

How to Write Romance Heroes with Sex Appeal

Book II in the E-Series:

[The Secrets to Getting Your Romance Novel Published](#)

By Adrienne deWolfe

Winner of 4 Awards for Sexy, Romantic Heroes

WritingNovelsThatSell.com

Meet Adrienne deWolfe

A career journalist and publicist with more than 45 awards to her credit, Adrienne's fiction debut occurred with [Texas Outlaw](#), which broke industry records when it was nominated for two Rita Awards by the published authors of Romance Writers of America (RWA).

Since that time, each of Adrienne's [five Romance novels](#) has earned distinctions from reviewers and readers. For instance, three of her heroes won Knight in Shining Silver (K.I.S.S.) Awards from *Romantic Times Magazine*, and a fourth hero won the Avon Romance Reader's Poll for Favorite Romance Hero.

Not to be outdone, Adrienne's heroines have also rated high among readers, who have recognized her with the Honey of a Heroine Award (West Houston Chapter, RWA) and the Cameo Award for Strong Woman Characters (*Calico Trails Magazine*). The readers of *Calico Trails* also named Adrienne's third book, [Texas Wildcat](#), the Best Historical Romance of the Year.

Adrienne is a [popular speaker](#), who has lead creativity and [novel writing workshops](#) at conferences around the country. She created the curriculum for, and taught, [How to Write a Novel That Sells](#) for three years as an adjunct professor for a community college.

In her hometown, she has held the office of Vice President of Mentoring for the non-profit organization, Women of Visionary Influence, and she was appointed to serve for two consecutive years as a New Business Ambassador by her local Chamber of Commerce. She is certified as a Habitat Steward through the National Wildlife Federation, and she has trained as a Texas Master Naturalist through the Texas Department of Parks & Wildlife.

Adrienne continues to balance her time between her speaking, marketing, and publishing careers. She was a contributing writer for the non-fiction release, *A Preeminently Healthy Place, The History of Medicine in Travis County, Texas*, edited by Marilyn Baker.

Adrienne is a firm believer that "what you believe, you achieve." When she mentors aspiring authors as a [book writing coach](#), she draws upon her 20 years of training in Attitudinal Healing, which teaches that individuals can change their circumstances by choosing to look at their situation, and the world around them, from a new perspective. She is certified as a Peer Counselor and Group Facilitator of Attitudinal Healing, a program developed by psychiatrist Gerald Jampolsky, M.D., in Tiburon, California.

Visit Adrienne's website, [WritingNovelsThatSell.com](#), for writing resources, advice about novel writing, and publishing tips. You can also follow her on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Google+](#).

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And They All Lived Happily Ever After . . .

What is a Romance novel?

And what must a male character do to be classified as a “Romance hero?”

The answers may surprise you, especially if you are operating under the belief that Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* is a Romance novel.

Genre Romance novels always – without exception – have a happy ending. In the world of genre Romance, the ending is considered “happy” when the male and female protagonists have declared their love for each other and then have proven their commitment to that love by agreeing to a happy, life-long, monogamous relationship.

No other ending will do.

This e-book is devoted to helping writers of Romance achieve their own happy ending: publication in book-length fiction.

Let’s be honest: no writer would devote 6 to 36 months of their lives, researching, composing, and revising a 300- to 500-page genre Romance manuscript, if s/he didn’t have *some* desire to sell it!

For a writer, nothing is more exciting than signing that first publishing contract (except, perhaps, for watching a total stranger hug *your book* to her chest as she heads toward the cashier.)

Every writer should experience that bubbling, champagne-like thrill.

My goal is to help you write a book that will allow you to celebrate a rich and rewarding success. As a Romance novelist, you will be required to master many basics of fiction-writing, but none will be more important to achieving your first sale than characterization.

Specifically, you will be required to create a Romance hero – a man who is so irresistible, so alluring and endearing, that the heroine can’t help but fall in love with him.

More to the point, your *reader* must fall in love with your hero, because reader satisfaction is the secret to selling your next Romance novel.

This e-book will help you create a lovable – and *believable* – fictional man. The tips that you’ll find in these pages will help you make your hero “sigh-worthy,” even if the gentleman starts out as a bit of a tyrant. Or denies his feelings. Or enjoys ridiculous

pranks. Or runs from commitment. Or suffers an illness. Or is raising a passel of kids. Or struggles to communicate. Or buries himself in his work. Or has failed at love before.

In short, “realistic men” are desired as characters in Romance novels. Our task, as writers, is to know our target audience well enough to turn that diamond-in-the-rough-male into a polished gem, one who rises above his faults, thus proving himself worthy of the love of a real, flesh-and-blood woman.

Romancing the Reader: Know Your Genre

“Romantic fiction validates the belief that men and women can have meaningful relationships that are strengthening and healthy.”
~ Jo Beverly, Bestselling Romance Author¹

Romance novels are the hottest-selling adult fiction in North America.

For more than 30 years, Romance novels have consistently dominated the fiction industry. They make up a whopping 54% of all mass market paperback sales.

If you're an aspiring author who wants to break into the fiction market, genre Romance is a good place to start, thanks to the sheer volume of books that are published each year. For instance, the publisher, Harlequin Romance, sells 4 books *per second*, half of them internationally. In the United Kingdom, 20 percent of all fiction sold are Romance novels. In France, 12 million Romance novels are sold each year.²

Clearly, a vast reading audience around the world is willing to part with its hard-earned money to read a love story with a happy ending. But who are these people? Who is likely to read the book that *you* are writing?

According to statistics published by Romance Writers of America, the vast majority of Romance readers are college-educated females, the majority of whom (59%) are between the ages of 25 and 54. They often have professional careers in addition to a husband and/or children.

In a study published by the American Booksellers Association, most Romance readers (80%) identified themselves as happy in their marriages or long-term partnerships.

¹“News Flash! All Authors Take Note!” *PANdora's Box*. May-June Issue, 1995, pg. 26. The publication is compiled by the Published Authors Network of Romance Writers of America.

²The statistics in this paragraph were reported by the internet website, Wikipedia, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_novel.

Romance Novels are Classified as Category Fiction

Before we discuss the kinds of stories that Romance readers prefer, let's briefly review the types of fiction that will be mentioned in this e-book.

Category fiction – often called genre fiction – appeals to a clearly defined target audience that has specific reading tastes. The best way to identify a novel's category is to read the label on its spine. Regardless of where that book is shelved in your local store, the spine reveals the book's true genre and/or sub-genre. *Publishing houses define a book's category*, not book sellers.

As defined by publishing houses, adult genre fiction includes the following main categories: Fantasy, Science Fiction, Mystery, Romance, Western, Thriller, and Horror.

Of course, many genres have "sub-genres." In the Romance industry those sub-genres include Contemporary Romance, Historical Romance, Paranormal Romance, Romantic Suspense, Gothic Romance, Regency Romance, Inspirational Romance, Young Adult Romance, Multi-cultural Romance, and Erotic Romance (or "Romantica.")

Some sub-genres are further divided: for instance, in the multi-cultural subgenre, separate markets exist for books featuring Latina/Latino protagonists and Afro-American protagonists.

You May be Reading Mainstream or Literary Fiction

Typically, new authors write what they like to read. Are you reading genre Romance novels? If not, you may be misidentifying the type of book that you are writing, and that can delay your first sale.

The best way to determine what you are reading (especially if you read paperbacks), is to look at the book's spine. If some derivative of the word, "Romance," appears there, then the book is classified as a genre Romance.

However, many other fiction classifications exist with strong romantic subplots, even though they are not considered genre Romances. You must be aware that a strong romantic "subplot" is not enough to get your book sold as a genre Romance.

Why should you care?

Because for a first time novelist, it is far easier to break into the genre fiction market (especially the Romance market, due to the sheer number of books that your reading audience purchases each month) than it is to break into the Mainstream and Literary Fiction markets.

How Do Mainstream Novels Differ from Literary Novels?

The term "mainstream" is frequently used by agents, editors, booksellers, and professional writers (publishing insiders) to describe a novel that defies categorization. In other words, it doesn't meet the specific publishing criteria for Fantasy, Science Fiction, Mystery, Romance, Western, Thriller, or Horror. The spine of a Mainstream novel is often labeled, "Fiction."

While a Literary Novel also defies categorization, it is recognized for its beautiful prose. Language is the determining factor between mainstream and literary fiction. Acquisitions editors consider the writer's poetic style or "voice" as crucial as plot and characterization. The spine of a literary novel is often labeled, "Fiction."

And Now to Make Classification Really Confusing . . .

Insider jargon may also classify a book as a "cross-over" novel. In other words, the storyline appeals to readers in several different markets. Typically, cross-over novels are written by extremely popular authors who got their break in the genre market and have since started writing Mainstream (non-genre) books, which their loyal fan base continues to buy.

Because cross-over novels appeal to a broader reading audience, the books are usually shelved in multiple places around the bookstore. For example, the Harry Potter novels, by J.K. Rowling, were categorized by publishers as "young adult fantasies;" however, book sellers often shelved them in the fantasy section, the children's section, the young adult section, and, of course, the bestseller section.

Other examples of popular authors whose books have crossed over from the genre market to the mainstream market include Terry Brooks and Robert Jordan (Fantasy); Maeve Binchy and Rosamunde Pilcher (Romance); and Patricia Cornwall and Mary Higgins Clark (Mystery).

Unfortunately, publishers do not make identification of a cross-over novel easy for the reader. The spine of a cross-over novel can be labeled all manner of things, including "Fiction" and "Women's Fiction." When in doubt, consult your local bookseller, who can point out "genuine" genre Romance for you to study.

Why Do Women Read Genre Romance?

Genre Romance novels are one of those rare venues in which a woman is consistently characterized as “heroic” and is given power over her life. The story espouses traditional values that are important to females: family, home, love, and children.

Genre Romance remains one of the few bastions of fiction where a reader can turn, with confidence, knowing that in the end, the heroine will be given the emotional strength and physical resources to overcome great odds and *win at love*, no matter what may have thwarted the heroine’s happiness earlier in the book.

Like other types of fiction, Romance novels test the heroine, who is considered the primary protagonist. She must grow. She must prove her worthiness to achieve her story goal (love) by demonstrating nobility and bravery in the face of adversity, and sometimes, by sacrificing some other story goal to achieve lasting happiness.

In essence, Romance novels allow women the same sort of fictional “privileges” that, in other genres, are often reserved for the male protagonist.

Lover or Loser: What Makes a Male Protagonist a Hero?

One of my best-selling, Romance-writing mentors used to tell me that nobody wants to read a story in which the hero is cruel, cowardly or stupid.

Nobody wants to read stories about cruel, cowardly, or stupid heroines, either.

However, the average Romance reader will lose patience with your hero a lot faster than your heroine. Romance novels are fantasies, and the reader wants to escape into a world where she can experience the thrill of falling in love with a man who, in real life, might be the tiniest bit too scary to date because he's so bold, handsome, sexy, sophisticated, muscular, confident, witty, rich, powerful . . .

You get the idea.

Why Perfect Men Make Boring Heroes

Have you ever met the perfect man?

Of course not.

You won't meet him in a Romance novel, either.

Perfect people make boring characters. The essence of all fiction is conflict. Sparks have to fly between your hero and heroine. When they first meet, they are going to be antagonists. (Surprise!)

Your job is to develop the relationship slowly between the hero and heroine so that the reader can believe that these two antagonists are actually falling in love. Your manuscript will become a snoozer if your hero and heroine fight like cats and dogs in every scene, with no hope in sight.

By the same token, editors will use your manuscript for a pillow if the hero and heroine are chatty and cuddly in every scene.

Character growth is a requisite of good fiction. Both the hero and the heroine must overcome internal prejudices and external obstacles throughout the story until, in the end, they have satisfied the reader that they are worthy of true love.

While the reader doesn't want to read about the perfect man, she definitely wants to fall in love with a *worthy* man. Characterizing such a persona takes some finessing on your part. For instance, there's a fine line between characterizing arrogance and contempt, brooding and self-pity, mischief and immaturity, resourcefulness and deviousness, etc.

If your hero does something heinous – for instance, he ransacks the home of a blue-haired granny – you must take extra care to let the reader know *why* he committed this crime. The reason had better be a good one (example: he's an undercover cop searching for evidence to prove that Granny is the Torching Terror of Toledo.) The reason must be plausible within the context of your story, and the reason must make your hero sympathetic. If you fail to supply a plausible, sympathetic motive, then you've created an unlovable hero.

Unlovable heroes will cost you sales, especially when it's time to market your next book.

Why Brains are Sexier than Brawn

According to a survey published in *Romance Writers Report* (a magazine produced by the organization, Romance Writers of America), the most desirable quality in a Romance hero *isn't* his rippling musculature.

