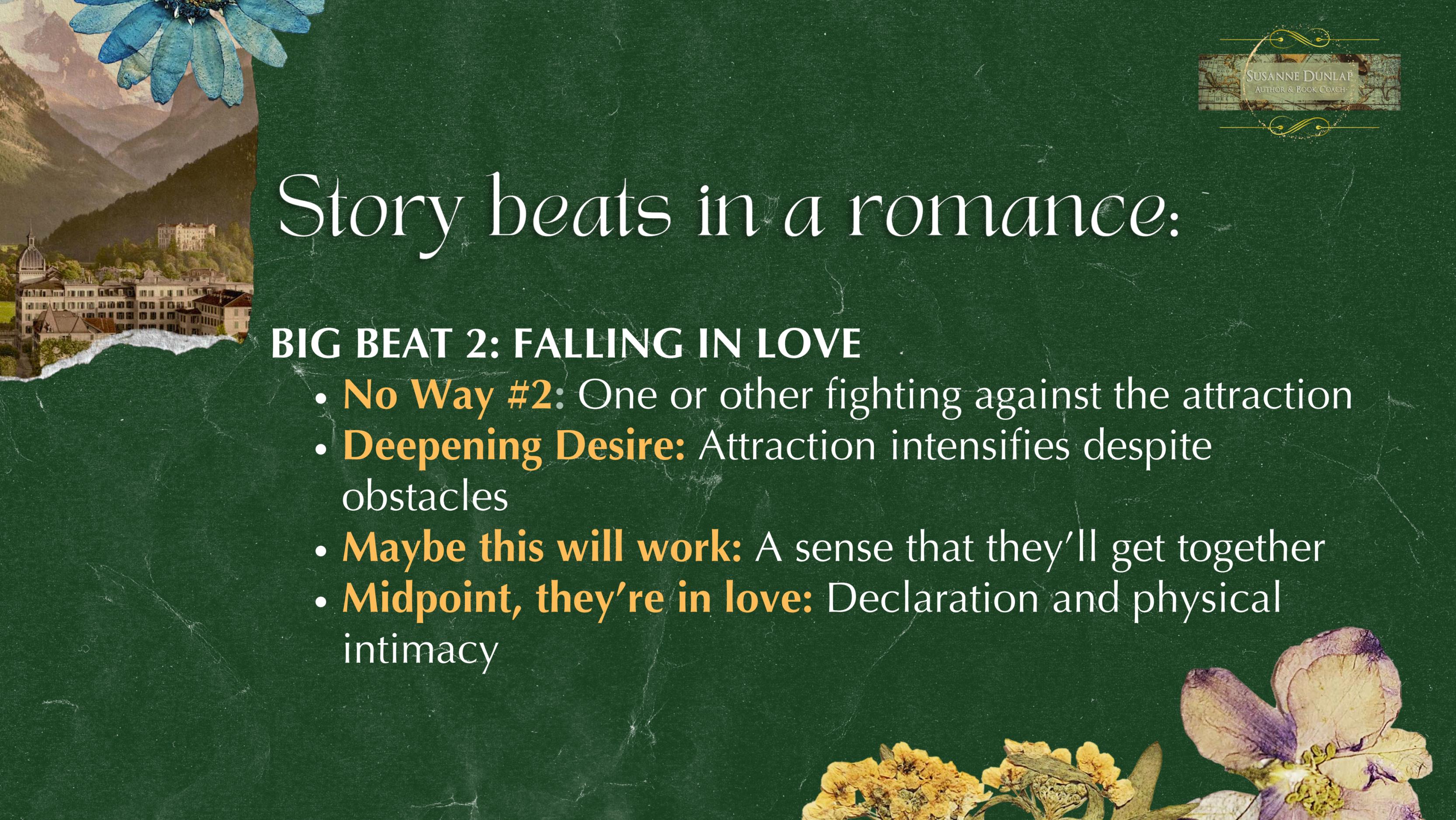
- **Race Against Time:** A high-stakes climax
- **Final Confrontation:** The ultimate showdown
- **Resolution:** Tying up loose ends and showing the aftermath
- **Potential Twist Ending:** A final surprise or ambiguous conclusion



# Story beats in a romance:

## BIG BEAT 1: SETUP

- **Intro H1 & H2:** Reader meets protagonists
- **Meet Cute:** First encounter between protagonists
- **Attraction:** Sparks of interest arise
- **No Way #1:** Internal or external obstacles to love
- **Adhesion:** Love is clear on at least one side



# Story beats in a romance:

## BIG BEAT 2: FALLING IN LOVE

- **No Way #2:** One or other fighting against the attraction
- **Deepening Desire:** Attraction intensifies despite obstacles
- **Maybe this will work:** A sense that they'll get together
- **Midpoint, they're in love:** Declaration and physical intimacy



# Story beats in a romance:

## **BIG BEAT 3: RETREATING FROM LOVE**

- **Inkling/deepening of doubt:** Something happens to make one or the other retreat from love
- **Retreat:** Further complications that split them apart
- **Break up:** One or other decides to quit



# Story beats in a romance:

## BIG BEAT 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE

- **Dark night of the soul:** All is lost moment
- **Wake-up/catharsis:** Realization that love is worth fighting for
- **Grand gesture:** One of them goes out on a limb
- **Happily Ever After or Happy For Now:** resolution



What's the difference  
between thriller and  
romance beats?





