

# The Story Setup

## The Engine

By John D. Brown

# Going Nowhere?



**Roxie Hurlburt**

Co-owner, Mercer's Dairy

# Story?

“The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died, and then queen died of grief is a plot.”

- *E. M. Forster*

# How about...

The king died, and 3 days later the queen is attacked on some lonely road, and all but one her guards, an old guy, are killed. And she discovers the men were sent by Lord Bannock, a powerful, murderous man, who has convinced most of the court she's guilty of regicide and is moving to crown him. But she has to get her kingdom back because not only will she eventually be caught, but worse, if he's crowned, Bannock will slaughter her family.

# How about...

But how can she save them when she's on the run, and there are traitors and bounty hunters everywhere, and she doesn't know who to trust, and there's the one disgusting lord who offers help in exchange for (cough) "services", and some monstrous bear in the woods, and the only person she can trust with any power is a pirate captain who is an enemy of the state...

# The Story Setup

1. **Interesting Character**
2. **Something Specific to Gain\Retain**
  - **THOM R**
  - **Inciting Incident**
3. **Formidable Obstacle**

# Reader Response

“Something happened today—you are not going to believe this...”

“The most awful thing happened last hour with Brenda Novak...”

“Oh. My. Gosh. Did you hear? Susan met this guy...”