Most Desirable Qualities in a Romance Hero ³

1. Intelligence
2. Humor
3. Tenderness
4. Protectiveness
5. Strength
6. Bravery
7. Nurturing
8. Good Body
9. Independence
10. Attractiveness

³Putman, Eileen. "What Do Readers Want? Ask Them." *Romance Writers Report*. May-June Issue, 1994, pg. 39.

As you can see, bulging biceps and smoldering smiles barely made the Top 10. And yet, many aspiring authors throw a description of musculature and gleaming teeth into *every single scene*.

::Yawn::

The reader gets the picture. He's gorgeous. So what? Can he cook? Rear kids? Manage finances? Cope with crisis? Communicate with compassion? Etc.

A hero needs more than brawn and superlative bedroom skills to satisfy your audience. If you want your hero to win the reader's heart, he needs to be a well-rounded, red-blooded man – preferably one whose strengths and weaknesses are the perfect foil for the heroine's strengths and weaknesses.

Romancing the “Bad Boy”

Since Romance novels are fantasy, you'll often find bad-boy heroes topping the bestseller charts. This fact is not meant to imply that real women want rebellious, unreliable, ignoble or emotionally wounded men as mates.

Far from it.

However, the stereotypical “James Dean” character has a certain heart-tripping appeal for some readers, who enjoy romancing such a man vicariously through fiction, where such love affairs are safe. In many popular storylines that feature bad-boy heroes, the female's patience, tenderness, and pure, enduring love tame the male, polishing his rough edges, but only enough so that she can live with him in connubial bliss.

The appeal of the bad boy is very specific: he must be tough on the outside and vulnerable on the inside, because he has been hurt. Just like the stereotypical whore-character who gets redeemed at the story's end, the bad boy must possess a heart of gold, prove that he is trustworthy, demonstrate competence, and choose to mature.

If the bad boy behaves like a jerk whose remorselessness or arrogance proves that he is unwilling to be healed by a woman's love, then no female (fictional or otherwise) would be attracted to him for long.

To make your character appealing to Romance readers, your bad boy must possess heroic tendencies and a personal code of honor (which is usually considered warped by normal standards.)

For example, examine any James Bond novel. Ian Fleming, the character's creator, describes Bond as a British assassin, a human machine who is so physically and mentally tough, that he can survive any punishment. Bond efficiently dispatches anyone who stands in the way of his mission, elevating the importance of “Queen and Country” above his own life.

Yet not until Bond's character was re-interpreted by actor, Daniel Craig, is Bond ever shown gloating over the violent acts that he commits.

Another of Bond's personal codes of honor involves women. Although books and movies depict him as using and discarding females as quickly as he does bullets and their casings, Bond nevertheless physically protects women, even after they've betrayed him. Many times in Bond movies, his enemies cite his chivalry toward women as his weakness – a factor which usually creates obstacles to the successful completion of his missions. Bond will charge through the burning munitions compound, or the sinking ship, or the careening train to save the woman, every time.

Thus, females sigh over the bad boy while they cheer for the heroine, whose love has the power to civilize the hero, making him a better man and a worthy mate.

Falling in Love with the “Good Boy”

While it's fun for a reader to fantasize that her love can redeem a bad boy, a good boy usually gets the girl in real life.

Why?

Because good boys have strong moral values. They provide emotional security and physical protection. They keep their promises – a sexy attribute that elevates them above other men. (After all, what woman wants a man who plays games with her heart?)

A good boy is respected by men and adored by children. Women find the good-boy hero's noble, reliable, and generous nature appealing, because he is mature enough to commit to the responsibilities of marriage and child-rearing.

In my first novel, [Texas Outlaw](#), Deputy U.S. Marshal, Cord Rawlins, was the consummate good-boy hero. When his parents were gunned down by outlaws, twenty-something Cord became the surrogate father of his four- and five-year-old brothers, as well as the male shoulder upon which his only surviving female relative could rely.

Later in his life, Cord was decorated as a Civil War hero for his valorous exploits on behalf of Terry's Texas Rangers. He married a demure southern Belle who, unfortunately, died in child birth. Grieving his wife and baby, he became a loner, choosing as his profession law enforcement rather than ranching (his family's business). When the book opens, we learn that Cord cannot be bribed by money, gifts, booze, or sexual favors.

Needless to say, when my outlaw heroine, Fancy Holleday, first meets Cord, she loathes him.

When an obstacle arises, one of the key elements that separate a bad boy from a good boy is that the former will often resort to physical solutions first (like brawling or gun-fighting).

A good boy will first opt for a non-physical solution, like negotiating a truce. However, a good boy is not a wimp. Nor is he perfect. In the example of [Texas Outlaw](#), Cord goes on drinking sprees (when he's off-duty) to drown his grief over his dead wife.

Alpha Heroes: Why They're Perennial Favorites

Alpha Heroes remain popular in Romance novels.

An Alpha Hero is much like the proverbial “leader of the pack.” He is strong, independent, confident in his strengths, and unafraid of conflict. A natural-born competitor / aggressor, he knows what he wants, and he goes after it.

The Alpha has no compunction against speaking his mind. His conversations are direct and to-the-point, and his dialogue lines are delivered more like commands than chit-chat.

Rarely does an Alpha Male talk about touchy-feely subjects, and if he does, he does so only in a rare moment of emotional vulnerability (perhaps he's drunk). He disdains displays of emotion (other than happiness and anger, of course) because the underlying fear of any Alpha character is loss of control.

While the Alpha Male has sidekicks, he rarely suffers “equals” among men. The sidekicks tend to exhibit Beta characteristics, and the reader – as well as all the other characters in the book – knows that the Beta is slightly intimidated by the Alpha.

The Alpha wants to be in charge (or in control) at all times. The typical “man's man,” the Alpha is usually uncomfortable with displays of female emotion. He probably resents the way females use “waterworks,” especially if he has a tendency to let tears get under his skin. This weakness further increases his distrust of emotion, and especially of females, who use feelings as weapons. For this reason, the Alpha prefers the companionship of men.

To gain the Alpha's attention, the heroine has to be strong (“spunky” is a popular characterization), independent, assertive, and forthright. While the Alpha Male may tolerate a wallflower or a milksop due to his rigid sense of social etiquette, he'll do so only for a brief time. He would *never* fall in love with a wallflower.

The Alpha Male likes to be challenged. Thus, the heroine may need to be written with resources (wealth, prestige, intellectual knowledge, etc.) that rival the Alpha's own, and that the Alpha may even need to achieve his story goal. The heroine should be able to stand up for herself, going toe-to-toe (when necessary) with any male who seeks to bully or smother her, especially if that male insists he is protecting her for her own good.

This type of pairing makes the sparks fly. It also makes interesting story conflict with lots of opportunities for sexual tension.

Beta Males: Not Just Sidekicks Any More

Beta Males tend to be influencers rather than aggressors. They may be characterized as boyish or charming, with a special knack for putting women at ease. Often, they seek out the companionship of women, and they may feel more comfortable with women than with Alpha Males.

A “pure” Beta is likely to be social, gregarious, and accommodating. His secret fear is loss of approval. Therefore, he may be a pleaser. He may also be a smooth-talker who is likely to say what’s appropriate in social settings – rather than what he truly thinks or feels.

Betas aren’t afraid to talk about feelings (which is one reason why women adore them). However, if the Beta waxes too maudlin or self-pitying, he quickly loses all the Brownie points that he scored by being a good listener and/or conversationalist. Nobody likes a mopping, self-centered whiner.

Beta Males may be characterized as insecure, vulnerable or subordinate to a stronger, more domineering male. If your Beta is the *hero*, he’d better overcome that insecurity and confront the Alpha Bully by the end of the book. Otherwise, readers won’t consider your Beta “worthy” of the heroine’s love.

Writing the Male Perspective

Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus.

That book title by John Gray, Ph.D., pretty much says it all. Men and women do not think alike. You, being either one or the other, already know this fact. However, you may have trouble *writing* it.

When creating characterizations, avoid stereotypes bordering on extreme yin/yang personality traits. As in real life, no believable character can be totally evil, stupid, heroic, perfect, invincible, etc. You must craft well-rounded Protagonists, Sidekicks, and Antagonists, who are complex, compelling, and memorable.

If you want to make a female character sound like a man, or a male character behave like a subordinate, the following section will give you a good starting point. Please note that all examples of male/female behavior are generalities. Except where noted, I am illustrating pure Alpha Male and pure Beta Female personality types.

Communication Patterns

When creating passages of internal dialogue (thinking) and external dialogue (speech) for your male and female characters, keep in mind that men and women think, act, and express themselves differently.

Because women are physically weaker than men, women have been forced throughout history to express themselves in indirect or diplomatic ways to prevent beatings — or worse — by offended male protectors. Although many women have evolved far beyond this stereotype, a significant portion of the female population still operates from the socially conditioned belief that they are more "ladylike" if they speak softly and act demurely.

For instance, I've heard both men and women describe bold career women as "aggressive," "pushy," and "brassy" while men who behave similarly are described as "sharp," "tough," or "assertive." The connotations are vastly different.

Due to socialization, women may ask for what they want in a round-about way, rather than speaking frankly. (Examples: "I think I might like to see a movie tonight," she said. "Would you be too tired to see a movie tonight?" she asked.)

Men, on the other hand, speak directly, even bluntly. They use the imperative. ("I want to go to the seven o'clock movie," he said, or "Let's go to the seven o'clock movie.") Of course, the Beta Male, or the Alpha who wants to keep peace in his household, may address his lover differently than he would address a male subordinate. In such cases, the male might phrase his movie question this way: "I hear that new Woody Allen movie's a hoot. Do you want to catch a show tonight?"

Men and women use different phraseology. A strong male character will speak in assertive, imperative language beginning with "I am," "I will," or "I did." An Alpha female will do the same. (Examples: "I'm working late tonight." "I'll be home at 8 tonight." "The kids have to hitch a ride with you tonight. I work 'til 8.")

Beta males and females, on the other hand, will soften the aggression in their communications, beginning sentences with "I could," "I would," or "I might." (Example: "I could try to get home before 8 tonight, but I'm on a deadline at work, so you might want to pick up a carton of milk on the way home.") Did you notice how many words were used to get the Beta point of view across?

That brings us to another interesting statistic: on average, a woman will utter 7,000 words in a day; a man speaks only 2,000.

Another way to spot a strong Beta personality is her habit of ending statements with a question. ("That was a lovely picnic," she said. "Don't you think so?") Alpha males will ask questions boldly and directly, ("Did you enjoy the picnic?") but they will rarely end a statement ("That was a pleasant picnic") with a question ("wouldn't you agree?").

Men aren't prone to poetic adjectives. "I got a great deal on a bad-ass four-wheel drive," is a male description. "Our new truck's a lovely shade of salmon with luxurious leather upholstery," is more likely to come from the female driver. Since men are less likely to express themselves with artful adjectives, you won't find male characters waxing euphemistic, either. He'll say, "Sex was great." She'll say, "We made love all night long."

In scenes where you're writing humor, be aware that men crack jokes in language that tends to be cruder than women's language. For instance, men are more comfortable with graphic depictions of body parts, especially in the company of other men. While both men and women "cuss," "curse" and spout oaths, men tend to express their excitement or their anger more crassly than women do. In scenes where

you're trying to convey a character's lack of sophistication, wit, or civility, put cruder dialogue in the character's mouth and crasser thoughts in his/her head.

Men tend to classify topics of conversation into four categories: work, sports, sex, and women. Women have numerous categories of conversation, including spirituality, home/family life, feelings, hobbies etc. Can you picture Ian Fleming's James Bond yakking to Moneypenny about her grandbabies? Over a pot of tea?

Not in a million years . . .

Psychology of Men and Women

To make plot conflict believable (the forensic doctor vs. the wisecracking PI; the sexy space pirate vs. the does-it-by-the-book spaceship captain), your male and female characters must be evenly matched, psychologically-speaking. In other words, a stronger, bolder, more aggressive female needs a stronger, bolder, more aggressive male foil.

What motivates men? They take pride in knowledge. They're problem solvers. They focus on solutions. Miss Marple would never approach a murder case the way Sherlock Holmes would.

Women are consolers. They enjoy talking about problems (analyzing them) and sharing experiences. Men don't admit to problems. They're socialized to define "manly" as stoic and invulnerable – which is probably why men don't ask for driving directions or consult the instruction manual when installing electronic equipment. Can you picture Rhett Butler slamming back a shot of whiskey and asking Ashley Wilkes for advice about Scarlett O'Hara?

Nope. Me neither.