Thriller: External/physical

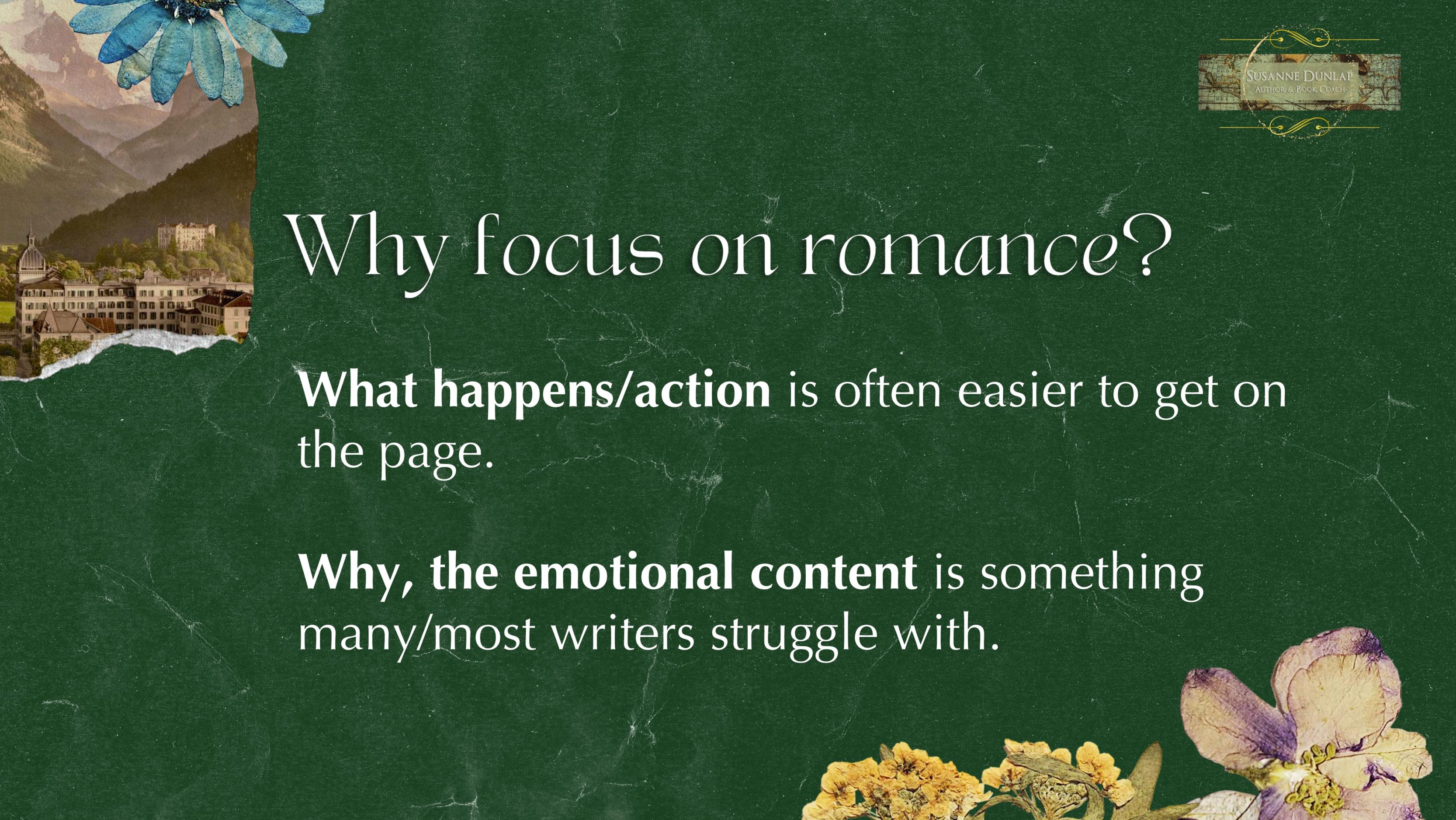
Romance: Internal/emotional



# What's the same?

- Accelerating pace
- Adding complexity to the story
- Leading to a positive outcome