# 3 Types of Information

1. Hopes and fears
2. Anticipation
3. Puzzlement, mystery



# Hopes and Fears



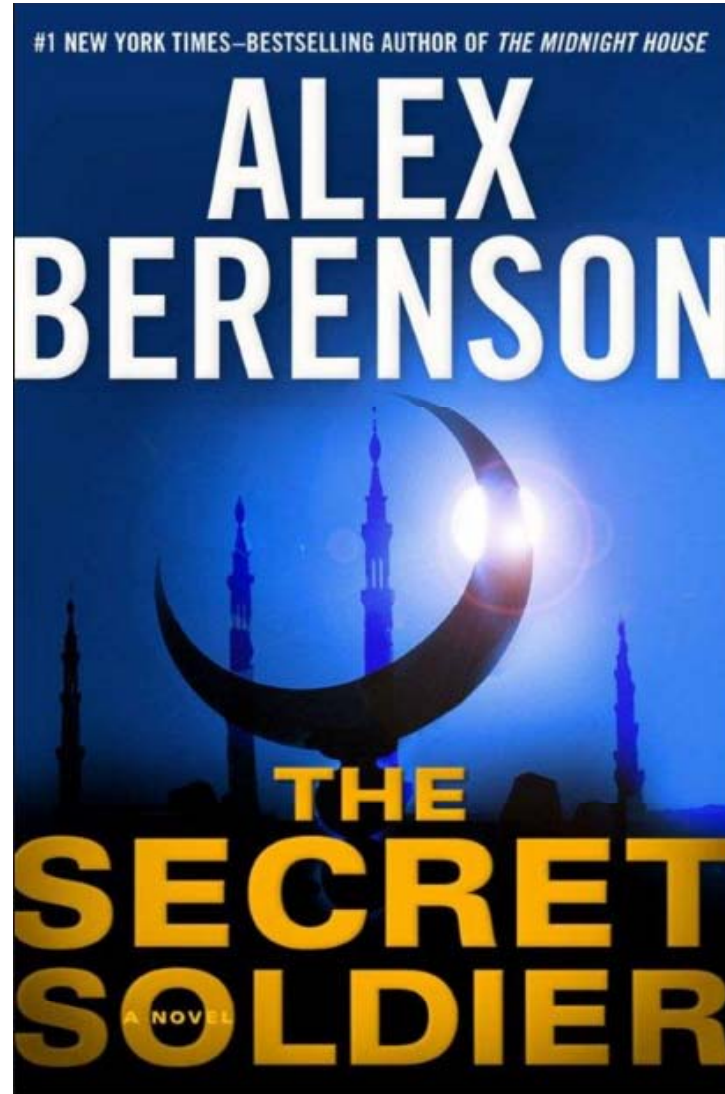
# Anticipation



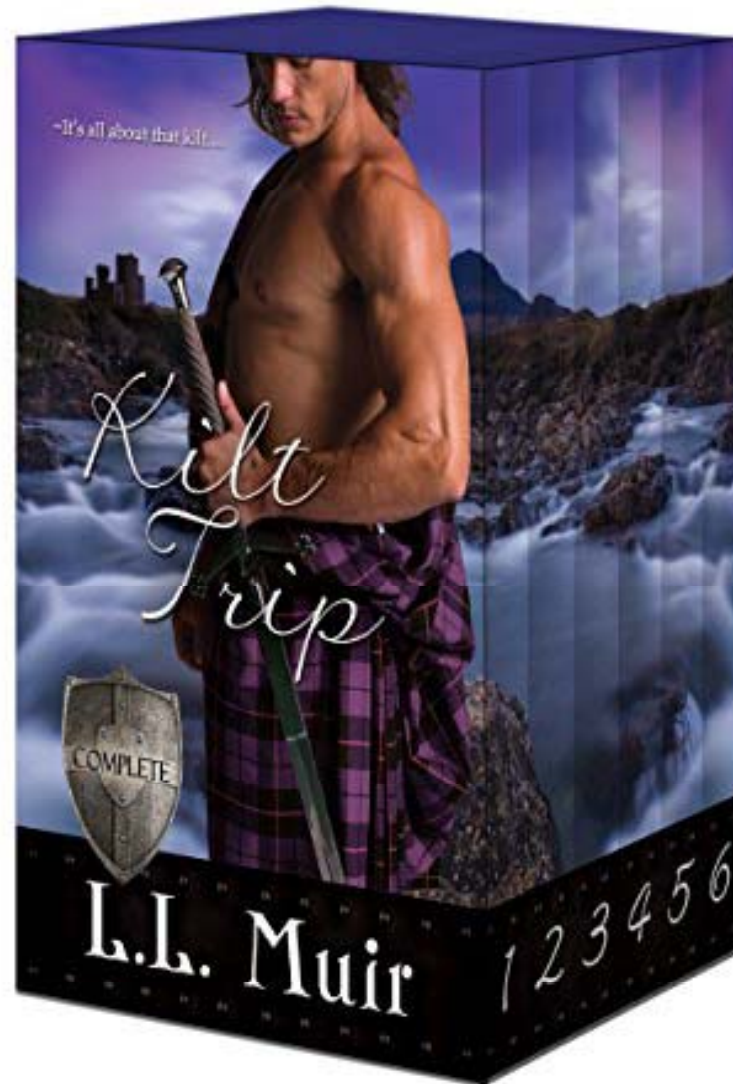
# Puzzlement, Mystery



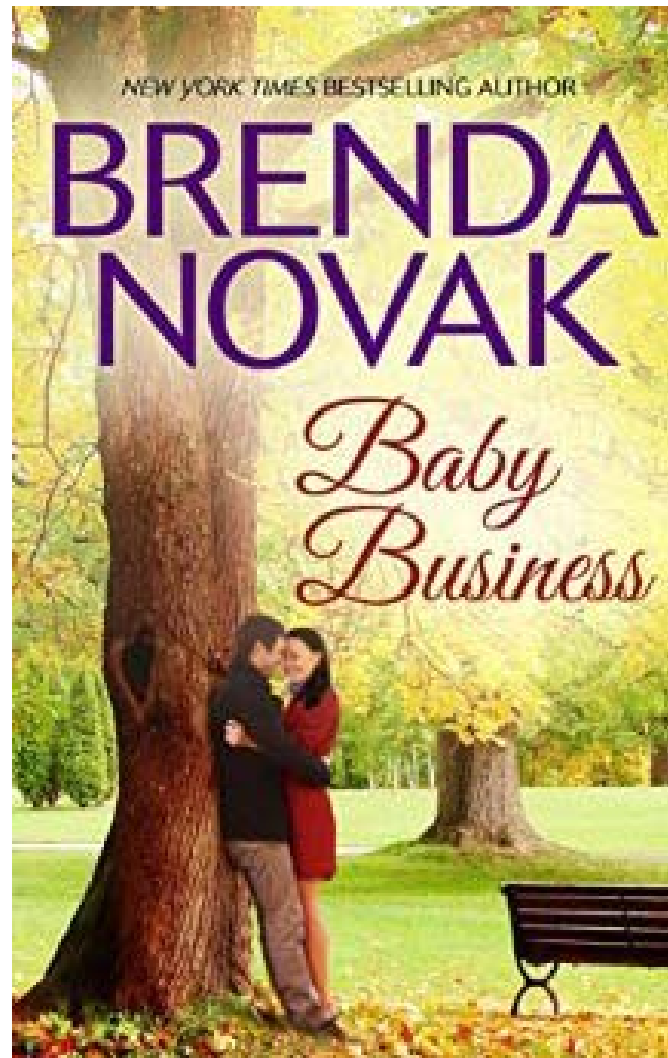
# Trigger



# Trigger



# Trigger



# Like a Rollercoaster



# To Start the Ride

1. An interesting character
2. Something specific to gain or retain
3. Formidable obstacle



# Triggering Desire to Gain or Retain

## THOM R

- Threat
- Hardship
- Opportunity
- Mystery
- Relationship

Significant enough  
Resonates with

# Threat

## An aspect of happiness in danger...

- Life
- Security
- Health
- Relationship
- Meaningfulness
- Freedom
- Ownership
- Self-respect
- Control
- Reputation

Significant enough  
Resonates with

# Hardship & Opportunity

**Already experiencing pain or lack or  
see an opportunity for happiness...**

- Life
- Security
- Health
- Relationship
- Meaningfulness
- Freedom
- Ownership
- Self-respect
- Control
- Reputation

Significant enough  
Resonates with

# Mystery

## Seeking insight for...

- Reward
- Justice
- Secrets
- Odd Events
- Understanding what's going on
- A key to gaining or retaining

Significant enough  
Resonates with

# Relationship

**A special type of threat, hardship, or opportunity**

- Friends
- Lovers
- Family

Significant enough  
Resonates with

# Formidable Obstacle

## Synonyms

- Trouble
- Difficulty
- Problem
- Complication
- Opposition
- Dilemma

# Why?

## Uncertainty

We don't want to know  
what will happen.