Men have been socialized to take charge. They vie for position. Deeply concerned with where they stand in the pecking order, men want the respect (or fear) of other men. Can you picture Aragorn, from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, abandoning the Fellowship of the Ring because his Elfin lover was pining for him?

'Course not. He would have been scorned by every character in the series – including Arwen (his lover).

Generally speaking, men are socialized to be more concerned with what other men think than about what women think. (Sorry, ladies.)

So when you're writing an Alpha character, keep this rule of thumb in mind: Alphas compete, and Betas cooperate.

Depicting Emotion through Body Language

Ninety-five percent of communication is nonverbal. Pay attention to your character's body language and make sure it mirrors who s/he is. For instance, a strong-willed, dominant, or proactive character will show authority by his (or her) actions.

He will interrupt, and talk more rapidly, loudly, or abrasively than the other person.

She will sit while others stand; lean back in her chair; gesture expansively; make direct eye contact.

Beta Characters (subordinates) show more passive behavior: they fidget, avert their eyes, clear their throats, make small gestures, wring their hands, nod in agreement, cross and uncross their legs, clasp hands in their laps, etc.

Self-confident, powerful Alpha males aren't likely to sigh or giggle. They may "redden" but they rarely "blush." They may stew, but they rarely "pout". Choose your adjectives carefully.

Since our primordial ancestors first learned to walk erect, males have traditionally protected women. Women, on the other hand, are usually the first defense for children. When you're writing antagonists, a quick way to showcase the despicable or despotic nature of a character is to create a scene in which a male browbeats a female subordinate or a woman unfairly punishes a child.

Writing about Feelings

Due to social conditioning, Alpha Males feel safe exhibiting only two emotions: happiness and anger. These aggressive, domineering men believe that anger makes them powerful, and that expressing any other emotion (doubt, resentment, jealousy, frustration, fear, yearning, relief, guilt, shame, etc.) is a sign of weakness. Thus, Alphas repress all emotions but joy and anger.

Women and Beta Males are more likely to exhibit nuances of emotion, such as the ones mentioned above. However, women are more likely to repress anger because they've been socialized to believe that outbursts are unladylike.

Alpha Males are less concerned with approval than with control. They want to establish dominance over other men. Beta Males (who are in touch with their feelings, compassionate about the feelings of others, or lacking in self-confidence) express themselves in ways that are not openly threatening.

A man or woman who lacks self-confidence, or who is struggling to be assertive in a potentially hostile environment, may express his or her needs and desires indirectly, diplomatically, or in passive/aggressive ways. In the negative extreme, these individuals may come across as manipulative, whiny, wishy-washy, unnecessarily strident, etc.

The caution here is that no character will appear "real" to the reader if that character is wholly black or white. How incredibly despicable Scarlett O'Hara would have been throughout the second half of *Gone with the Wind* if she hadn't vowed before God (and the reader), "I'll never be hungry again. No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill. As God is my witness, I'll never be hungry again."

Readers may not have approved of Scarlett stealing her sister's fiancé, but at least Margaret Mitchell showed Scarlett's motivation for coveting Frank and his sawmill.

As a writer, you can get away with more "gray area" when developing secondary characters. Although Villains and Sidekicks can teeter on the verge of caricature, remember that stereotypes make dull reads.

A true master of storytelling will craft Villains and Sidekicks with both redeeming and reprehensible personality traits. How dull Darth Vader would have been in *Return of the Jedi* if George Lucas hadn't written into the screenplay that Vader must yield to his paternal instincts and save Luke from the Emperor.

Characterizing Internal Dialogue

One of the greatest characterization tools available to a writer is the juxtaposition of internal dialogue (thought) against external dialogue (speech). Characters can speak with utter cordiality toward someone they hate and clue the reader to their real feelings during passages of introspection.

To make your men "sound" like men during introspective passages, remember that men don't participate in a lot of self-examination, self-doubt, or analysis before (or after) making a decision. (Think John Wayne.)

Women try to take into consideration the feelings of everyone involved before taking action. Afterward, she may worry about whether she made the right choice. The exceptions, of course, are your Alpha females, Anti-Heroines, and Villainesses (example: the magazine CEO and fashionista, Amanda Priestley, from *The Devil Wears Prada*).

When in doubt, run your prose by a trusted confidante of the opposite gender. He or she can let you know if your characterization rings true, based on the parameters you've established in your story.

Alphas at War: The Battle Between the Sexes

Conflict is the key to any good fiction plot.

In a story that focuses on the development of a relationship – often between two people who are leery of love – the conflict will probably involve the Battle Between the Sexes.

As I noted earlier, Romance novels begin with the hero and heroine acting as antagonists. They may spend the first half of the book trying to get the upper hand over each other; however, during this period, they are also trying to find the courage to rise above secret hurts so they can love again.

For instance, from the heroine's viewpoint, the hero may behave in a high-handed and insufferable manner. She may rue the day that she met him – at first.

But when the scenes are written in the hero's viewpoint, the reader learns of his tender feelings for his crippled kid sister, whom he has vowed to protect; or his fear of

falling in love when he thinks he may be called to war; or his unrelenting grief over the murder of his father, which has driven him to seek revenge.

Thus, the reader knows that Mr. Alpha has a good heart. It just needs to be softened by love.

Half the fun of the “Battle of the Sexes” scenes is watching how the writer cleverly paints each protagonist into a corner, until neither can deny their pent-up feelings for the other. When sexual tensions explode, the revelation of some deeper feeling usually results, proving to the reader that love is blossoming between two stubborn souls, and that the story is moving toward the all-important happily-ever-after.

Let’s look at an example of an Alpha Hero.

Always Her Hero
Originally Published by Avon Books
ISBN 0-380-80528-6

My fifth award-winning novel was a departure for me. In my previous Romances, I had written an Alpha/Beta hybrid of hero: strong men with relatively charming personalities and ironic senses of humor. All of them were strong willed, and they could each be high-handed when they wanted to be; however, their humor kept them from being impossibly arrogant.

In *Always Her Hero*, I decided to try my hand at an autocratic Alpha Hero. Of course, I gave the reader plenty of insight into his off-putting demeanor toward the heroine.

I guess I did a good job at making Michael Jones sympathetic, because Michael was praised as “the perfect . . . hero” by *Romantic Times Magazine*, and he got voted, “*Reader’s Pick for Best Hero*,” on the Avon Books website.

Story Notes:

The (blue) scene you are about to read, is abridged due to length. It starts at the end of Chapter Four (which is deliberately written as a cliff hanger, to entice the reader to continue reading Chapter Five). The book is set in the fictional town of Blue Thunder, Kentucky, in 1886.

Michael is the son of a preacher (and openly defiant of God, since God “took” his kid brother at the age of seven.) A university-trained medical doctor, Michael has long blamed himself for Gabriel’s death.

When this scene opens, Michael secretly fears he has contracted a terminal disease, one which none of his college-educated colleagues has been able to diagnose. To protect his ward/younger sister, Michael does his best to hide his condition. Michael also staunchly refuses to take a wife, because he is too noble to saddle a young bride with an invalid husband. Thus, every chance he gets, Michael shuns the heroine (Eden), with whom he fears he is falling in love.

Eden is also a healer, one who was trained by an Indian Medicine Woman. Following the death of Eden's father, her faith in her herbal knowledge was badly shaken. She is too ashamed to confide to anyone that she blames herself for her father's death. In the following scene, she is secretly contemplating Michael's medical books because she hopes to learn what she might have done differently to save her father from pneumonia.

The scene begins in Michael's viewpoint. He thinks he is about to meet his younger sister's new beau.

**Excerpt (Abridged) from *Always Her Hero*
By Adrienne deWolfe**

CHAPTER FOUR (Ending)

Thunder rumbled, and the gaslight flames danced in their sconces, casting wild, writhing shadows across the wall as Michael walked along the hall. The shades reminded him a bit too uncomfortably of a drawing from a college history text, one of naked pagans celebrating the Rites of Spring. Why he kept such garbage locked in his mind remained a mystery, since he needed a clear head to discuss courtship etiquette with Sera's new beau.

Gathering his wits, Michael rounded the corner— only to freeze in mid-stride on the threshold. Sera's visitor stood with her hands clasped behind her back, her attention riveted on the book titles that ordinarily would have held no interest for Sera or her friends. Even though the woman's back was to him, Michael would have recognized that cascade of russet hair anywhere. How many times had he seen it blowing in the wind through his dreams? How many times had he imagined its taste, its scent, its feel as it tumbled across his face while Eden made love to him?

His response was instantaneous. He grew as hard as any randy youth.

He wanted to believe his thoughts of writhing pagans had something to do with his lust; unfortunately, he knew better.

Christ, Jones. She's an innocent. She won't notice the difference. Walk into the room, exchange a few pleasantries, and get out. She'd have to be deaf not to hear you panting out here like a bull.

But Eden didn't hear him, thanks to the tumult of the heavens. Instead, she rose on tiptoe. Her tongue jutted in determination as she stretched her hand as high as it could reach. Somehow, she managed to grasp the first volume in

his medical set. The one entitled *Compendium of Ailments: Abrasions (Aa) to Hemophilia (He)*. The one whose dog-eared corners clearly marked the sections on cranial pathology.

His heart slammed into his ribs. Too unnerved to concoct a lie about which patient's complaint he might have been researching, he flew across the room.

He had to stop her before she learned his secret.

CHAPTER FIVE

"What the devil do you think you're doing?"

Eden spun guiltily at that rumble of ire. She hadn't heard Michael coming down the hall. In fact, she hadn't heard much of anything but the shrieking of her conscience and the hammering of her heart. Spying Michael's medical books high on the shelves in the family parlor had seemed like the answer to her prayers.

But guilt had made her sneak. How could she explain her interest in medical research to Sera without revealing her secret fear: that the herbal wisdom Talking Raven had taught her was faulty? That her own incompetence as a healer had killed her father?

"M-Michael." Thunder shook the walls, or did that quaking come from Michael's boots? "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry – "

"Of course you meant to pry. Prying is what females do best. And I have no patience for it."

He snatched the volume from her hand, and Eden winced. Looming over her, all muscle and menace, he practically steamed. She felt his heat like a furnace blast, flushing her skin and melting her nerves into a single, sparking puddle.

"I'm sorry," she repeated. Good heavens, why was he so angry? True, she'd been handling his personal property, but it wasn't as if she'd been tearing out its pages. "I was just curious. About, um, respiration."

"This volume is clearly marked A through H. Respiration would be in another volume entirely."

"Yes, but bronchial inflammation – "

"Are you ill?"

Her pulse tripped as his gaze swept to her bodice. How could eyes so ice-blue one moment burn so scintillatingly hot the next?

She cleared her throat. "No. Nothing like that. I was just – "

His gaze snapped back to her face. "Then kindly refrain from snooping."

She managed to gulp a breath. "I wasn't." Honestly, the man might *try* to be civil. She was his neighbor, after all – not to mention his guest.

A sudden suspicion, one having to do with Sera and her infernal matchmaking, crept through Eden's mind. Her gut clenched.

"I, uh, brought you a cherry pie."

His mood didn't improve in the least.

"For dessert."

Again, no reaction.

"Since Aunt Claudia's out of town," she prompted hopefully, "Sera invited me to dinner. She said it was your idea."

He raised a pitch-black eyebrow.

"It wasn't your idea?" she asked weakly.

"Not that I recall."

"Oh."

A moment of silence lapsed. Eden wondered if it was too late to slink under the rug.

But if Michael noticed her embarrassment, he didn't comment. He simply stretched above her, intent on shoving the volume onto an out-of-reach shelf. When his arm brushed her nipple, she jumped. He recoiled. The electrifying jolt made them both gasp. If she hadn't known better, she might have thought him edgy, not angry, his flash of temper little more than show.

"The kitchen's that way," he said, jerking his head toward the hall.

"I know where the kitchen is."

Their eyes locked. Again, that midnight eyebrow rose. A thread of her patience unraveled.

But as much as her reluctant host deserved a tongue-lashing, Eden had to concede that Sera was the real culprit. Sera's scheming had made Michael a pawn. Since Sera did nothing but try to marry him off, and Bonnie did nothing but try to trap him for the same purpose, was it any wonder Michael thought females were annoying?

Well, it's high time Michael learns that Eden Mallory isn't moonstruck – or desperate – like all the other spinsters in this town.

She mustered the shreds of her decorum. "I completely understand your feelings, Michael. If I were you, I'd be put out, too, although I must say, I didn't realize Sera's dinner invitation was delivered without your consent. If you prefer, I'll leave."

"That won't be necessary. You're my sister's guest."

And clearly unwelcome by you. The proof of her suspicions burrowed deep, a barb to nettle the defenses of her heart.

She told herself her hurt was ridiculous. She didn't care one whit for Michael. Sera was the one she loved.