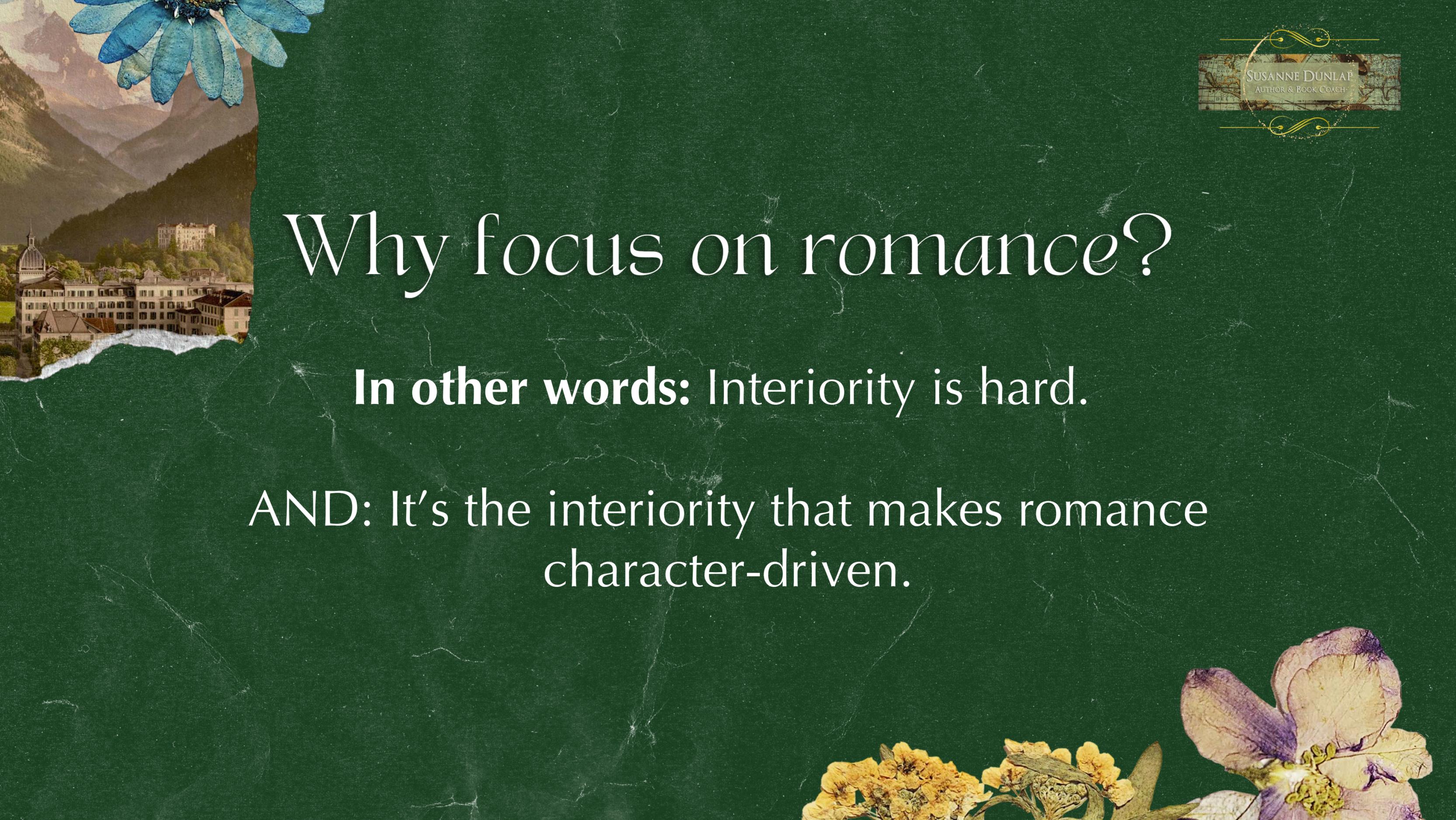




# Why focus on romance?

**What happens/action** is often easier to get on the page.

**Why, the emotional content** is something many/most writers struggle with.



# Why focus on romance?

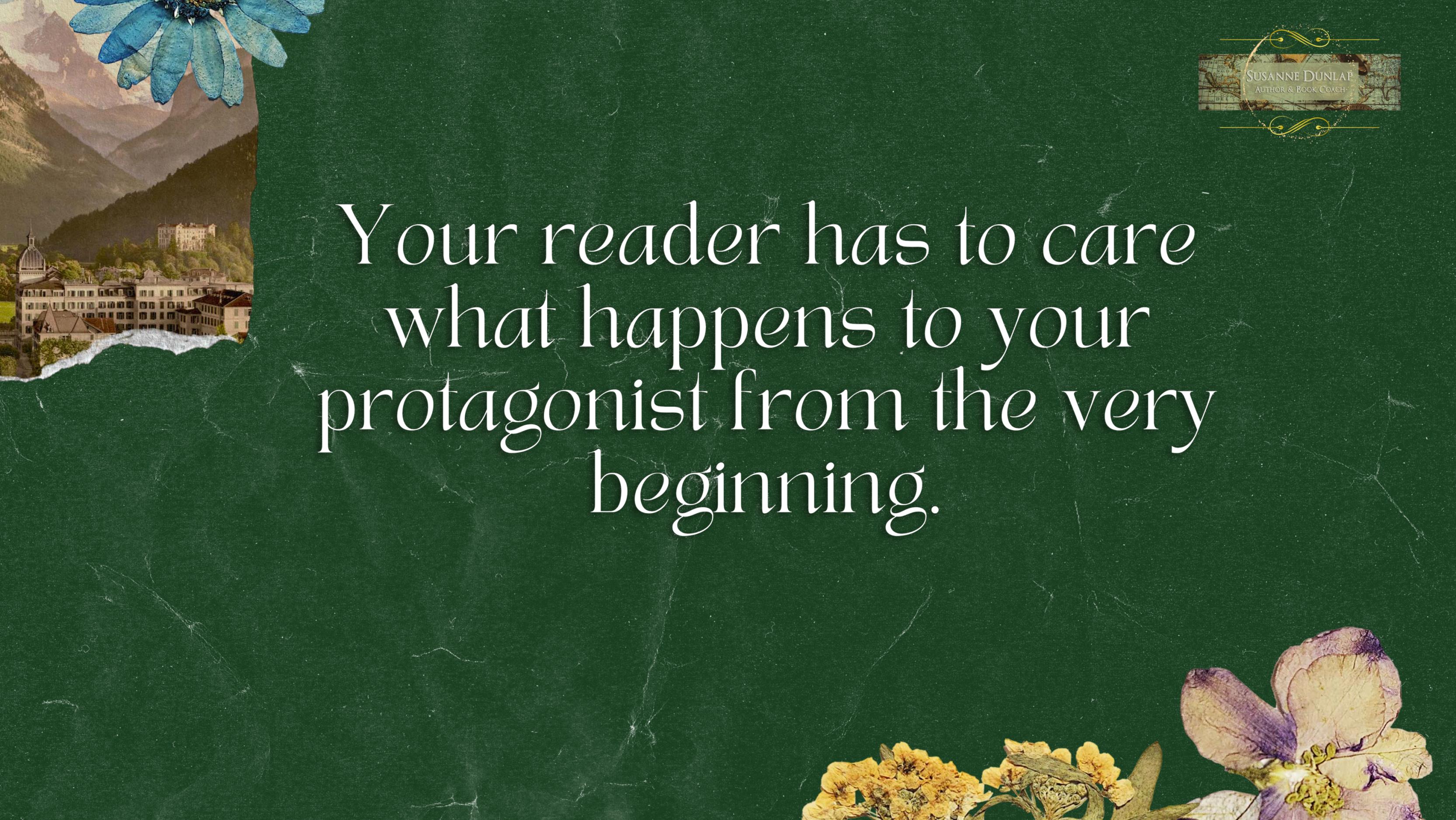
**In other words:** Interiority is hard.

**AND:** It's the interiority that makes romance character-driven.



Emotion and interiority  
start with the protagonist.





Your reader has to care  
what happens to your  
protagonist from the very  
beginning.



# Protagonist Basics

- Who are they on page 1?
- What do they want?
- What are the stakes?
- What stands in their way?





# Protagonist Basics in romance

- **Who are they on page 1?** Appealing, lovable, worthy of love even though they don't think so.
- **What do they want?** Love, even if they're not aware of it.
- **What are the stakes?** **Internal:** A lonely life, being unfulfilled **External:** Almost anything
- **What stands in their way?** **Internal:** Self-image, limiting belief **External:** a person, a circumstance





Let's break it down for  
your story.





Can you identify your  
story trope?