We want to know what might happen  
and worry about the possibilities.

# Making the Task Difficult

- **Conflict**

- Antagonist
- Others
- Things
- Self

- **Obstacles**

- Physical environment
- Cultural environment
- Objects
- Lack (knowledge, skills, resource, ability)

- **Pressure**

- Underdog
- Stakes
- Time



**A story is...**

**An account of the effort  
to gain or retain  
something specific**

# The Story Setup

1. **Interesting Character**
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# The Story Setup: Grandma

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, Roxie, sixties, gun-toting, tractor-driving, horse-riding, tough-as-nails widow rancher. Loves spending time with her little cow girl, ten-year-old granddaughter.
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	Gets a call that neighbor's dog has mauled yet another one of her calves. Goes over to demand dog be put down. Interrupts drug deal punishment with some nasties.
<b>THOM R</b>	Threat. They're coming after her.
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Life, security. Escape these specific murderers.
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	Doesn't have phone, out in a rural area. She's in an old pickup. They're in a new SUV. The granddaughter pops up from backseat, having sneaked in to surprise her.

# The Story Setup: Hotdog

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, twenties, Luna, dirt-poor but resourceful, working at hotdog stand, trying to save \$ for college
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	Attractive, teasing cop questions her about a crime that occurred in parking lot. He comes back later sans uniform showing interest.
<b>THOM R</b>	Relationship opportunity, with this specific guy
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Love, maybe this specific guy?
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	She's helping illegals. He's not a cop, he's an ICE agent.

# The Story Setup: Hotdog 2

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, twenties, Jane, dirt-poor but resourceful, working at hotdog stand, trying to pay \$ for college
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	Attractive, teasing cop questions her about a crime that occurred in parking lot. He comes back later sans uniform showing interest.
<b>THOM R</b>	Relationship opportunity, with this specific guy
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Love, maybe this specific guy?
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	Her brother's into drug distribution, and other things. She's got a record. She's got old ties. Including a criminal boyfriend from the past.

# The Story Setup: Hotdog 3

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, twenties, Jane, dirt-poor but resourceful, working at hotdog stand, trying to pay \$ for college
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	Her shack gets blown over in a massive wind. Humble guy wearing a cowboy hat helps her out.
<b>THOM R</b>	Relationship opportunity, with this specific cowboy
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Love, with this specific cowboy
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	Wants to escape current class, pursuing a life of high finance, New York, big city stuff. Is receiving interest from a rich boy.

# The Story Setup: Grandma 2

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, Roxie, sixties, smart, put together, but starting to forget things, manages ice cream co-op. Earning to help pay for daughter's cancer treatments.
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	She loses a deposit for \$30,000. Then an investigation shows something not right with books.
<b>THOM R</b>	Threat. Younger gal wants her job, is campaigning to get her out. She's accused of negligence, then intent.
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Find the lost money. Prove innocence.
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	She's only got a week before the board votes. Cops and younger gal are building a case. She knows it was stolen, but there are no leads. Only one that believes her is grumpy Ernie, who she grew up with.

# The Story Setup: Leap Year

<b>Interesting Character</b>	Female, twenties, Anna, successful, vivacious real estate stager, helping others envision home of dreams. Wants to be loved. Wants a man who wants her. That home life.
<b>Inciting Incident</b>	Father tells her about leap year tradition. Opportunity. She decides to go.
<b>THOM R</b>	Hardship. Fiancé hasn't proposed in four years, doesn't want to commit.
<b>Gain\Retain</b>	Love. Her specific boyfriend.
<b>Formidable Obstacle</b>	Weather diverts plane, then boat, and she's in the middle of nowhere. Has deadline. Countryside obstacles. Boyfriend doesn't want to marry.



# The Story Setup

1. [Name] is an [adjectives] [vocation] working for [hope or dream]
2. when [inciting incident occurs introducing THOM R].
3. Will she be able to [gain/retain specific thing]
4. when she must [struggle against formidable obstacle]?

# Roxie

- 1. Roxie is a mid-sixties, gun-toting, tractor-driving, horse-riding, tough-as-nails widow rancher who loves spending time with her 10-year old granddaughter.**
- 2. When she interrupts a drug cartel killing, the bad guys come after her.**

# Roxie

- 3. Will she be able to save herself**
- 4. when she is outmanned, outgunned, cut off in the middle of nowhere, and finds her granddaughter hiding in the back seat?**

# The Engine

1. **Interesting Character**
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**Before you  
strap your reader in for a ride**



**Make sure you've got an engine under the hood**