"I don't want to cause tension between you and Sera."

"Sera causes tension between me and Sera."

"Yes, well . . . I'm sure she believes she's acting in your best interests."

"By lying to you?"

Eden fidgeted. He did have a point.

"Dinner doesn't have to be difficult," she said, opting for a topic change.

"Even though you don't like me – "

"Who told you that?"

She bit her lip. Whenever he used that tone of voice, it was hard not to feel like a child.

"You did. Or rather, you do. Whenever you snap."

"You shouldn't take everything so personally."

Did he actually mean to say he *liked* her? She had trouble hinging her jaw closed.

"Well, that may be. But you have to admit, you've been short with me since the first day we met. It makes me wonder if . . . well, if I've done something to offend you."

"Are you asking me to apologize?"

"Well, no, I . . ." She caught herself. Why was she trying so hard to appease him? Clearly, she wasn't earning his respect that way. "May I speak frankly?"

"When do you not?"

Ooh. Insufferable man.

"Honestly, Michael, you would try the patience of a saint. Contrary to what you might think, I don't wake up each morning plotting some new way to aggravate you. And I certainly don't spend my nights dreaming up schemes to make you court me."

"Indeed?"

"Heaven forbid. Why on earth would I waste a perfectly pleasant evening with a man who's so *unpleasant*?"

"The question does give one pause."

Her irritation climbed another notch. "You see? That's just the sort of attitude I've been talking about. Rather than own up to your failings like a proper gentleman, you resort to sarcasm. Or arrogance. You're as high-handed as a tyrant, and you're more prickly than a porcupine."

"I see." He folded his arms across his chest. "Anything else you'd like to share before dinner?"

Her hands flew to her hips. "Well, if you must know, I find you completely lacking in humor!"

His laughter startled her. It was a warm, rich, rumble of mirth, so utterly masculine and thoroughly frustrating, she wanted to smack him.

"That wasn't supposed to be funny!"

"My dear Eden, are you certain you aren't the one lacking in humor?"

"Don't you dare try to turn the tables on me, Michael Jones. My sense of humor is expansive! It's the only thing that helped me survive the mob, and the ridicule, and the ransacking . . ."

To her horror, she realized she was on the verge of tears.

"Eden –"

He reached for her sleeve, but she spun away, battling the grief that washed over her. She hadn't meant to speak of Colorado.

"Are you crying?"

"No!" Her voice broke, humiliating her further. "I won't have you mock me, Michael Jones. I won't!"

"I'm sorry."

Her chest heaved, and she halted before the window, squeezing her eyes closed. The rain had ceased again. The resulting silence clapped louder than thunder, leaving her at the mercy of her senses. She could hear his breathing, smell his cologne, feel his remorse. But she couldn't bring herself to confide in him. She couldn't bear his condemnation if he learned that her father had died in her care.

"Tell me about this mob," he said more gently.

She gripped the bombazine with a shaking hand.

"Is that why you left Colorado?" He stepped behind her, his heat rippling over her in waves.

She shivered.

"Did they hurt you?" he prompted.

"It's not important."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

"I don't *want* to tell you!"

"Ah." This time, his mockery was self-directed. "That I can believe."

She dashed away tears and wiped them on her skirts. "You can be very cruel."

"That's true."

She rounded on him. "Why? Why do you pretend to be cruel when you're not?"

She'd startled him. Chagrin flickered in the ocean-blue depths of his eyes. He quickly tamped it down.

"It's hardly pretense. I am what I am."

"No." She shook her head emphatically. "I've met cruel men before. They have no conscience. But you, you'd blame yourself for every sickness you can't avert."

His shoulders grew taut.

"You'd lay down your life for a child," she added more gently.

"You can't possibly know that."

"I was there, Michael. I saw you. You would have torn that wagon apart, splinter by splinter, to dig Jamie out."

A familiar agony pierced Michael's chest. It was true – everything she'd said. But on the day of the accident, he hadn't seen Jamie under that wagon, he'd seen Gabriel. Ten years had eased none of the pain. In every cough, every sprain, every broken bone and wound, he saw the ghost of his kid brother. Gabriel's death had left a scorched abyss where his soul once had been.

And if he ever fell into that pit, Michael knew, he'd never crawl out again.

"I told you," he said curtly. "Healing people is my responsibility."

"Your responsibility or your passion?"

"You suffer romantic delusions about me."

"You'd like to think I do. You'd like to convince us both you don't feel any grief or pain."

He didn't like where this conversation was heading. "Are you sure you haven't set your cap for me?"

That derailed her from her track. Her chin rose, quivering beneath flashing, storm-flecked eyes. "I told you I haven't."

"Good."

"Why?"

"Because you'd regret it."

"Why?" she demanded again.

His gaze roamed over her ribbon-bound hair, shimmering like molten copper in the lamplight. Renegade wisps curled softly in the hollow of her throat, just beside the flurry of her pulse, and his lashes fanned lower. He didn't want her to see the long-constrained hunger that would have made him feast upon that column of peaches-and-cream . . . or, God help him, the ripe, pouty handfuls that heaved just an arms-length away. Lightning surged to his loins as he envisioned the globes of her breasts spilling over his palms, their tender rosettes jutting into his mouth.

"Because I'm not the angel I was named after," he told her.

Red-gold brows fused as her forehead puckered. "What do you mean?"

He allowed himself a rueful smile. "I mean, my sweet Eden, that what you think you know about me is a honey-comb of lies. I'm cold. I'm callous. And I have no intention of changing."

She licked her lips. Nerves, he told himself, not guile. Still, to spy the pink tip of that tongue chipped at his straining self-control.

"You're just saying that," she said tremulously. "To make me think less of you. You couldn't bear it if anyone tried to hold you up to your own impossible standards."

Her insight, spoken with such hard-won defiance, was almost as unnerving as the realization that the child who'd once bathed his wounds had grown into a woman wiser than her years, a woman who could see clear to the charred bottom of his soul.

But Michael had never cowered before a worthy opponent, and he wasn't about to start. He stepped closer. Then closer still. He halted only when his

thighs were bare inches from her skirts, when his shoulders towered above hers and she was forced to crane back her head to meet his gaze. It was a deliberate tactic, one designed to press his physical advantage, and yet, at this proximity, he was forced to breathe her fragrance.

The intoxication of lilies, lavender, and cherry pie was almost his undoing.

"I'm not afraid of you, Michael."

"You should be, Eden," he said huskily. "Very, very afraid."

She swallowed, her eyes as dewy as meadows. "Why?" she whispered again.

Her refusal to concede was more than he could bear. That she would stand before him, rejecting what he knew to be absolute – that he was detestable because he had failed Gabriel – unleashed a raw, manic frenzy inside him. How dare she be so naive? He needed her to run from him as he would have run from himself. And he knew of only one way to make her see the light.

He locked his arm beneath her buttocks and dragged her forward for his kiss.

Let's Review *Always Her Hero*

I invite you to go back and re-read the scene in blue to look for emotional escalation – and the techniques that I used to push the characters apart . . . then bring them together again.

Note the tension between the hero and heroine, and how the anger gets diffused several times by “honest emotion” from each character. Each time one inadvertently drops a defense, his / her “vulnerability” heightens, increasing authentic caring (emotional intimacy) between the hero and heroine.

Hopefully, after re-reading the scene, you'll be able to identify how Michael was “protecting” Eden from his baser nature – ironically, by behaving like a jerk. Thus, the aggression behind his kiss is believable.

Although you didn't get to read the remainder of the scene, Michael ends the kiss as it starts to get out of hand. He is mortified by his lack of self-restraint.

Thus, Michael shows hero potential. He is worthy of Eden's love.

Although I'm glad that I tried my hand at an autocratic Alpha Hero, I have to confess that Michael's brooding nature made him an exhausting character to write. I learned from this experience that I prefer to write mischievous, wily, smooth-talking rogues who make me laugh as they spew wise-cracks.

Fortunately, readers *want* humor in their heroes, according to the survey published in *Romance Writers Report*. When it comes to “desirable qualities,” humor ranks higher than protectiveness (domination), bravery (aggression), or “good body” and attractiveness (sex appeal).

As I mentioned earlier, I tend to write Alpha/Beta hybrids, because I seek to write realistic human beings. No man broods all the time. No man is cheerful all the time. Such two-dimensional characterizations are signs of weak writing, and they rarely get past the pencil of an editor.

For the sake of comparison, let's look at another scene that uses a medical dilemma as conflict. This excerpt features an example of a humorous, rogue hero – the Alpha/Beta hybrid from my second novel.

Wes Rawlins sprang fully-characterized into my mind when I was developing the plot for my debut Romance, [Texas Outlaw](#). I fell in love with Wes before I fell in love with his older brother, Cord, who was the hero of [Texas Outlaw](#). As a result, I just *had* to write a book that featured Wes. That book was [Texas Lover](#).

[Texas Lover](#)

Originally Published by Bantam Books

ISBN 0-553-57481-7

Story Notes:

[Texas Lover](#) is set in central Texas during the year of 1886. Wes Rawlins, who is 26, is a Texas Ranger investigating the murder of the local sheriff. In the course of his investigation, he must determine whether the heroine (Aurora “Rorie” Sinclair) was an accomplice. Thus, he has gone undercover, posing as a carpenter, to repair her barn. At this point in the novel, schoolmarm Rorie is completely unaware of Wes's true identity, although she's savvy enough to suspect that a man who wears a “double-holstered rig” is more likely to be a gun fighter than a carpenter.

Thirty-year-old Rorie is divorced, but she has adopted four children of varying ethnicities, including a crippled seven-year-old named Merrilee. The child surprises Wes when he is rummaging through Rorie's locked and private cabinets, searching for evidence. Caught in the act, Wes tells Merrilee that he is searching for bee sting medicine. Merrilee grows alarmed and rushes to fetch the heroine.

The scene is written in Rorie's viewpoint.

**Excerpt (Abridged) from *Texas Lover*
by Adrienne deWolfe**

"It's all right, Merrilee," Rorie soothed. "I'm sure Mr. Wes will be just fine."
She'd no sooner said this, than a pitiful moan came from the dining room.
Merrilee's uneven legs churned even faster as she tugged Rorie down the hall.

"Hurry, Miss Rorie! Hurry!"

Much to her secret amusement, Rorie spied Wes sitting on her desk, swinging a long, muscular leg and frowning perplexedly at the taffy box she'd filled with sewing notions.

"Damn," he muttered before realizing he'd acquired an audience.

"Does it hurt, Mr. Wes?" Merrilee asked, dragging Rorie all the way to his side.

He nodded woefully, but Rorie saw the amusement dancing in his eyes. She suspected then that there'd been no bee and no sting, and that *he* was the only pain.

Merrilee stepped up onto the stool by the desk and pressed a small palm to his sun-baked cheek. "He's real hot, Miss Rorie!" The child turned anxiously to her mentor for guidance.

Wes had the audacity to smirk behind the child's back. "That's not the only place I'm hot, Miss Rorie."

She shot him a quelling glare. "Merrilee, sweetheart, why don't you gather up all your flowers and put them in a vase for Ginevee."

The child looked torn between her patient and her chore.

"Go ahead, Miss Merrilee," Wes said in a brave voice, "Miss Rorie will fix me."

I'll fix you all right.

After the child had finally left the room, Rorie planted her fists on her hips and glared at the scapegrace sitting on her desk.

"Ah, my angel of mercy," he drawled.

"Mercy's the last thing you'll get from me, Wes Rawlins."

"You sure do have a lot of flash in those eyes. Reminds me of a Winchester when its brass receiver catches the sun."

"Don't change the subject. " She tugged the taffy box from his hands. "Don't you have any scruples?"

"Now don't go spitting smoke. I was only going to eat one tiny, little piece."

She glowered at him. "That is *not* what I meant, and you know it. Lying to the child that way – "

"What, you don't think I have a bee sting?"

She blinked, her reprimand faltering on her tongue. It had never occurred to her that he really might.

"Do you?"

"Yes."

She wasn't sure she liked the silky tone of his voice. "Where?"

"On my belly."

For the first time since arriving in the room, she noticed the wilted Indian paintbrush tucked into the belt loop of his denim work pants. A bee sting in such a tender area probably throbbed worse than a sore tooth.

She sighed. Why hadn't he said he was hurting in the first place?

To her embarrassment, she realized he had.

"I see." She cleared her throat. "Very well. Unbutton your shirt while I get the salve."

She stepped to the cabinet, flustered by self-recriminations. She couldn't have turned her back on him for more than half a minute, however. When she turned to face Wes again, he'd stripped off his vest and shirt.

Her jaw dropped.

The jar of salve nearly did, too.

