

## **Disrupting the Script: Narrative and Plot Progression in *the Accidental Husband***

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses the plot elements in the film *The Accidental Husband* directed by Griffin Dunne using a narrative approach. The study aims to identify and examine the plot structure, including exposition, starting point, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This is a qualitative descriptive study with primary data taken from the film's dialogues and scenes. The analysis focuses on the emotional development of the main character, Emma Lloyd, a radio love consultant whose advice unknowingly disrupts someone else's life. The findings show that the film uses a linear narrative structure, building tension gradually toward an emotional climax and ending with a happy resolution. The film also delivers strong moral messages about the impact of words, the importance of interpersonal communication, and the courage to follow one's heart. This study contributes to narrative analysis in film and supports literature-based learning using popular media.

**Keywords:** the accidental husband, plot analysis, romantic film, narrative, interpersonal communication

## **Introduction**

Learning English is not only about mastering linguistic structures, but also understanding cultural and literary expressions. Literature, in this context, becomes an essential medium for language learners to explore human experiences, emotions, and values through various forms of artistic expression, including novels, poetry, drama, and films. In modern times, film has emerged as one of the most accessible and engaging literary media, combining visual, auditory, and narrative elements to convey complex stories in a compact and appealing format.

Film, as a form of modern storytelling, plays a significant role in language and literature learning. Through watching films, learners can grasp vocabulary, contextual usage, intonation, cultural nuances, and more importantly, narrative structure. A well-crafted film usually revolves around a strong and coherent plot that sustains audience interest and delivers its

messages effectively. Plot, as the backbone of a story, determines how events unfold and how characters interact within the narrative frame.

This study focuses on the analysis of plot structure in the movie *The Accidental Husband*, directed by Griffin Dunne. The movie is categorized as a romantic comedy, portraying the intertwined lives of a relationship expert and a fireman through a twist of fate and deception. The narrative presents multiple layers of conflict, character development, and emotional dynamics, which makes it an interesting subject for plot analysis.

The purpose of this analysis is to describe and examine the narrative progression of the movie through its major plot elements, such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This paper aims to reveal how these elements contribute to the coherence of the story and to explore the values of honesty, loyalty, and love presented in the film. By understanding the structure of the plot, viewers

and readers alike can appreciate the storytelling techniques used in romantic comedies and learn how such narratives reflect real-life emotional journeys.

## Method

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method with a focus on narrative analysis. The primary object of the research is the film *The Accidental Husband* (2008) directed by Griffin Dunne. The analysis centers on the film's plot structure, aiming to identify and describe the major elements that construct the narrative sequence.

The data were collected through close observation of the film by repeatedly watching it and taking notes on key scenes related to the plot development. The researcher also consulted secondary sources, such as film reviews, articles, and academic references on plot theory and narrative structure, to support the interpretation. The analysis was conducted using a structural approach, specifically focusing on the classical plot elements: exposition, starting point, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. These components were examined in order to map the narrative flow and to understand how the story builds tension and delivers its message. The findings are then discussed to reveal the moral and emotional values embedded in the plot.

## Results and Discussion

Plot is considered the backbone of any narrative work, including novels, dramas, short stories, and films. It is the structure that organizes the sequence of events in a meaningful and coherent way. A well-developed plot helps the audience understand the motivations behind a character's actions and the cause-effect relationships that drive the story forward. Without a plot, a narrative lacks purpose and direction.

Baldick (2000) defines plot as "the pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected and arranged to emphasize relationships—usually of cause and effect—between incidents, and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience, such as surprise or suspense" (p. 112). This shows that plot is not merely a sequence of events but a

structured design that generates meaning and emotional response.

Lyon (2004) adds that plot refers to both the characters and the events that shape the narrative in a specific way, suggesting that plot is "mechanical and particular" in how it clarifies major events and character roles (p. 4). Similarly, Hodgson (2001) explains that plot is "the order of events in which the reader learns of them," emphasizing the plot's role as a narrative guide (p. 165).

