

Tonight's email is on the topic of setting the scene.

A setting may be described as a mental picture. It is used to create a visual image that we romance writers use to create a sense of place. There are sounds that can be evoked and smells that can be remembered. Involving all of the reader's senses can help set the scene for the build-up to the climax.

No matter how flawlessly you describe a room, an island or a midnight tryst, the background of your romance novel should come through your character's thoughts, actions, and dialogue. A setting should only be used to begin the scene and create that sense of place.

A playwright once told Helen Haukeness, "You can risk three minutes without advancing the play's climax; more than that, and you've lost your audience."

While we are writing novels and not plays, we still must not risk losing the reader's attention. Use a descriptive setting to begin your scene, but don't *dwell* on description is the best advice for romance writers. Try to use action words in your descriptions so that your scene doesn't just sit there on the page.

Your homework is to look inside your refrigerator and write down the first five items that you see. Now describe each item in a way that will begin or set your scene. Try to use two or three sentences.

For example, you could write down the word *bread*. Your description could look like this:

Hungrily she devoured the crust of day-old bread, knowing that her struggle with poverty would end the day she married into Dave's fortune. She pulled her tattered sweater tighter around her body as the sun set on eastern Newark. Out before winter was all she could think about.

See how action words such as "hungrily she devoured" pull the reader into the setting? You can also tell where and to some degree when the story is taking place.

Have fun with this exercise!