

PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES AND FLASHBACKS, OH MY! By Lynne Marshall©2009

(This first appeared on the **Love is the Best Medicine** Medical Romance author's group blog earlier this year. <http://www.medicalromance.blogspot.com>)

Warning: Gratuitous picture of a man in a kilt follows:



Now that I've got your attention, I'd like to impart a personal story about a prologue that isn't in my North American Harlequin release – ***Pregnant Nurse, New-Found Family 2008***. This story has nothing to do with men in kilts, but I couldn't resist sharing that gorgeous picture with everyone.

Back on topic now - There seem to be various schools of thought on whether to include prologues, epilogues, and flashbacks in our books, or to avoid them like the plague. As usual, I fall into the middle of this trend and feel all three techniques can be utilized in a good story, but should be doled out sparingly and not necessarily used in each and every book I write. Interesting that I should say that now, as I've suddenly realized my June 2009 book, ***Temporary Doctor, Surprise Father***, has both an epilogue and a prologue which weren't in the original manuscript. My editor thought I needed to explain something in the hero and heroine's past a bit more thoroughly right off, so I wrote a prologue. And at the end, she wanted to be left with a specific picture in her mind - that of a pregnant woman greeting her man back from his tour in Iraq - so I included that in

the epilogue. Plus, that book was a reunion story; flashbacks got sprinkled throughout, and were an essential part of telling the Beck and Jan's tale. There were other things that changed from my original manuscript in the revisions stage, too. But I digress.

SURGICAL INTERVENTION ON THE PLOT



My prior editor said the prologue I'd written for *Pregnant Nurse, New-Found Family* ran the risk of making the hero and heroine seem unsympathetic, "as the reader has not yet got to know a little of what makes them tick – apart from sex for the hero and peach daiquiris for the heroine!" Point well taken, but for those curious souls out there, I've posted that entire prologue on my website under *News and Articles*. I might add that prologue was also a finalist in the **Hook Line and Sinker** contest in 2004 under the title **Code Blue Kiss**. So it wasn't because it was poorly written, it was because of the "unsympathetic" light it initially shed on the hero and heroine.

I got crafty when it came time to revise, and of the sixty-six lines of the prologue, I extracted eight of them for the hero to recall, and eleven of them for the heroine to remember. I used those prologue lines to have both the H/H flashback in chapter one when they meet again for the first time since their one night stand.

Not the dreaded flashback, you howl!

Here's my rationale. If you had a terribly out of character "encounter" with someone six weeks before, and hadn't seen that person since that time, upon seeing them again wouldn't you automatically recall to that last encounter? Exactly! By taking eight lines and dropping them into the hero's point of view when he first sees Bethany and following up by placing eleven more of the prologue lines in Bethany's POV when she first sees

Gavin, I was able to communicate exactly what had transpired in the deleted prologue prior to the beginning of the book. It made sense, imparted important information, and it solved my plot problem. More importantly, the editor accepted the results, which made it a win-win situation.

If I had dropped the entire prologue into the middle of the first chapter as a flashback, it would have indeed slowed down the forward pace of the book. By picking and choosing lines that communicated the essence of the prologue and having strategically placed them in the first chapter, I'd solved my problem.

EPILOGUES IN ROMANCE BOOKS – Used or abused?



The epilogue is used much more frequently in category romance as we writers suspect our readers want to find out what happens a bit later after the actual story ends. It's almost as though we want to make sure that their happily ever after (HEA) ending wasn't a fluke. Sometimes, I admit, our epilogues border on sappy, but as readers and writers, we love to read them. Don't you want to know what happens after that final story crisis has been resolved and the hero and heroine pledge their undying love to each other? I sure do!

So that's my take on the topic. Scroll down for another gratuitous photograph of a man in a kilt, plus an offer that might just make your day. 😊

Keep scrolling to the next page



Here's that other gratuitous picture of a man in a kilt – not just any man – Ewan McGregor! OH MY!

If you enjoyed this article, or any of my posted articles, please leave a comment telling me so. The life of a writer gets lonely without feedback. And if you do leave a comment, I might send you a book! (While they last – I've got six hardback copies of India Grey's next Romance)

Love,
Lynne