Narratives can be structured in two temporal ways: flashback and foreshadowing. Flashback is a technique used to revisit past events and provide additional background, while foreshadowing gives subtle clues about events that will unfold later. Kennedy (1979) describes flashback as "a scene relived in a character's memory" and foreshadowing as "an indication of events to come" (p. 9).

According to Kriszner and Mandell (2008), flashback "moves out of the sequence to examine an event or situation that occurred before the time in which the story action takes place," whereas foreshadowing is "the introduction early in the story of a situation, event, character, or object that hints at things to come" (p. 69). These two narrative techniques serve to enrich the storytelling by layering meaning and preparing the audience for key developments. A similar analytical approach is demonstrated by Pratama and Desnaranti (2022) in their study on *Obsessed: A Plot Analysis*, which focuses on identifying and describing the elements of plot in a modern film using narrative structural theory. Their analysis provides a framework for examining plot divisions such as exposition, climax, and resolution in cinematic storytelling, which is also applied in this paper to analyze *The Accidental Husband*. As supported by Putri et al. (2022), traditional narrative structures typically follow a five-stage plot model similar to the one applied in this study. Likewise, Mahfian et al. (2024) demonstrate how film analysis can systematically map exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution in modern Indonesian cinema. These studies reinforce the relevance and applicability of narrative structural analysis in examination of *The Accidental Husband*.

In the film *The Accidental Husband*, both flashback and foreshadowing are used to

structure the storyline. Scenes from the past are presented to provide context, while subtle hints suggest future developments. This dual approach enhances the emotional complexity and narrative coherence of the film.

### Preliminary Exposition

Preliminary exposition is the section at the beginning of a story that introduces the setting, characters, and key background information. According to Baldick (2001, p. 90), it is where the audience is introduced to the situation and characters, often with references to prior events. Kriszner and Mandell (2000, p. 67) add that this part sets the story in motion, providing the foundational context for the conflict to follow. Similarly, Beckson and Ganz (1990, p. 83) describe it as the portion that sets the scene and offers the necessary background.

In *The Accidental Husband*, the exposition takes place in New York during a dry season, with scenes set in Emma's home, Patrick's apartment, a radio station, a bar, and a fire station. The central characters are introduced:

- Emma Lloyd, a successful radio host and author, confident and career-driven.
- Patrick, a kind-hearted firefighter with a close-knit circle of friends and a stable life.
- Sofia, Patrick's fiancée, who works in event planning and is a devoted fan of Emma.
- Richard, Emma's fiancé, supportive and polished in appearance.

The story begins with Emma receiving a call from a radio listener, which becomes the catalyst for the plot that follows.

### Starting Point

The starting point in a narrative refers to the initial trigger that launches the main storyline. Kriszner and Mandell (2008, p. 69) define it as the moment where the story begins and develops into subsequent scenes. Hornby (1995, p. 1164) similarly explains that the starting point is where something begins, often before the main conflict arises.

In *The Accidental Husband*, the story officially begins during a live radio broadcast hosted by Emma Lloyd, a relationship expert. A caller named Sofia contacts Emma's show seeking advice on her upcoming wedding. Emma, relying on her compatibility algorithm and intuition,

suggests that Sofia reconsider the marriage. This moment—though still calm—plants the first seed of conflict that shapes the rest of the story.

A key excerpt from their dialogue illustrates the starting point:

Sofia: "I'm supposed to get married this weekend and I'm having second thoughts."  
Emma: "Are you scared of being alone?... You know what's worse? Being alone with the wrong guy for the rest of your life."  
(00:03:29 – 00:03:45)

Although no direct conflict occurs yet, this scene marks the narrative shift: Emma's advice leads Sofia to cancel her wedding with Patrick, setting off a chain of events. The protagonist's involvement in others' romantic decisions becomes personal when consequences reach her own life, making this scene the story's narrative springboard.

### Rising Action

Rising action refers to the sequence of events that intensifies the conflict and builds momentum toward the climax. Forster (2000, p. 17) defines it as the development of initial conflict that becomes increasingly complicated. Croft and Cross (2000, p. 96) describe it as the series of struggles experienced by the protagonist, while Beaty (1973, p. 603) notes that rising action plays a crucial role in shaping dramatic tension through both external and internal developments. As explained on Answer.com (2009), rising action may also include secondary conflicts and obstacles that add depth to the narrative.