Perfectly at ease in all his bare-chested glory, he settled back on the desk, every sinew rippling in shameless display. She tried not to gawk, but it was impossible, given his striking virility. Broad and brawny in the shoulders, lean and narrow in the hips, Wes had hidden a whole world of wonders beneath his faded cotton work shirt: knotted biceps, corded forearms, and a rock-hard abdomen that would have taken a stinger of steel to scrape, much less to puncture.

She swallowed, and he flashed a dazzling smile.

"You don't mind me unshucked, do you, ma'am? I figured you being a doctor's wife and all, you'd grown kind of used to fixing up patients with their shirts off."

She clutched the jar like a lifeboat in a hurricane.

"Er . . .no." Her voice sounded too high, and she felt her face flood with color. "Of course not."

Think of him as Shae, she instructed herself. *You've massaged salve into Shae's aching back a dozen times or more.*

She took a step closer, then forced herself to take another. He began swinging his leg again, an incongruous combination of youthful exuberance and manly sensuality. It drew her gaze to the thickened trunks of his thighs, which spread apart oh-so casually on a level with her warming womanhood. The realization had a devastating effect on her pulse.

"Where, uh, were you stung?"

"Here." He touched a reddened spot a hairbreadth higher than his buckle.

She nearly groaned aloud. To treat his bee sting *there*, she'd have to walk right up to him and . . . and stand between his thighs!

She glanced uncertainly at his face, which he's smoothed into stoic lines. She suspected his solemnity was a mask behind which he'd hidden a wealth of mirth, all at her expense.

She, however, wasn't about to let him see how much he could disturb her.

Drawing a bolstering breath, she marched with the jar of salve into the danger zone. She tried to keep her eyes focused on her hands, which, she realized to her mounting frustration, were sticky-damp and shaking as she tried to turn the jar's lid.

"Need help?" he drawled.

"I . . . uh, can manage. Thank you."

She stole a glance upward – not at his eyes, for she wasn't quite nervy enough for that – but at his chest. Never in her life had she seen anything so perfect – until her furtive gaze was arrested by the jagged, circular scar on his left shoulder. She caught her breath. Another scar, not far below it and ominously close to his heart, looked much fresher. She'd never seen a bullet hole, but she knew with gut-wrenching certainty that these were gunshot wounds.

Her gaze flew to his. "Wes, you could have been killed."

He stared into her eyes for what seemed like forever. Only inches away, she could see all the shades of green in his gaze, from pine, to jade, to emerald, bursting outward in concentric circles from their pitch-black center.

The dark core of his gaze mesmerized her. It was the doorway to his secret self, a portal where shadows flitted past like phantoms fleeing the light. She thought he might be hiding some secret he didn't want her to know. When his red-gold lashes fanned downward like a veil, intuition told her she'd touched Truth.

"Naw." His voice was husky, low. "No little bitty honeybee could send me to the boneyard."

He hadn't come close to fooling her. She knew that he knew it, too.

"How did this happen?" With a will all their own, her fingers touched that second scar. "This wound can't be more than a year old."

"Eleven months," he corrected her in a strangely hushed voice. "I remember, because . . ."

His voice trailed off.

"Does it hurt to talk about it?" she asked gently.

His heart jumped hard beneath her fingertips, its rhythm growing ragged. "A little," he admitted.

His gaze moved beyond her, growing dark with some haunting memory. "A man doesn't forget being bushwhacked and left for buzzard bait. Or lying helpless, unable to stop a blood feud from becoming a family massacre," he added with uncharacteristic grimness.

She swallowed, too shaken by his admission to press him further.

Silence wrapped around them. He spared her the gruesome details of the nightmare he'd lived through, and yet his refusal to share more of the tale and let her ease his hurt made her feel strangely shut out and alone.

"Wes, don't take such risks anymore." The words blazed a path from her heart to her tongue; she couldn't have stopped them if she'd tried. "You're too young –"

"I'm not that young."

She caught her breath. His voice held a razor-keen edge, a stab of warning so sharp, one might have thought she'd challenged him.

"I'm sorry. I meant no offense."

She retreated a step, retrieving her hand. But when she reached again for the jar's lid, he caught her fingers. His haunted expression was receding, leaving in its place something just as unnerving. Those forest-green depths gleamed now with a primal intensity, one that he couldn't entirely hide behind his fallen-angel's smile.

"I like when you touch me," he said, his voice deep and rumbley.

He raised her hand to his lips, and her pulse leaped. She was so disconcerted by the moist connection of his flesh tasting hers, that for a moment, she couldn't breathe. She couldn't think. He raised her hand higher, pressing a damp kiss into her palm, and her knees went dangerously weak.

"Wes," she protested feebly.

He wouldn't release her hand, though, or free her from the smoky promise in his eyes. Turning her arm over, he applied gentle pressure to her palm with his thumb. The tip of his mustache, so provocatively soft, followed the sinfully wet brush of his tongue across her knuckles. She'd had no idea that goose bumps could make one feel so giddy.

"Wes, please," she whispered. "It's not proper."

He pressed her now moist and trembling hand against the hard, fierce beating of his heart. "You mean 'cause I'm so young?"

The earthy cadence of his murmur gusted fresh shivers down her spine. She was no blushing innocent, and yet this man – dare she say this *young* man? – had made her feel like a maid. She suspected he'd done so on purpose. She also suspected he'd gotten a ripsnorting thrill out of making a barren old spinster randy.

She flinched at the thought.

"Are you quite finished?" she demanded, snatching her hand away.

He arched his eyebrows, looking for all the world as if her outrage surprised him. "Well, that depends. Are you going to touch me again?"

She nearly choked. She *had* started the whole thing, and there was no canyon on earth that was deep enough to hide her from the light of knowing in those foxy eyes.

"Do you, or do you not, want salve for that bee sting?"

"Hmm. As I recollect, my Aunt Lally used to suck the stinger out when I was a boy. Me being so young and all, you might want to try that first."

"I think not!"

"Then I guess I'll settle for the salve."

He looked inordinately amused and much too smug for her peace of mind.

"Here." She thrust the jar into his hand. "You can salve the sting yourself."

“But from way up here, I can’t tell if there’s a stinger,” he pointed out affably. “You aren’t going to leave me with a stinger in my belly, are you?”

She ground her teeth. He did have a point.

“Very well. I’ll look for a stinger.”

“You won’t have to look far.”

Heat coiled through her insides at his innuendo. “Kindly behave yourself.”

“I’m trying, ma’am, but you make it so consarned hard for a man.”

With a wariness she usually reserved for loaded pistols, Rorie dragged her gaze to the flesh in question. Red and swollen, the bee sting lay well below her line of vision, and she realized that glancing at him simply would not be enough. She would have to move closer, stoop, or worse, *kneel* between his thighs to bring her eyes close enough for her inspection. There was no way on God’s green earth that she could accomplish her task by keeping her face a respectable distance from his crotch.

“Something wrong?” he asked.

She didn’t have to see his face to know he was smirking.

“No.” She silently vowed if she found more than one stinger thrusting out of his nether region, she’d make him wish that honeybee *had* sent him to the graveyard.

Knotting her hands in her skirts, she mustered her courage and did the unthinkable: she lowered her head between his thighs. As hard as she tried at such proximity, it was impossible to keep his fly out of her field of vision. An unsettling mixture of relief and disappointment washed over her when she spied no evidence of a straining, robust bulge.

“See anything?” he asked.

“Not yet,” she admitted, turning scarlet a heartbeat later when she realized where her eyes and thoughts had strayed.

“Maybe it would help if I loosen this – “

He was reaching for his buckle, and she grabbed his hand, straightening so fast, she nearly butted her head against his chin.

“Don’t you dare!”

His deep, rich laughter was intoxicating. “Aw, Rorie. I don’t bite.”

She heated like a furnace. “You . . . you take far too many liberties, sir.”

“Me?” His voice lowered to an intimate murmur. “But you’re the one touching me.”

She glanced down and realized, to her utter mortification, that he was right. How her left hand had found a resting place on his thigh was a thorough mystery to her. She jerked it away, then next tried removing her right hand from his neatly turned grasp, but he held on, making her feel like a mouse to his cat.

”You’re enjoying this entirely too much,” she accused.

“Aren’t you?”

“No, I most certainly am not!”

“Oh. My mistake.”

His thumb was stroking her palm. It was the barest whisper of flesh against flesh, yet his touch shot confused signals through her body. Her insides shivered while her skin burned.

"You are no gentleman," she said hoarsely. "If you were, you wouldn't be touching me so."

"You mean a gentleman wouldn't hold a lady's hand?" His eyelids drooped, hooding the stare that she felt like a hunger on her lips. "Or give it a little kiss?"

"Y-yes."

"Being a gentleman doesn't sound like very much fun."

She gulped a breath. He'd finally freed her – which was precisely what she'd wanted, she reminded herself.

Mustering her wits, she prepared to make a hasty retreat. Unfortunately, her feet had tangled in his discarded vest and shirt. When she tried to turn, she staggered.

It all happened so fast. One moment, she was making a beeline for safety; the next, she was flailing, grasping at anything to keep from falling. His neck proved the handiest anchor. Her breasts collided with his chest, and the air whooshed out of her lungs at the stunning feel of hard, male musculature. In that heartbeat, with her face so close to his, she could see surprise flare in his eyes.

Then something very different, something primal and male, blazed to life in the depths of his gaze. She sank a fraction lower as his arms and legs cradled her, leaving little doubt in her mind that she'd had a stirring effect on him, too. The gentle ridge of his manhood pressed against her woman's flesh, leaving her hot and shaken, scandalized and exhilarated. His lashes swept down to hide the appetite lurking in his eyes. She had little time to form a coherent thought other than the nerve-jangling, pulse-firing realization that her lips were mere inches from his own. . .

"Oh, geez." The voice, which came from the doorway, was filled with boyish disgust. "You two aren't going to smooch, are you?"

In that instant, Rorie would have preferred facing a thousand raging honeybees than watching her four orphan children swarm into the room with their bright and curious eyes.

"Not now, I reckon," Wes answered dryly and released her.

Let's Review *Texas Lover*

In both the "First Kiss" scene from *Always Her Hero*, and the "Bee Sting" scene from [*Texas Lover*](#), a medical dilemma serves as the catalyst (external conflict) that leads to seduction.

While both scenes drip with sexual and emotional tension, the “Bee Sting” scene has the added poignancy of humor. The humor is situational; however, it evolved primarily from the unique personalities that I’d created for Wes (the inveterate mischief-maker) and Rorie (the prim and proper schoolmarm.)

If I’d placed Michael and Eden in the same situation, can you imagine how differently the scene would have transpired? No-nonsense Michael would have snatched the salve jar from Eden’s hands and stalked out of the room to apply the ointment to his abdomen, in private. *End of scene.* No humor, so suggestive innuendoes, no physical contact of any kind.

If I had tried to *force* Michael’s character to behave like wise-cracking Wes, the scene wouldn’t have rung true. Based on the goals, motivations, and internal conflicts that I’d created for Michael’s character, a scene depicting him as a seductive rogue would have been alien to his normal behavior -- not to mention unethical, since he was a medical professional talking to a potential patient. Michael was simply too virtuous and self-restrained to initiate the kind of innuendo-laced flirtation in which Wes delighted.

Therefore, I had to give Michael lots of other redeeming qualities (his self-sacrifice on behalf of sick orphans; his paternal concern for his younger sister; etc.), to make him appealing as a hero.

Characterization Tips: Ways to Make Your Heroes Memorable

Your goal is to create heroes who have complex personalities and compelling story goals.

Conflicting personality traits make heroes interesting and memorable. When a hero has a full range of emotions, he is able to move the reader in some way.

Good characters aren't black and white. In real life, no person is completely good or bad, beautiful or ugly, stupid or genius, etc.

Humans have motivations (ie, "reasons" or "rationales") for what they do. Usually, these motivations stem from their values or their belief systems. Your job as a writer is to help the reader understand why your hero does what he does – even if his behavior is considered heinous by other characters (example: shooting someone's pet dog.)

The protagonists (hero and heroine) are the main characters in your book. Readers must identify with the hero, and especially the heroine, to be satisfied by the story. An author's goal is to create protagonists that make the reader want to read to the end of the book, falling in love with the hero and considering the heroine a friend.

Goal, Motivation and Conflict: Keys to Creating an Appealing Hero

Your story must be derived from the hero's and heroine's goals and motivations. If your protagonists are not credible or inspirational to the reader, or if your characters are not heroic, your reader will not care about their love affair. At that point, your reader is likely to put down your book and look for something more interesting to read.

Why?

Because your reader has accepted your invitation to live inside the skin of your characters. Throughout the book, your reader "becomes" your hero (or the character who has the viewpoint in any given scene). The reader is looking for a vicarious experience. However, no reader wants to continue "being" a character that she doesn't like, accept, or at least understand.