# Common non-romance tropes

- The Chosen One
  - Fish Out of Water
  - Rags to Riches
  - The Quest
  - Coming of Age
  - The Hero's Journey
  - Good vs. Evil
  - Man vs. Nature
  - Dystopian Society
  - Time Travel
  - Alternate History
  - The Underdog
  - Revenge Plot
  - Redemption Arc
  - Forbidden Knowledge
  - The Mentor
  - The Trickster
  - The Reluctant Hero
  - The Antihero
  - The Ensemble Cast
  - The Heist
  - The Conspiracy
  - Alien Invasion
  - Post-Apocalyptic World
  - The Chosen Family
  - The Prodigy/Genius
  - The Fall from Grace
  - The Transformation
  - The Sacrifice
  - The Journey Home
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Now let's see how  
elements of the romance  
beats can apply  
to your story





# Big Beat 1: THE SETUP

This is where you introduce the protagonist, the situation, the setting, the central conflict, and the mood of your story.





# Big Beat 1: THE SETUP

That means both exteriority and interiority right out of the gate. Showing AND telling.





# Small Beat 1: INTRODUCTION

Since love is the subject and object in a romance, the reader also has to love at least one protagonist—and understand what makes them lovable, and capable of love from the start.





# Eloisa James

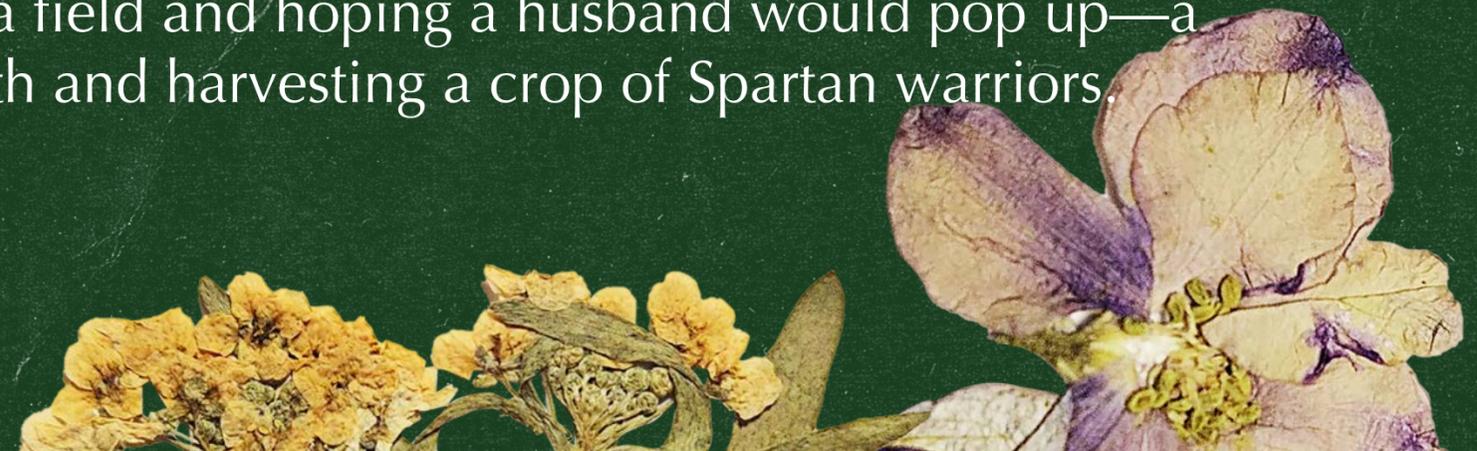
## TWO DANCES AND A DUKE

*April 14, 1814 Porterhouse Square, #38 Lord and Lady Sheffield's ball in honor of their daughter's debut*

It was astonishing how easy it was to predict the future. In a mere five weeks, Miss Beatrice Valentine had discovered that she had no need to gaze at the stars or into a crystal ball. She could make accurate predictions merely by peering at the ballroom from the shelter of a large fern.

*Query:* Will the lady dangling tangerine ribbons from her topknot drop her fan in front of the young man with the violet waistcoat?

*Prediction:* A probability of nearly 100%. The lady in question had already dropped her fan three times in front of various men, as if she were sowing a field and hoping a husband would pop up—a version of that Greek myth about sowing dragon teeth and harvesting a crop of Spartan warriors.





# Georgette Heyer VENETIA

'A fox got in amongst the hens last night, and ravished our best layer,' remarked Miss Lanyon. 'A great-grandmother, too! You'd think he would be ashamed!' Receiving no answer, she continued, in an altered voice: 'Indeed, you would! It is a great deal too bad. What is to be done?'

His attention caught, her companion raised his eyes from the book which lay open beside him on the table and directed them upon her in a look of aloof enquiry. 'What's that? Did you say something to me, Venetia?'

'Yes, love,' responded his sister cheerfully, 'but it wasn't of the least consequence, and in any event I answered for you. You would be astonished, I daresay, if you knew what interesting conversations I enjoy with myself.'

*Heyer, Georgette. Venetia (Regency Romances Book 18) (p. 1). Sourcebooks. Kindle Edition.*





# Sarah MacLean BOMBSHELL

...every time she tried to find a new path, one that led deeper into the gardens, away from the formal performance and toward the kind of entertainment that made for gossip and scandal and something to keep her mind from the emptiness in her chest, she was intercepted—ever waylaid from more reckless adventures.

Adventures more suited to her reputation: Sesily Talbot, walking scandal, buxom beauty, untethered heiress, and queen of recklessness, whom most of London called Sexily when they thought she wasn't listening (as though it was a *bad* thing). At twenty-eight years, Sesily was the second oldest and only unmarried daughter of wealthy, baseborn Jack Talbot, a coal miner who'd pulled himself up through the soot to win a title from the Prince Regent in a game of cards.

MacLean, Sarah. *Bombshell: A Hell's Belles Novel* (pp. 2-3). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.