In *The Accidental Husband*, the rising action starts when Sofia ends her relationship with Patrick, following the advice she received from Emma during a radio broadcast. This breakup becomes the emotional trigger that leads to the central conflict. The following dialogue illustrates this moment:

Patrick : "I don't understand. You know a minute we're getting married, talking about names of our kids, and the next—because some fruitcake."

Sofia : "She's a doctor."

Patrick : "Of what, Sof? Of what? Talk to me, here."

Sofia : "Patrick, it's over. I'm sorry. Ok. It's over. I gotta go."

(00:07:43 – 00:07:58)

The rising action continues when Emma visits the Marriage License Office to register her upcoming wedding to Richard, only to discover that she is legally married to someone else—a man she has never met:

MLO : “You’re already married.”

Emma : “According to who?”

MLO : “According to whom. The State of New York.”

Richard : “That’s impossible.”

Emma : “I have never been married.”

MLO : “Then who is Patrick Thomas Sullivan from Astoria, New York?” –

(00:11:18 – 00:11:30)

These scenes represent the building tension and confusion that push Emma into a journey to uncover the truth, leading toward the story’s climax. The emotional intensity increases as the two central characters—Patrick and Emma—find themselves unknowingly connected by a mistaken marriage record.

### Climax

The climax represents the fourth part of plot structure and serves as the most intense moment of the story where major conflicts reach their highest tension. Kirsznner and Mandell (2000, p. 68) define the climax as “*a point of greatest tension or importance, the scene that presents a story’s decisive action or event.*” Hodgson (2001, p. 64) also describes it as the peak of emotional intensity, while Hoepner and Pickering (1962, p. 17) highlight its placement near the end of a narrative, often marking the pivotal moment that shifts the course of events.

In *The Accidental Husband*, the climax unfolds when Emma discovers that she is legally married to Patrick due to a forged marriage document. Shocked and betrayed, Emma believes Patrick has intentionally manipulated her life. Patrick attempts to explain the truth—that everything started from a radio call made by his ex-fiancée, Sofia, who was influenced by Emma’s advice. This misunderstanding intensifies into emotional conflict between them.

Key dialogue illustrating the climax is as follows:

Emma : Liar. Stay away from me.

Patrick : Emma, I can explain.

Emma : Yeah? What? This is no accident? There was no glitch? No. You are glitch.

You googled me, invaded my life.  
Invaded my privacy, ruined my relationship.

I almost called off my wedding for you. I trusted you! I had sex with you.

You’re just some sort of con man. Scam artist. Deranged fan.

Patrick : You know what? Don’t flatter yourself.

Emma : What have I done? Richard warned me about you. I warn people about men like you every day. I’m worse than my own callers.

Patrick : Emma, stop.

Emma : (Stops speaking)

Patrick : Thank you. Can I show you something? Please?

Emma : Do you know her?

Patrick : Yeah, you don’t. Come here. That’s Sofia...You told her to call off the wedding, Emma.

Emma : Patrick...

Patrick : Someone you don’t know and can’t remember, you changed her life—and mine—forever.

I guess I wanted to educate you about that.

About what it’s like to have your life ripped out from under you.

I wanted to knock you down a peg.

(01:02:34 – 01:02:50)

This scene presents the emotional turning point in the film. Emma realizes that her casual professional advice had serious personal consequences for others. The miscommunication and emotional outburst from both characters intensify the conflict before any resolution is possible.

Thus, the climax functions not only as a narrative peak but also as a moment of emotional reckoning for Emma, marking a shift from misunderstanding to realization.

### Falling Action

The falling action represents the stage of the plot that follows the climax, where tensions begin to subside, and the story begins to move toward resolution. Kirsznner and Mandell (2000, p. 608) state that the falling action “*records the outcome of conflict and establishes some new equilibrium or stability... The action subsides as the plot moves toward its conclusion.*” Similarly, Pickering and Hoepner (1962, p. 17) note that falling action is the part of the narrative that comes after the climax, reducing tension and guiding the story toward its conclusion.

