

Act IV • BIG YES - NO

In this first pair of Act IV reversals—known as “What’s the Worst that Can Happen”—several landmarks occur:

- The hero, having embraced the positive thematic argument, makes a commitment to change. This sets up the resolution to the Private Conflict.
- Energized by this private (and usually unstated) commitment, the hero understands the need to be willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of the stakes character. This sets up the resolution to the Personal Conflict.
- The hero acts out of courage and does the gutsiest thing possible. This sets up the resolution to the Professional Conflict.

The hero meets with failure, but instead of licking his wounds, the hero keeps going.

- BIG YES - The Hero has achieved a substantial victory.
 - George McFly defeats Biff in BACK TO THE FUTURE.
 - In JAWS, Brody, Quint and Hooper head back to the shallows to lure the shark, who’s traveling with three barrels.
 - Rose has finally made it onto a lifeboat and is being lowered towards the water in TITANIC.

And then. . . NO - The Hero suffers a setback; it’s not fatal, but it’s really, really bad:

- In TITANIC, Rose jumps out of the lifeboat because she won’t leave Jack behind.
- In JAWS, the boat blows its engine.
- In BACK TO THE FUTURE, Marty tries to give Emmett a note about the future which will save his life (saving Emmett’s life is one of Marty’s goals); however, Emmett rips the note up.