# Bonnie Garmus

## LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY

Back in 1961, when women wore shirtwaist dresses and joined garden clubs and drove legions of children around in seatbeltless cars without giving it a second thought; back before anyone knew there'd even be a sixties movement, much less one that its participants would spend the next sixty years chronicling; back when the big wars were over and the secret wars had just begun and people were starting to think fresh and believe everything was possible, the thirty-year-old mother of Madeline Zott rose before dawn every morning and felt certain of just one thing: her life was over.

Despite that certainty, she made her way to the lab to pack her daughter's lunch.

*Fuel for learning*, Elizabeth Zott wrote on a small slip of paper before tucking it into her daughter's lunch box. Then she paused, her pencil in midair, as if reconsidering. *Play sports at recess but do not automatically let the boys win*, she wrote on another slip. Then she paused again, tapping her pencil against the table. *It is not your imagination*, she wrote on a third. *Most people are awful*. She placed the last two on top.

Garmus, Bonnie. *Lessons in Chemistry: A Novel* (p. 1). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.





# Exercise 1:

Answer these questions for your protagonist:

- Who are they on page 1?
- What do they want?
- What are the stakes?
- What stands in their way?





## Exercise 2:

Write a one-paragraph introduction for your protagonist that reflects what you wrote in the previous exercise.





# Small Beat 2: MEET CUTE

This is a staple of any romance or rom-com. Its power is in setting up the potential for sparks, for conflict, for stakes between two people.





# Small Beat 2: *MEET CUTE*

In another genre, this could be the moment your protagonist meets their nemesis, or an ally who proves instrumental in helping them prevail.





# Small Beat 2: *MEET CUTE*

This must occur near the beginning of the book. It can even be the first scene, combining with the introductory beat.

It **LAUNCHES THE STORY.**





# Sophie Irwin

## A LADY'S GUIDE TO SCANDAL

Into the silence came the slow creak of a door being opened, and a man stepped out of the other carriage. He was tall, with dark curling hair and a brown complexion and—unlike Eliza and Margaret's dishevelment—the only evidence of the crash upon his person was the angle of his hat, which had slipped from rakish to precarious.

He looked about the scene with an expression of mild astonishment, taking in first his driver, then the barouche and then, finally, Margaret and Eliza. "Do you mean to rob me?" he asked, more curious than alarmed. "Is this a stand-and-deliver moment?"

Eliza stared at him. Had she hit her head in all the commotion? "N-no, of course not!" she stammered out.

"Do you mean to murder me?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" Eliza said. What on earth . . . ?

"Then what the devil do you mean by it?" the gentleman said, brows furrowing. "I was in the middle of a very peaceful nap, you know."



# Sophie Irwin

## A LADY'S GUIDE TO SCANDAL (cont.)

Eliza gaped at him, speechless. Who on earth was this man? His skin suggested Indian descent—unusual in so rural a setting—and the private chaise spoke to affluence, so perhaps he was a wealthy merchant, en route to a nearby city? But a merchant would not speak to her in such a way. “We did not intend to!” Margaret said indignantly.

“He was driving at a shocking pace, milord!” The man’s driver, having calmed his horses, was now jabbing an accusatory finger at Tomley.

“So were you!” Tomley retorted.

“Shall we agree the fault was shared?” Eliza suggested hastily, before tempers could rise any further.

“That verdict feels a trifle premature,” the gentleman said, a smile beginning to curl his mouth, as if he were tempted to find the whole incident rather amusing. “Ought the jury not properly hear the evidence before we deliberate?”



# Georgette Heyer VENETIA

She had been making her way round the outskirts of the wood, and had paused to disentangle her dress from a particularly clinging trail of bramble when an amused voice said: 'Oh, how full of briars is this working-day world!'

Startled, she turned her head, and found that she was being observed by a tall man mounted on a handsome gray horse. He was a stranger, but his voice and his habit proclaimed his condition, and it did not take her more than a very few moments to guess that she must be confronting the Wicked Baron. She regarded him with candid interest, unconsciously affording him an excellent view of her enchanting countenance. His brows rose, and he swung himself out of the saddle, and came towards her, with long, easy strides. She was unacquainted with any men of mode, but although he was dressed like any country gentleman a subtle difference hung about his buckskins and his coat of dandy gray russet. No provincial tailor had fashioned them, and no country beau could have worn them with such careless elegance. He was taller than Venetia had at first supposed, rather loose-limbed, and he bore himself with a faint suggestion of swashbuckling arrogance.



# Georgette Heyer VENETIA (cont.)

As he advanced upon her Venetia perceived that he was dark, his countenance lean and rather swarthy, marked with lines of dissipation. A smile was curling his lips, but Venetia thought she had never seen eyes so cynically bored.

‘Well, fair trespasser, you are justly served, aren’t you?’ he said. ‘Stand still!’

She remained obediently motionless while he disentangled her skirt from the brambles. As he straightened himself, he said: ‘There you are! But I always exact a forfeit from those who rob me of my blackberries. Let me look at you!’

Before she had recovered from her astonishment at being addressed in such a style he had an arm round her, and with his free hand had pushed back her sunbonnet. In more anger than fright she tried to thrust him away, uttering a furious protest. He paid no heed at all; only his arm tightened round her, something that was not boredom gleamed in his eyes, and he ejaculated: ‘But beauty’s self she is...!’

Heyer, Georgette. Venetia (Regency Romances Book 18) (pp. 30-31). Sourcebooks. Kindle Edition.



## Exercise 3:

Write your “meet cute” between your protagonist and whatever other character serves the purpose of launching the story.





# Big Beat 2: FALLING IN LOVE

Your protagonist must start on their quest to achieve the want you established, and look as though it's going to be possible—despite setbacks along the way.