Additionally, according to a source on literary terms, the falling action “is the sequence of events that follow the climax and lead to the resolution” (ContemporaryLit, 2009). These definitions underline that falling action is the transitional phase where emotional or narrative conflicts begin to settle, offering the audience a sense of closure.

In *The Accidental Husband*, the falling action occurs when Emma decides to return to Richard and reconcile with him. She visits his home and expresses her wish to continue with their wedding plans. Richard accepts, and their relationship begins to mend. Meanwhile, Patrick moves on with his life, returning to his routines as a firefighter and enjoying soccer with friends. This moment marks a shift from conflict to emotional resolution.

A key dialogue illustrating the falling action is as follows:

Emma : It’s beautiful.

Richard : I was just thinking how... how it’s too big for me without you here. Are you here?

Emma : If you’ll have me.

Richard : Do you mean you still want to get married?

Emma : I do, I do, I do.

(01:07:09 – 01:07:35)

This emotional exchange demonstrates the softening of conflict and the reestablishment of harmony between Emma and Richard. Although the situation with Patrick remains unresolved at this point, the narrative clearly moves toward closure and emotional balance.

### Analysis of the Story

*The Accidental Husband*, produced by Yari Film Group, is a romantic drama that explores themes of love, honesty, emotional conflict, and the complexity of modern relationships. The narrative is structured using a linear or progressive plot, where events unfold in chronological order without major use of flashback. This allows the audience to follow the emotional journey of the characters in real time, particularly focusing on the lead character’s internal struggle and transformation.

The central conflict arises when Dr. Emma Lloyd, a successful radio host and author, is faced with a life-changing decision regarding her impending marriage to Richard. Despite the

plans for their wedding being underway, Emma begins to question her feelings as she develops an emotional connection with another man, Patrick. Her internal dilemma escalates as the wedding approaches, leading her to seek guidance from her father, reflecting the importance of family support in decision-making.

Emma’s ultimate decision to end her engagement with Richard and pursue a relationship with Patrick marks a turning point in the story. The narrative culminates in a joyful resolution: Emma and Patrick marry and, several months later, Emma is shown to be pregnant. Despite the dramatic tension that builds throughout the film, the story concludes with a sense of emotional fulfillment and stability, reinforcing its romantic genre with a *happy ending*.

Beyond its romantic appeal, the film conveys a strong moral message about love and integrity. It emphasizes that love is not merely a matter of emotion or words, but also requires honesty, courage, and sacrifice. The importance of family is also portrayed through Emma’s close relationship with her father, who provides consistent support and advice throughout her emotional journey.

Overall, *The Accidental Husband* presents a narrative that not only entertains but also encourages reflection on personal values, commitment, and the role of trust in relationships. Its positive resolution reinforces the idea that genuine love often requires difficult choices and emotional growth.

### Conclusions

Beyond its romantic and comedic layers, *The Accidental Husband* offers several valuable moral lessons. The film reminds us that love requires honesty and courage, even when faced with uncertainty or unexpected turns. It teaches that every word we say—especially in positions of influence like Emma’s—can have profound consequences on others’ lives. Through Emma’s emotional journey, the film encourages us to listen to our hearts, but also to take responsibility for the effects of our choices. It also highlights the importance of forgiveness and vulnerability in healing broken trust. Lastly, the story conveys that love often finds us in the most unexpected ways, and sometimes, letting go of control is what allows genuine connection to flourish.

In conclusion, *The Accidental Husband* delivers more than just an entertaining romantic storyline; it presents a meaningful exploration of the unintended consequences of human actions, the complexity of emotional decision-making, and the transformative power of love. Through its well-structured plot and relatable characters, the film encourages viewers to reflect on their relationships, values, and personal growth. By combining humor, conflict, and heartfelt moments, this film successfully captures the nuances of modern love and the importance of listening—to others, and to one's own heart.

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