Motivation:

Help your reader understand your hero's behaviors. Reveal – or at least hint at – his motivation for every feeling and deed in every scene. Emotion equals motivation. Or if you prefer: Caring is the ultimate motivation.

Scene Goal:

A character's goal is determined by his motivation. Every hero and heroine will have an overall story goal. In a Romance, it will be to find true love. Of course, in order for your hero to accomplish his story goal, he must first live through a series of scenes.

Scene goals stem from the character's motivations. For example: Your hero's child is sick, and your hero needs additional income to pay doctor bills. Therefore, he might decide to ask his boss for a raise. Or he might find a second job. Or he might rob a bank. The hero's motivation is to care for his sick child. His goal is to find a solution to his money shortage.

In every scene, your hero must have an identifiable goal, even if that goal changes or is not accomplished by the end of that scene (because some new, more pressing problem occurs).

Internal Conflict:

Internal conflict must also be present in every scene, and it is relayed to the reader through the viewpoint character's thoughts (also called "internal dialogue.") Internal conflict can be described as a character's value conflicts (example: "I want to lose weight, but I hate exercise, and I resent giving up ice cream.")

Romances are about relationship; therefore, your hero's internal conflicts will determine why he is reluctant to fall in love. In genre Romance, internal conflict (wariness of love) is always more important than external conflict (bank robbers, traffic jam, lost car keys, etc.), because internal conflict drives characterization. External conflict moves the plot forward.

External Conflict:

External conflict must also be present in every scene. External conflicts are the physical obstacles that keep the viewpoint character from achieving his scene goal. (Example: He intends to drive to the convenience store for a pack of cigarettes; however, while he's in mid-route, a hit-and-run driver side-swipes his car, and it stalls.) External conflict drives the main romantic plot and the subplots.

If you remember nothing else about characterization, remember this: your hero must grow and change throughout the course of the Romance; thus, his goals and motives will, too. For instance, a hero who starts the book, seeking revenge, may change his mind in the middle of the story after he realizes that he is falling in love with the heroine, and he discovers that his target is the heroine's beloved father.

Consistency is Crucial

You must understand the importance of *consistency* when you are creating complex and memorable heroes.

If a character is dark and brooding for most of the book, you can't suddenly write him "funny" just because your plot calls for humor on page 187. The change in character simply won't ring true.

If you want "funny," and your protagonists aren't people who are likely to "yuck it up" at a party, then give the comedy to the secondary characters. Otherwise, you'll be re-writing your book from scratch – multiple times.

Make Heroes Larger than Life

Readers of genre Romance want their heroes and heroines to be inspiring; they want characters that are role models or larger than life. Readers want to see these characters be especially competent and endearing in some area (example: the penniless aristocrat who outwits the card cheat to keep the heroine's happy-go-lucky father from a debtor's jail.)

Most importantly, readers want to understand why heroes do what they do, say what they say, and feel what they feel. If you cannot provide a reading experience that satisfies this demand, then you are likely to confuse your reader and eventually, lose her interest.

Let's look at an example.

Scoundrel for Hire
Originally Published by Avon Books
ISBN 0-380-80527-8

Story Notes:

My first rogue hero was Raphael "Rafe" Jones (the half-brother of Michael Jones from *Always Her Hero*.) Appropriately titled *Scoundrel for Hire*, the book was rife with characters humbugging other characters.

The wealthy heroine (Silver Nichols) hires penniless Rafe, a Kentucky-born, Shakespearean actor, to role-play an aristocrat at her father's engagement party. However, Silver does so for less-than-noble purposes.

When Rafe learns that Silver hasn't been completely honest with him, he decides to "improvise" his impersonation of the Earl of Chumley in ways that Silver had never intended.

The book is set in Aspen, Colorado, when it was a silver mining town (1886). Maximilian "Midas Max" Nichols is Silver's father.

This scene opens Chapter Five.

Excerpt from *Scoundrel for Hire*
By Adrienne deWolfe

Peering out his coach window, Rafe gazed in awe at the Nichols's massive, Romanesque mansion. Its unflappable stone face and shingled roof had been constructed with practicality in mind, probably as Midas Max's first defense against the conflagrations that had wiped out entire city blocks in other clapboard towns across the west.

Of course, since Midas Max hadn't built his legend on practicality, Silver had probably chosen the building's design. No doubt hers had been the sparing hand that had decorated it, too. Frilly curtains, flower pots, and gingerbread trims were nonexistent in the ponderously squat, solid shape. In fact, the only frivolous element of the mansion's design – if one could call it frivolous – was the upper story's stained glass windows. Glittering blue, green, and red jewels seemed to wink from every casement, and a rainbow of fire spilled out upon the immaculately manicured lawn.

Rafe cocked his head with a smug little smirk. Judging by the lights, music, and laughter, the party was well underway. He'd taken great care to arrive last.

Timing was everything in the theater.

Giving the coach roof an imperious whack with his walking stick, a shiny new acquisition which amused him to no end, he displayed the appropriately bored manner of a British blue blood. His demeanor was no small feat, considering the result of his whack. The vehicle lurched; the right wheels bounced; and he was nearly flung from his seat as the coach listed, jolting to a shuddering halt in a rut.

Jimmy, God love him, had finally located the coach's brakes.

Rafe heard a thump and the eager pounding of boots. A heartbeat later, his driver, an impossibly gullible youth whose vocabulary was roughly limited to exclamations of amazement, flung open the door.

"Man alive, your worship sir," Jimmy panted. His ruddy cheeks bulged above the buttoned collar that he, in his less auspicious job as a cantaloupe picker, was unaccustomed to wearing. "That house sure is some pumpkins!"

Rafe gazed fondly at the youth. Jimmy was decked out in a red livery that had cost Rafe – or rather, Silver – at least twice as much as every item of clothing Jimmy had ever owned. Jimmy was another new "acquisition" that amused Rafe to no end, and he couldn't wait to spring the lad on Little Miss High Society.

"That house?" Rafe gestured toward the grand edifice with a limp hand. "'Some pumpkins,' you say?" He sniffed disdainfully. "Lud, my boy. You have yet to see my kennels."

Jimmy's eyes bugged out, making him look like a guppy with spiky blond hair. "Golly!"

Rafe hid his smile. Tossing back his cape with a flourish, he stepped briskly up the cobbled walk that wound toward the door. He'd been waiting two excruciatingly long days for this moment. When he'd agreed to seduce Celestia Cooper and thus prove to Silver's father that he was marrying a gold-digger, Rafe had assumed that Silver was matching him up with a modern-day Jezebel. He'd conjured in his mind a woman so sinful, so voluptuous, that no mortal man could possibly have resisted her. Silver had never bothered to correct his misconception.

Well, yesterday morning, he'd glimpsed the inimitable siren herself. In fact, he'd nearly collided with Midas Max as he was boyishly stealing a last kiss from his lover in her hotel room's doorway. Rafe was sure his jaw had dropped when a short woman with plump arms, a double chin, and wild blonde corkscrews hastily gathered her sheet and ducked out of sight. Max's *affaire*

d'amour was no smoldering, pert-breasted fantasy-in-the-flesh. What was worse, Celestia Cooper was old enough to be Rafe's mother.

Rafe halted before Silver's door, scowling at the memory.

He'd been so furious – disappointed, too – to learn his conquest was no smoldering, tempestuous beauty, that he'd had half a mind to vanish into the wilderness and let Silver sweat out her father's engagement.

Unfortunately, Rafe's finances wouldn't permit such rash behavior.

Even if he actually could have mustered enough lust to woo a woman who reminded him so forcefully of his foster mother, he'd be loathe to try. He had one or two scruples left – despite his every effort to purge them – and they were both adamantly against tricking old women and breaking their hearts.

Of course, he wasn't about to let Silver know that. No, he had a little lesson to teach his cohort-in-crime. He'd thought long and hard about his options, and he'd finally decided on the only sensible alternative: revenge. That's why he'd scoured the countryside for a suitable retainer. Hiring Jimmy had been integral to Rafe's plan. Spending a king's fortune on Silver's credit had also been part of his mischief. But best of all. . .

Rafe snickered to himself.

Best of all were the character improvements he'd made in the role Silver had scripted for him.

Rapping his cane on the Nichols's glass and mahogany door, Rafe relished the look on his co-conspirator's face when he unveiled the new Lord Chumley. To his surprise, though, Silver didn't greet him on the threshold. Instead, a pine tree of a manservant in impeccable swallowtails appeared at the entrance, barred his way, and looked down his hooked nose at him.

"Hullo, my good man," Rafe said in his best British fop's voice. "Do step aside and tell Miss Nichols the Duke of Chumley has arrived."

The manservant arched an eyebrow. One sweeping, flesh-scoring glance later, he'd masterfully conveyed just exactly what he thought of Rafe, Rafe's attire, and all of Rafe's ancestry.

"The *Duke* of Chumley, you say?" the servant repeated in unmistakably British accents.

Rafe started, and the back of his neck turned blistering hot. Damn Silver. She'd also neglected to tell him she had an English butler!

"That's correct." Rafe fixed the servant with his haughtiest stare and vowed to make Silver the Shyster pay double – no triple – for this latest breach of contract. "Run along and fetch your mistress."

"And I suggest, sir, that *you* run along before I call Sheriff Hawthorne to the door."

A heartbeat later, the wooden portal slammed, and Rafe was left staring at his reflection in the quivering, opaque glass.

Silver, my love, that's another one I owe you.

For her part, Silver nearly dropped an entire tray of champagne glasses when she heard Rafe's voice – and her butler's threat to call the sheriff. Hurrying into the entrance hall, she rounded the corner just in time to see Benson slamming the door on her long-awaited guest.

"Benson!" she choked, certain she'd blanched. The last thing she needed was another reason to regret this nightmare of a party. For once heedless of the proprieties, she made a beeline past the couple who was signing her guest register and tried to console herself that this night couldn't possibly get worse.

First, her illustrious, French chef had arrived tipsy, stumbling through the back door with an empty bottle of cooking sherry in his coat pocket. Next, her pricy, Denver orchestra had turned out to be little more than a tone-deaf oompah band. Then, her father's bride-to-be had pulled out her crystal ball and started predicting the mayor's re-election returns.

But the final horror on this night of horrors, Silver mused darkly, would be to watch her nobleman-for-hire be unmasked by her very own butler.

It was moments like these when Silver wondered if Celestia had fashioned a rag poppet in her likeness and was gleefully jabbing pins into its head.

Racing to the door, Silver thrust her tray of glasses into her bemused butler's hands. "For heaven's sake, Benson, what's the matter with you?" she whispered, throwing open the door. She almost sobbed with relief to see Rafe still standing on the stoop. He managed to look unperturbed, as if nearly getting his nose smashed against a window pane was an everyday occurrence.

"My Lord Chumley, I am so sorry!" she greeted him, genuinely mortified. "Please do come in. I don't know what has gotten into my butler. Obviously, there's been a misunderstanding," she added with an ominous glance at her manservant. "Benson, apologize at once to his lordship."

Benson drew himself up to his full six feet, seven inches. "With all due respect, Miss Nichols, this man is an impos–"

"Benson!" Silver choked as she spied Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan, the couple by the register, turning curiously toward the commotion. "Lord Chumley is my guest. Kindly do as you're told."

The butler's face mottled at her lady-of-the-house voice. However, years of serving, not to mention the tidy stipend she paid him, must have won out over his pride. With a coldness that would have endeared him only to penguins, he inclined his head. "My apologies to . . . your *Grace*," he added disdainfully.

Silver started. Your Grace? Wasn't that a duke's address?

Rafe's smile was bland as he craned back his head to peer at the butler. "Odds fish," he said, fluttering a lacy handkerchief beneath the servant's flaring nose. "Wherever did you recruit your man? From one of your colonial lumber camps?"

Benson's jaw grew rigid at the insult.

"Of course not," Silver interceded quickly. She wished Rafe was close enough for a good elbow jab. "Benson comes from a long and distinguished line of manservants. Why, his grandfather served in Lord Wellington's household."

Rafe didn't look the least bit impressed. Silver suspected he didn't have a clue who Lord Wellington was.

She frowned. As glad as she was that he'd actually upheld his part of the bargain, the impression he was making was far from the desired effect. In addition to knowing nothing about one of England's most celebrated warriors and statesmen, he'd dressed like a . . . well, Nancy Boy. For some unfathomable reason, he'd selected a gold velvet coat, a chartreuse waistcoat, and matching green spats for his shoes. His cravat was a frilly, overly elaborate affair that no doubt would have smothered a shorter man, and the tawny, muttonchop whiskers he'd pasted to his jaws gave him a comical rather than sophisticated air.