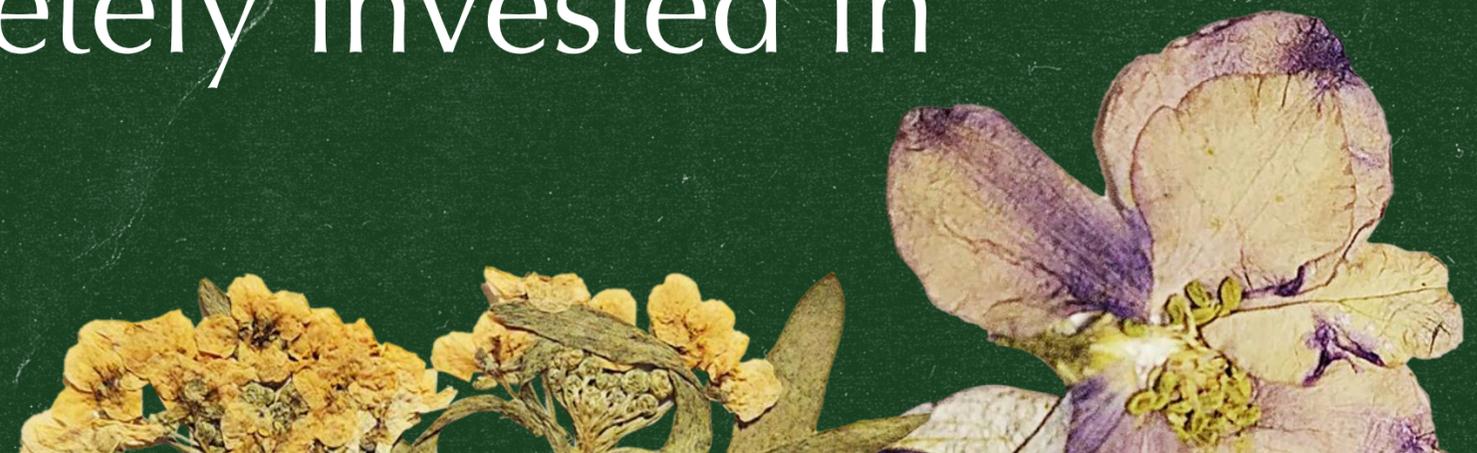




# Big Beat 2: FALLING IN LOVE

This beat, in romance, takes the reader to about the 50% mark.

Why? Because they and readers need time to become completely invested in the outcome.





# Big Beat 2: FALLING IN LOVE

And to have what happens to the protagonist really matter.





# Big Beat 2: FALLING IN LOVE

This process is packed with emotional content, which must be on the page or the reader won't believe it.





# Big Beat 2: FALLING IN LOVE

How do romances sustain this through half the book?

- One protagonist falls in love first
- Both protagonists are unaware they're falling in love, but the reader knows
- Introducing small complications and setbacks





## Exercise 4:

List some small complications and setbacks you might incorporate to throw in your protagonist's way in the first half of your story. Then describe the moment when the reader thinks it could work out.





## Exercise 4:

What are the aspects of the relationship you identified in your "meet cute" that intensify or evolve during this section?





# Big Beat 3: RETREATING FROM LOVE

A big turning point. A complication throws a spanner in the works, and throws the couple apart.





# Big Beat 3: RETREATING FROM LOVE

In any other genre, this is the point where suddenly what seemed possible now appears impossible, and the stakes amp up dramatically.





# Big Beat 3: RETREATING FROM LOVE

It's the pulse-quickenning moment in a thriller, the sudden reversal in a mystery, the unforeseen complication in domestic fiction.





# Julia Quinn THE DUKE AND I

He sighed, and in that moment he looked weary and sad and infinitely old. "I've already told you I cannot marry you."

"You have to."

Her words emerged with such urgency and force that he looked up, his eyes on sharp alert. "What do you mean?" he asked, his voice a study in control.

"I mean that we were seen."

"By whom?"

"Macclesfield."

Simon relaxed visibly. "He won't talk."

"But there were others!" Daphne bit her lip. It wasn't necessarily a lie. There might have been others. In fact, there probably were others.

"Whom?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "But I've heard rumblings. By tomorrow it will be all over London." Simon swore so viciously that Daphne actually took a step back.

"If you don't marry me," she said in a low voice, "I will be ruined."



# Mary Balogh SLIGHTLY MARRIED

“Perhaps,” she said softly, “women who are already traveling with the armies and know what to expect of the life.”

“Perhaps,” he agreed.

Her jaw tightened and her voice dropped in volume. “Were you betrothed to her?”

“No, of course not,” he said.

“There were expectations, though,” she said. “An understanding, perhaps? Similar to, if different in detail from, the one I had with John—with Viscount Denson?”

“There was never an understanding,” he said.

She continued to stare at him.

“Not a verbal one,” he said. “Nothing had been spoken between us, Eve. And nothing had been spoken between the general and me. There was merely perhaps a . . . a—”

“An expectation,” she said.

“Perhaps.”

“And yet you dared accuse me of lying when I did not tell you about Viscount Denson?”

“I had not bedded Miss Knapp,” he said.



# Mary Balogh SLIGHTLY MARRIED (cont.)

She recoiled almost as if he had struck her. He had not meant it like that. He had merely meant to suggest that the secret she had kept from him had been of more significance than his secret because she had loved the man and committed her very body to him.

“Eve—” he said, but she had turned sharply away and was hurrying over to rejoin Freyja and Alleyne, who were in conversation with some chance-met acquaintances.

Lord! Aidan thought. Deuce take it, could there never be any lasting peace between them? But did it matter when in a few days’ time they would no longer be together? It mattered, he thought unwillingly. It mattered.

Balogh, Mary. *Slightly Married* (Bedwyn Saga Book 1) (pp. 251-252). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



# Georgette Heyer REGENCY BUCK

“I shall take leave to tell you that this guardianship, which was foisted on to my shoulders, and which has been from the outset a source of trouble and annoyance to me, comprises more than the mere management of your fortune. You had the goodness once, Miss Taverner, to inform me that you were glad you were not my daughter. So am I glad, but however little I may relish the post I stand to you in the place of a father, and if you do not obey me I shall be strongly tempted to use you as I have very little doubt your father would if he could see you at this moment.’

‘I have only one thing to be thankful for!’ cried Judith. ‘It is that in a very short time now it will be out of your power to threaten me or to interfere in my concerns! You may be certain of this at least, Lord Worth: once your guardianship of me ends I shall not willingly see you again!’

