

Tonight's email is on the topic of characterization.

Strong characterization is imperative in the romance genre. It is what makes romance readers loyal readers chapter after chapter. They crave getting intimately acquainted with our juicy alpha males and fair-skinned beauties.

Science fiction novels generally have less than developed characters, and detective novels falling somewhere in between. But in romance writing, we must have strongly developed characters.

Our character development is real writing. It is not an adjunct. It is not an option. We must learn to do it well or waste time on rewriting or plotting.

One of the best quotes on characterization comes from Norman Mailer: "It's when they become almost as complex as one's own personality that the fine excitement begins."

One of the biggest mistakes that new romance writers make with characterization is we overdevelop our antagonist (bad guy) and underdevelop our protagonist (good guy). Why? Because we tend to hate the bad guy so much that we "let 'em have it" with enough description and scenes to fully develop.

Now the protagonist is too much like ourselves, so we know the protagonist too well to develop him or her. We haven't fully separated the protagonist from ourselves to develop the character. Tonight we pull the protagonist out of ourselves!

Our assignment for tonight is to develop our protagonist by inviting him/her to our dinner table.

Take out a notepad and be willing to answer the following questions:

- 1) Punctuality: Will they arrive on time or be late? What made them late?
- 2) Appearance: How are they dressed? Are they wearing anything unusual? Did they comb their hair or do they look like disheveled? Any new scars or tattoos exposed?
- 3) Mannerisms: How will they interact with other guests at the dinner table? Where will they sit? Who will they sit next to? How would they react if someone accidentally spilled gravy on them?
- 4) Eating Habits: Are they a vegetarian? What will they put on their plate? Will they be drinking alcohol?
- 5) Conversations: What will they talk about? What questions will they avoid? Will they risk bringing up the subjects of religion and politics?

Good luck with your character sketches.