No wonder Benson had threatened to call the sheriff. Rafe's fashion sense was criminal!

"Benson, kindly take that tray to the drawing room," she said, realizing she would have to debrief her imposter yet again. "Those glasses need to be circulated."

Benson nodded stiffly, giving Rafe one last, skin-flaying glance before turning with the champagne. Unfortunately, that gave Rafe enough space to step inside. Confronted by yards of gold velvet, Silver's every instinct screamed, "*Shove him out the door to find a proper tuxedo!*"

But alas, the party was well under way, and she sincerely doubted he'd locate a tailor at this hour of the night. In fact, she had the sneaking suspicion he might be hoping she'd dismiss him so he could retire to the nearest saloon.

Well, his nefarious little scheme wasn't going to work, by God.

"I say," he drawled, affecting a faint lisp, "what a smashing little cottage you have. All these colored windows and glittery . . . thingamabobs." He waved his handkerchief at the \$2,000 crystal and sterling chandelier tinkling in the breeze from the open transom. "I wager that keeps your lumberjack of a manservant busy come polishing time, what? Oh, and dear me, look."

Before Silver could block the smart aleck's escape, he'd ambled over to the priceless, Chinese vase and the stunning arrangement of mountain laurels that dominated the register's table.

"Posies!" he exclaimed, inhaling noisily.

Pasting on a smile for the pesky couple who was *still* loitering about her foyer, Silver caught Rafe's arm and dragged him toward the coat closet beneath the circular staircase.

"Must you be such a trial?" she whispered, snatching his ridiculous linen from his hand. "You're late. The invitation said eight o'clock sharp. Don't tell me you spent all this time at the tailor's, because clearly, you did *not*. Where on earth did you get that waistcoat?"

Rafe's lips twitched as he lovingly smoothed the brocade. "Rather festive, don't you think?"

"You don't want to know what I think." She stuffed his handkerchief and gloves into his top hat and tossed his cape over a hook. "Your tardiness has made it impossible for me to keep Celestia away from Brady Buckholtz. He's the editor of the *Times*. He's no fool, so I suggest you get your story straight. You're supposed to be an *earl*, not a duke – "

She faced Rafe again, only to realize he wasn't listening. He was too busy gawking through his quizzing glass at the statue her love-struck father had commissioned six months ago for the alcove. The sterling maiden was supposed to represent Aphrodite, but Silver had never ventured close enough to admire its artistry. All its shameless, bare-chested glory made her blush.

Rafe, on the other hand, was fairly smirking at the sculpture's more pronounced places.

"Oh for heaven's sake," she muttered, grabbing his sleeve and yanking him toward less scandalous vistas. "Will you please pay attention?"

His lazy, golden lashes swept lower, lingering on her own modest décolletage. "I should be delighted."

Her insides shriveled with embarrassment. Despite the caress in his gaze, it was hard to feel adequate compared with the Greek goddess of love.

"We don't have much time." She did her best to assume a businesslike whisper, despite the distraction of his nearness. His heat shivered over her bared shoulders like a sultry summer night, and his scent, an enticing aroma, filled her head like a sensual fog.

"Sandalwood," she muttered.

"I beg your pardon?"

She started when she realized she'd spoken aloud. She'd been trying to guess the essence of his cologne – sandalwood, cinnamon, and ginger, perhaps even cloves. *Good Lord*. Thirty seconds alone with the man, and already she was babbling like a mooncalf!

She made a concerted effort to regain the use of her wit.

"Nevermind." She tried to cow him with her best imitation of Aunt Agatha's glare, the one that had always made her shriek and dive under her blankets as a child. "I trust you have some plan in mind?"

"Seduction does require forethought."

Her toes curled. She couldn't immediately say why. Perhaps it was due to the smoky timbre of his voice.

"Good. Then I shall distract Papa so you can approach Celestia.

Only – " Her stomach flipped at the prospect of her treachery. Honestly, she'd thought she'd overcome these annoying pangs of guilt. "Be discreet. Papa does have feelings, after all."

"Oh, your papa won't feel a thing."

She eyed him sharply. Was he being ironic? Or was he up to no good again? It was hard to believe he'd suddenly developed compassion for her papa. "I shall expect significant progress from you tonight," she reminded him firmly.

"My progress, dear Silver, is the one thing on which you can depend."

He smiled, smiled in such a way that her entire body tingled, as if those full, firm lips had sipped the taste of hers. She flushed from head to toe.

"Kindly focus, sir." Folding her arms, she retreated a step, hoping to appear more miffed than ruffled. Her Aunt-Agatha glare wasn't intimidating him in the least, and she couldn't help but wonder how much of his roguery was real, and how much was contrived. "I'd like to be sure we're talking about the same thing."

"Rest assured, Silver. You'll get everything you've been asking for tonight -- and more."

Those pewter eyes held her spellbound, their sparks of mischief kindling into something far more tantalizing. He'd become Rogue Romeo again, and no amount of whiskers, sashes, lace flounces or other fripperies could detract from his sensuality. It was undeniable. Irresistible . . .

Her face flamed. She'd been tempted to think it was *appealing!* Obviously, she'd been spending too much time with grizzled miners and pot-bellied investors.

"Quit being so . . . so satirical," she said, annoyed to hear how breathy her voice had become. "This performance may be just a lark to you, but I've invested quite a bit in the outcome – not the least of which, apparently, went toward that waistcoat. After using my money to indulge yourself in such whims, I'll thank you to get on with your job."

He grinned. Actually grinned, damn him. A heartbeat later, she understood why.

"Hello there, Chumley," her father called jovially from behind. "And what job might that be?"

Let's Review *Scoundrel for Hire*

If you examine this scene, you'll see that the hero had several scene goals, motivations, and conflicts:

What were Rafe's scene goals?

1. He wanted to ruin Silver's party.
2. He planned to renege on his agreement to seduce Celestia.
3. He planned to seduce Silver, instead. (This goal is implied through the heroine's viewpoint.)

What were Rafe's motivations for these scene goals?

1. He was angry because Silver misled him.
2. He was disappointed that Celestia wasn't a "tempestuous beauty."
3. He wanted to punish Silver.
4. He needed the money that she represented to him.

What was Rafe's internal conflict thus far in the scene?

1. He had "one or two scruples left"
2. He couldn't bring himself to trick an old woman (Celestia)

What were Rafe's external conflicts?

1. Benson, the British Butler
2. Silver's insistence that Rafe act out the role she had scripted.
3. Brady, the editor of the *Times* newspaper

As brief as this excerpt was (the scene goes on for another 10+ pages), you can see that this snippet was extremely complex in terms of characterization. If I had not taken care to motivate Rafe's inane behavior (lisp, waving a limp hand, and dressing like a fashion-challenged fop), his arrival at the party would have been confusing and worse, unbelievable to the reader, who was expecting to see more of the Rafe that she'd come to know in Chapters 1 - 4: the suave, sophisticated scoundrel.

Thus, your hero should be so well-developed, that in every situation, the reasons behind his actions are clear, consistent and convincing. Otherwise, you run the risk of losing your reader.

Raise More Questions than You Answer

When introducing a character for the first time, new writers often try to describe everything they know about that character in the first scene.

I call this problem “background dumping,” and it should be avoided. Even though you know your hero inside and out, you have to be judicious when deciding how much information you reveal. Not only that, you have to reveal this information bit by bit.

In today’s culture, with so many modes of entertainment screaming for your reader’s attention, you have strong competition. Why would any reader wade through 10 or more pages of sunsets and seascapes when she wants to be reading about *people* who are going to meet and fall in love?

Give the reader what she wants, or risk losing her by page five.

As an author, your goal is to grab the reader in paragraph one of your novel and never let go. To accomplish this goal, the next few pages of your novel must be written to get the reader (subconsciously) to ask questions, such as, “What’s at stake for him?” “Who’s standing in his way?” “How will the heroine complicate his plans?”

By the way, it *is* important to set the scene in time and place – please don’t misunderstand me. But you don’t have to talk about sunsets and seascapes in the first sentence of your narrative. After all, Romance readers want to know “who they are” character-wise when they pick up a book and begin reading, and they want this information quickly. Six pages about sunsets would bore the modern reader to death.

Therefore, the first few pages of any novel must offer a brief introduction (including goals, motivation, and conflicts) of the viewpoint character. In these pages, you must let the reader know what’s at stake for the character before you drop the proverbial bomb and launch into the action of the scene.

The best way to introduce a character, and help the reader gain insight into his moral fiber, is to pick a scene in which the character’s under duress. Open that scene about five minutes before you change the character’s life forever. Keep in mind that this “five minute” opening should be extremely short in page length. The quickest way to lose your reader is to dump five or more pages of exposition (narrative) on her.

Let’s look at how I introduced Michael in *Always Her Hero*. We’ll review each of the first two pages separately, so that you can see how character exposition is balanced by the “art” of raising questions.

Always Her Hero
Originally Published by Avon Books
ISBN 0-380-80528-6

PROLOGUE

Autumn 1878
The Pine Mountains, Tennessee

There were many ways to die.

Some men writhed in torment, fighting the inevitable with their last, rattling breath. Others succumbed quickly, cleanly, never knowing whose bullet had killed them.

But for Michael Jones, death was a lingering numbness, a curse that had dulled all pain, all pleasure, all *interest* he used to take in life.

"You sure showed Hoss, didn't ya, Mick?" crowed the toothless bootlicker dogging Michael's heels as he slammed out the swinging doors of the Jade Rose Saloon. "You sure showed him you weren't no lily-livered preacher's brat."

Stalking away from the wreckage and the wagering that his brawl had caused, Michael didn't bother to respond. What he'd shown Hoss tonight, actually, was that he was a mean-tempered sonofabitch with two ham-sized fists and a chip the size of Blue Thunder Mountain on his shoulder. But he didn't expect this stranger, this weasel who scavenged off the other riffraff of Whiskey Bend, to understand. It didn't take courage to bring a man to his knees. It only took brute force.

Let's Review Page One

The above passage consists of 179 words.

Note that few of those words describe the setting. Instead, this passage is designed to introduce the viewpoint character and to raise questions about him in the reader's mind. Why does this character call himself "Michael" while his companion calls him "Mick?" Why is he so jaded about life? Why was he brawling in a saloon?

The passage also hints at Michael's moral fiber: he recognizes that winning a brawl isn't worthy of admiration ("he was a mean-tempered sonofabitch.") Michael's self-contempt extends to the sycophant trotting at his heels. The reader can't help but wonder, who is this stranger? Why is he chasing after Michael?

If you examine page one, however, you will see that Michael's motivation and scene/story goals remain unclear. Let's read a little further.

Always Her Hero

Page 2:

"I never did see a chair get smashed up in so many pieces," the weasel yapped, scrambling to keep pace through the mud and garbage as Michael circled behind the saloon and entered the alley. "Did you hear the way them soiled doves was cooing when you knocked Hoss on his ass? I bet you'll get all yer humpin' fer free from now on at the Rose. Womenfolk like rough guys, don't they, Mick?"

Michael touched his tongue to his smashed lip. It hurt like hell. So did his ribs, thanks to Hoss's head butting. His right eye was swelling shut, and his knuckles were raw and bloody. Any woman who'd want him in this condition was either desperate or scared witless. Neither kind appealed to him.

Still, it had felt good, damned good, swinging his fists at the migrant logger who'd recognized him and had threatened to carry the tale back to Blue Thunder Valley. Michael wished he could say he was ashamed of busting the chops of a drunkard with a grade-school education. But ever since God had forced him to bury Gabriel two years ago, Michael had welcomed opportunities to break the Commandments. What better reason for him to ride secretly to Whiskey Bend every chance he got? He couldn't disgrace himself openly without losing the respect of the kid sister who so misguidedly looked up to him, but he could stain his soul black enough to disgust the King of Heaven.

Pissing off God: That was the one pastime still capable of sparking zeal in Michael. That, and snatching souls from the angel of death.

Let's Review Page Two

The above passage consists of 267 words. Again, very few of these words are devoted to scenic descriptions. I allowed the hillbilly dialect of the “yapping weasel” to imply the type of culture and, of course, the type of setting in which we find Michael.

Thanks to the scene's internal/external dialogue, we get the sense that Michael is better educated than the weasel, and that he holds women in higher esteem. We also learn that Michael is angry and hurting – and not just at the physical level. Michael “secretly” engages in self-destructive behavior by riding off to Whiskey Bend. Near the middle of page two, we intuit Michael's motivation: he drinks and brawls because he feels guilty about the death of Gabriel. But who is Gabriel?

In the final two paragraphs, we at last learn Michael's story goal – to snatch souls from the angel of death – but this revelation begs additional questions, *How?* Is Michael a preacher? A fireman? An officer of the court? A doctor?