‘Thank you! You have now given full rein to your temper, and can have no more to say,’ he replied, and turned, and held open the door. ‘Your chaise should be ready by this time, ma’am.’

Heyer, Georgette. *Regency Buck* (Alastair-Audley Book 3) (p. 275). Sourcebooks. Kindle Edition.



## Exercise 5:

What is that big inflection point in your story where it looks like your protagonist is going to fail and nothing will work out as hoped?





# Exercise 5:

Which characters are in that scene, and what's going on in each of them emotionally?





# Big Beat 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE

Something happens that turns one of the protagonists back toward wanting the relationship to work out.





# Big Beat 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE

The action accelerates, and there are steps here that keep readers flipping pages hopefully through the little beats.





# Big Beat 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE

Little Beat 1: Dark Night of the Soul





# Big Beat 4: FIGHTING FOR LOVE

Little Beat 1: Dark Night of the Soul

Can be external or internal.





# Laura Kinsale

## FLOWERS FROM THE STORM

He turned his head, his lips against her cold ear. He held her hard because he thought he was going to weep. She stood steadily. Her hand crept up and found his, locking fingers.

“My write—my letter—it was...bad. I think...it was bad. Mistakes. Stupid!”

“Next time,” she said, “I will look at thy writing first, if thou wish it.” A comfortable, unremarkable, Maddygirl answer. She looked forward, instead of back. Next time. Next time we will do better. He was responsible for her. He had to do better. Far better. He had to be perfect, so no one could doubt him. So no one could steal his life, no one could take her, no one could lay hands on him and lock him back in that place.

“Maddy. Hearing...got...I...” He broke off in frustration. The way his speech disintegrated under attention and strenuous effort terrified him more than anything: he knew that when he was judged again, he would want it so fiercely he would drive it away. “Fail. Too...strain. Idiot!”

Kinsale, Laura. *Flowers from the Storm* (pp. 373-374). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.



# Laura Kinsale

## FLOWERS FROM THE STORM (cont.)

“Sometimes—” She paused, and then said, “Sometimes, thou art capable.”

He groaned and tilted his head back to the wall. “Why not...now? Hearing—” He groaned again.

“Never!” She lifted her arms and crossed them over his. “I wish thou couldst exercise and drill, to make thee easier.”

He could attempt it. But there was nothing that would accustom him to the pressure of unexpected demands, the ordeal of critical eyes on him. Nothing.

He looked out on the empty valley and the ridges: Jervaulx, that he loved, that he had known all his life—a secure and precarious refuge. He was vulnerable here, but he didn’t know what else to do, where to go that would be safe.

She touched his hand, folding it into her cold fingers. He turned his face to her throat, kissing her, warming her with himself, burning away fear with the flame that blazed instantly between them.



# Georgette Heyer VENETIA

'My Uncle Hendred – my uncle by marriage, I should say. Damerel, he wishes to take me to London, and at once!'

'I see,' he said, after a moment's silence. 'Well – thus ends a charming autumn idyll, eh?'

'Do you think that that is what I came to say to you?' she asked.

He glanced at her, his eyes a little narrowed. 'Probably not. It is the truth, however. Unpleasant, I grant, but still the truth.'

She felt as though the blood in her veins was slowly turning to ice. He had turned abruptly away, and walked over to the window; her eyes followed him, but she did not speak. He said harshly: 'Yes, it's the end of an idyll. It has been a golden autumn, hasn't it? In another week there won't be a leaf left hanging to the trees, though. Your uncle timed his coming well. You don't think so, do you, my dear? But you will think it, believe me.'



## Georgette Heyer VENETIA (cont.)

She still said nothing, because she could think of nothing it was possible to say. She found it difficult even to take in the sense of what Damerel, incredibly, had said, or to disentangle the wisps of thought that jostled and contradicted each other in her brain. It was like a bad dream, in which people one knew quite well behaved fantastically, and one was powerless to escape from some dreadful doom. She lifted one hand to rub her eyes, as though she had really been dreaming. In a voice that seemed to her to belong to nightmare, because it was so quiet, and in nightmares when one tried to scream one was never able to speak above a whisper, she said: 'Why shall I think it?'



# Evie Dunmore

## BRINGING DOWN THE DUKE

“You are afraid. Of a man managing you for a change, and I’m not referring to husbandly rule. In fact, I reckon you could exist quite well under draconian rules, because there is a fortress at your very core no one can breach with force. But I have breached it already; you have given yourself to me. Why not let me make an honest woman out of you now?”

*Because I love you more than my own happiness.*

Renewed determination was etched in every line of his face, and she understood that as long as he thought she loved him, he would not abandon this insane scheme. He’d sacrifice everything. He’d disgrace himself, become an object of ridicule among his peers, in the press. His home, his political standing would be lost, his ancient family line destroyed. He’d ruin his life’s work over a country woman. And inevitably, his infatuation would wane, and he would come to resent her, or worse, himself, for everything he had given up.

Dunmore, Evie. *Bringing Down the Duke* (A League of Extraordinary Women Book 1) (pp. 289-290). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



# Exercise 5:

Identify your dark night of the soul. What happens internally and externally?





# Little Beat 2: Awakening/Epiphany

Again, can be internal or external.





# Little Beat 2: Awakening/Epiphany

**Internal:** realizing their own mistake/misjudgement

**External:** discovering something that leads to a solution





# Georgette Heyer VENETIA

'Don't waste a thought on him!' said Venetia. 'Don't waste a thought on any of the eligible suitors you've found for me, dear ma'am! There is more of my mama in me than you have the least idea of, and the only eligible husband for me is a rake!'

Heyer, Georgette. Venetia (Regency Romances Book 18) (p. 320). Sourcebooks. Kindle Edition.



# Evie Dunmore

## BRINGING DOWN THE DUKE

“He is a rare man, not because he is wealthy, or powerful, but because he says what he means and does what he says. He could be a self-indulgent tyrant, and yet he chooses to work hard to keep everyone’s lives running smoothly, thinking of everything so others don’t have to. And if you, my lord, had but one honorable bone in your body you would help him carry his infernal load of responsibilities instead of acting like a spoiled brat.”

She all but spat the word brat.

Peregrin had gone pale beneath his pallor.

“Annabelle.” Catriona had wedged herself between them, her upturned face a blur.

“He does have a heart,” Annabelle said, “and I love him.”

“Annabelle,” Catriona said, “you mustn’t—”

“I love him, but I lied to him, and now he will forever think badly of me.”



## Exercise 6:

What is your moment of epiphany, when something happens or your protagonist realizes something that opens up the way to resolution?





# Other romance tips





Balancing and timing what the reader knows with what the protagonists know.





A lot of tension can be created when the reader can perceive something and the protagonist misses it.





Caveat: Be careful not to make your protagonist seem clueless! There have to be good, logical reasons why they can't see what the reader sees.





# Getting emotion and interiority on the page

## From VENETIA

To oblige her, Venetia took a macaroon and sat nibbling it while her aunt returned to the task of persuading her that solitary expeditions must never be undertaken by young ladies of ton. Venetia let her run on in her discursive way, for she could not tell her that she went sightseeing in a dogged attempt to occupy her mind, any more than she could tell her that she was never alone, because a ghost walked beside her, soundless and invisible, yet so real that she felt sometimes that if she stretched out her hand it would find his.





# From THE DUKE AND I

They had become the best of companions, their conversations ranging from comfortable silences to the wittiest of repartée. At every party, they danced together twice—the maximum permitted without scandalizing society.

And Daphne knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that she was falling in love.

The irony was exquisite... Come to think of it, Daphne thought, sagging against the wall, the irony was exquisitely painful.

...she did on occasion catch him looking at her in ways that made her think he might desire her... it was always enough to set her skin tingling and shorten her breath with desire.

And his eyes! Everyone likened their color to ice, and when Daphne watched him converse with other members of society, she could see why... But when they were laughing together, just the two of them poking fun at some silly society rule, his eyes changed. They grew softer, gentler, more at ease. In her more fanciful moments, she almost thought they looked as if they were melting.

Quinn, Julia. *Bridgerton Collection Volume 1: The First Three Books in the Bridgerton Series (Bridgertons)* (pp. 129-130). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.





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# From FLOWERS FROM THE STORM

He turned around suddenly, the motion caught halfway with a sharp steel clangor, his dark hair falling wildly over his forehead, the deep blue eyes intense, frozen cobalt rage: a caged and bound pirate, a brute at bay.

Maddy lost her voice.

He stared at her, silent. No flicker of recognition. Nothing.

“Thou!” Maddy whispered.

He lowered his face a little, looking at her from beneath his eyelashes. Wariness, anger, a deep and powerful passion—they were all in his face, in his stance, in the concentrated and uneven exhalation with his jaw shut hard and his unbound hand flexing open wide and closed, over and over again.





# Exercise 7:

Find a place in your manuscript (or create one) where your protagonist is experiencing strong emotions, and write a paragraph of their internal thoughts and feelings.

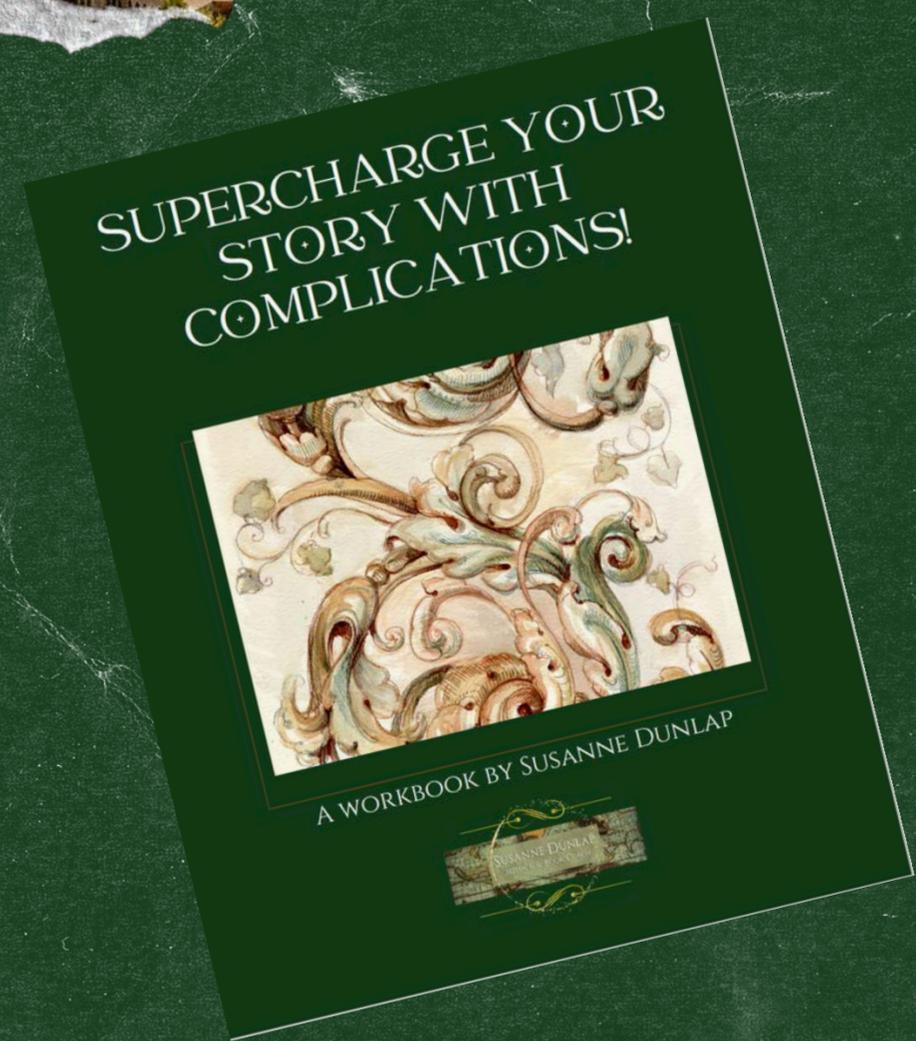




# Q & A



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