And so the prose continues to draw the reader deeper into the mystery of Michael, revealing information about him in bite-sized pieces.

Just for the record: you can introduce a character's goal, motivation, and conflicts in far fewer than 446 words. I opened [Texas Outlaw](#) as follows:

[Texas Outlaw](#)

By Adrienne deWolfe

Originally Published by Bantam Books

ISBN 0-553-57395-0

CHAPTER ONE

Eagle Valley, Nevada
December 1875

The last time Fancy Holleday robbed a train, she did so in her bloomers. On that singular occasion, she'd had only one hired gun to distract from his duties. Tonight, the train carried a railroad detective *and* a deputy U.S. marshal. As skilled as she was at disposing of lawmen, even Fancy had to admit she had limitations.

She scowled, careful to hide her tapping boot beneath her skirts. She'd made the unfortunate decision to concentrate her charm on the marshal, since she'd reasoned that a federal tin-star could do her mission more damage than the detective. Cord Rawlins, however, had barely glanced her way. Now her time was running out.

(Word count: 116)

Let's Review *Texas Outlaw*:

Fancy's Scene Goal:	To distract lawmen by charming/seducing them
Fancy's Motivation:	She wants to rob a train.
Fancy's Internal Conflict:	She has limitations/she's worried that she concentrated on the wrong lawman.
Fancy's External Conflict:	She's running out of time, and Cord is still ignoring her.

After this section on introducing characters, you may be thinking, "But I'm a reader, too, and I *want* to know what a Pullman Railroad Car looks like. I want to know what kind of gown Fancy is wearing. I want to see the interior of the Jade Rose saloon. I want to see the color of Michael's hair."

Me too.

So don't go overboard: avoid letting whole pages slip by without providing *some* detail to set the scene.

Every writer is different. As you develop your writing style, you will learn to strike a balance between character exposition (raising and answering questions) and scenery. The trick is to figure out the best "formula" for each story – because, believe it or not, each book will present its own challenge. What worked for [Texas Outlaw](#) and *Always Her Hero* did not work for *Scoundrel for Hire*. After six re-writes of Chapter One in *Scoundrel*, the situation boiled down to this: I had two editors calling the shots.

The first editor wanted more emotion for the funeral scene on page one. The second editor claimed that my "emotion" read like the opening of a Gothic Romance, not a Western.

I finally tried an opening with more scenery description. That detail set a harsh/somber mood, and that mood did the trick: the second editor bought the book, and I left Bantam to write for Avon.

So no matter how you choose to balance character exposition with setting, keep the following in mind:
Emotion hooks readers. Emotion sells books.

Ways to Reveal Your Hero's Personality

When creating your own heroes, use the following foundational fiction-writing techniques to sprinkle character traits lightly through your prose:

Action:

Physical gestures
Facial expressions
Habits (Example: he's never on time for anything)
Lifestyles (including religious and socio-economic backgrounds, hobbies, profession, etc.)
Idiosyncrasies (Example: he chews on his mustache when he's lost in thought)
Quirks (Example: he likes tuna fish on his pizza)

Dialogue:

- Speech patterns
- Dialect/Slang
- Idiomatic expressions (Example: "Golly!")

Reactions to Other Characters & to Circumstances through:

Introspection (Internal dialogue)
Behaviors
Attitudes and moods

Physical Appearance:

Age
Gender
Ethnicity
Scars and/or handicaps
Clothing
Personal belongings
Home and/or work environment

Good characterization is the key to selling any novel, but in genre Romance, the characterization stakes are much higher.

If you can't engage the reader's emotions (through the characters' emotions), then the reader won't care about the stage coach robbery, the battle of the werewolves, or the exquisitely clever way you solve the murder mystery. Every nuance of plot must evolve the love relationship.

Mastering characterization skills takes practice, and this section was intended to be a brief refresher. If you feel like you need additional tutelage, enroll in my online course, [*How to Write a Novel That Sells*](#), or *How to Write Memorable Characters* (one of the [novel writing workshops](#) in the *So Close But No Sale* series.) You may also want to investigate my [fiction coaching and manuscript critiquing services](#).

Hero Sex Appeal: How to Raise Your Reader's Temperature

Contrary to popular belief, kissing and pawing the heroine aren't guaranteed to make your hero "sexy."

In order to be considered a worthy mate, he has to prove himself in many ways that aren't necessarily connected to his libido. Think of it this way: how many women have you met who married their husbands based strictly upon bedroom talent?

Very few, I'll wager.

The story goal of every hero and heroine in a genre Romance is to find love and eventually, to marry that lover. Therefore, a Romance hero needs to be just as well-rounded as a real-life marriage prospect.

And Now to Really Amaze You . . .

Romance readers care more about *characterization* than they do about being titillated through gratuitous sex.

Surprised?

Then you don't understand your audience.

In all the years I've been writing, I have yet to encounter a Romance author who receives fan mail for her "hot sex" scenes. But fans do praise us – and frequently – for our "hot heroes."

Listen: write what you want. But keep the sensibilities of your paying audience in mind. If you're writing for Avon Romance, you're going to be asked to write hotter love scenes than you would by Bantam editors. Trust me. I know.

However, if a love scene isn't driving the plot forward, or revealing some surprising new character trait (or both), then that scene is nothing more than story bloat and should be cut from your manuscript. The only exception to this rule is when your editor insists that you include another sex scene. As a commercial fiction writer, you don't have much choice when the editor makes such requests. Either you write the additional sex scene, or you return your monetary advance and break your publishing contract.

Most writers opt for the former choice.

50 Ways to Give Your Romance Hero Sex Appeal

So how do you strike that elusive balance between brain and brawn, sass and class, sexual chemistry and emotional caring that will make a reader sigh – and maybe even pant – for your hero throughout your entire manuscript?

I'll help you jumpstart your creativity with 50 ideas.

1. You write clever, humorous, or euphemistic dialogue for him. (Example: "Seduction, my dear Silver, does require forethought.")
2. You let him embrace new challenges or activities (Example: For the heroine's sake, he attends a Led Zeppelin concert, even though the reader *knows* the hero would rather be listening to the Boston Symphony play Mozart.)
3. You make him emotionally vulnerable at least once in the book. (Example: When she tells him she's walking out of his life, he breaks a brandy snifter in his bare hand. Another example: He seems to be ultra self-confident facing down gunfighters or lawyers, and yet he becomes boyishly shy in the heroine's company.)
4. You prove that he'll be a good caretaker (Examples: He romps through the park with a puppy. He tenderly inspects a young tomato plant for evil, leaf-eating bugs.)
5. You reveal his protective nature in a positive light (Example: He chides his young ward for sneaking out of the house to spark her less-than-noble beau).
6. You show him stepping forward in defense of the heroine. (Example: He kindly but firmly tells her mother to mind her own business.)
7. You attach some alluring fragrance to his belongings or his hair. (Example: he smells like pine trees or some titillating tobacco.)
8. You paint him as sensitive and/or considerate, especially related to the needs and feelings of others. (Example: He is authentically remorseful over some minor infraction that he committed.)

9. You give him an optimistic outlook. (Example: When everyone else is grumbling about the weather, he whistles to himself, pleased to think that he'll soon have new flowers growing in his garden.)
10. You allow him to develop his own unique fashion sense. (Example: instead of a Stetson – which every other cowboy wears – he chooses his old, Confederate Army slouch hat. Another endearing tactic: he's self-conscious about his appearance and dresses to please the heroine.)
11. You give him a relationship with a Higher Power. (Example: He may not follow the dictates of a particular religious sect, but he has a strong sense of right and wrong, and he believes in a Divine Power.)
12. You help him find the humor in situations (Example: he makes the heroine laugh when she's dead-set against it.)
13. You show that he can be reasonable, even when he's angry or hurt. (Example: He *wants* to thrash the heroine's smarmy date; instead, the hero grits his teeth and shakes his rival's hand.)
14. You also show that he'd rather negotiate a truce than fight. (If he has to fight, he does so as a last resort, and he wins the showdown, of course.)
15. You continually reveal his deepening admiration, respect, and love for the heroine. (Example: The first time the hero meets the heroine, he thinks her appearance is plain. As he grows to care about her, he can't imagine why he didn't see her beauty before.)
16. You paint him sad or guilty over some minor infraction (Example: youthful voyeurs spy him kissing the heroine. After the children spread rumors, the heroine's reputation suffers, and the hero feels responsible.)
17. You develop unique, heart-warming romantic gestures for him. (Example: He brings the heroine a breakfast tray, and the whipped cream for her hot cocoa gets used in very creative ways before they leave the bedroom.)
18. You prove that he can forgive others, especially those who are genuinely trying to make amends. (Example: His loser brother needs yet another loan. The hero gives it to him, but only on the condition that the Loser gets himself a paying job.)

19. You allow him to romp in the rain (add children, pets, or the heroine to the scene for additional opportunities to reveal his playful nature.)
20. You make him act with kindness and compassion toward his servants, his staff, and to the working classes. (Example: He gives his secretary time off, with plane fare, to visit her ailing mother.)
21. You challenge his integrity, and he comes out smelling like a rose. (Example: He has the option to fib about his age in a dating chat-room. Instead, he reluctantly tells the truth and wins a date with the heroine.)
22. You produce evidence that he is well-liked and well-respected by his colleagues, subordinates, family, friends, etc. (Example: he has trouble sneaking away for romantic interludes during family gatherings, because his niece and nephew chase him around the house, claiming he gives the best “horsie” rides.)
23. You give him a social cause that women can respect (Examples: he plants trees to help “green” the neighborhood; he donates money to a battered-woman’s center; he regularly brings his “pet therapist” dog to a nursing home; he cooks meals for the homeless; he tutors elementary school children in reading or math at the local YMCA, etc.)
24. You give him hobbies that make him light up with boyish glee. (Example: He practically runs to the mailbox every afternoon to see if his subscription to *Popular Mechanics* has finally arrived.)
25. You make his rival or enemy grudgingly acknowledge one of his positive traits or talents. (Example: Mr. Enemy admits that the hero is too honest for his own good.)
26. You show him helping the heroine to regain her self-confidence or to overcome some deep hurt. (Example: He nods silently and hands her tissues, one by one, as she pours out her heart to him.)
27. You reveal his resourcefulness, especially in stressful situations. (Example: The heroine drops her keys down the grate and is frantic about getting to the airport on time. Mr. Corporate Lawyer Hero hot-wires her car.)

28. You make him courageous, persevering no matter what the odds are. (Example: The door is on fire and the house is collapsing; nevertheless, he dashes inside to retrieve the heroine's unpublished Romance manuscript. Ha!)
29. You give him a drop-dead gorgeous smile that makes up for thinning hair or an oversized nose.
30. You show that he respects women. (Examples: Even when he's furious with a woman, he refrains from cursing in her presence or making snide remarks about her; he is especially careful to teach his daughters to love and respect their bodies; he encourages his lover to stretch her wings when she's afraid of taking a career risk, etc.)
31. You show that he has reasonable money sense (he's not a spendthrift, nor is he a miser.)
32. You demonstrate that he is willing to sacrifice his life for a loved one. (Example: When the villain is using the heroine as a body shield and has jammed the barrel of a one-shot pistol into her throat, the hero calmly but grimly steps within the pistol's range, hoping to draw the villain's fire.)
33. You paint the hero as generous, noble and/or chivalrous. (Example: He surrenders the last piece of cherry pie to his sister's bratty kid.)
34. You force him to face his deepest fears and eventually, to triumph over them. (Example: He realizes he'll have to face his eight-year-old daughter and admit that he's in love with a woman other than "Mommy.")
35. You prove that he can keep a secret. (Example: At a party, the heroine professes that she baked the lasagna herself; he furtively peels the Deli price tag from the bottom of the dish.)
36. You let his "authentic self" shine through his eyes, no matter what he may be saying. (Example: When he is called to war, he breaks off his engagement with the heroine and tells her their affair was nothing but a "silly dream," but she can tell by the light in his eyes that he still loves her.)

37. You create a small but endearing idiosyncrasy for him. (Example: he likes tuna fish on his pizza; he insists on throwing salt over his shoulder when he spills it; he proudly drives an “art car”.)
38. You hide a skeleton in his closet and demonstrate his character based on the way he chooses to handle stigma. (Example: When confronted publically with evocative posters of his twin sister, the porn star, the hero quietly but tactfully walks down another street ****or**** he storms into the XXX Bookstore and demands that the proprietor tear the posters off the wall.)
39. You make him deal prudently and/or tactfully with other characters who are angry, upset, threatening, etc. (Example: He quietly stashes his drunken father’s whiskey bottle behind a couch cushion.)
40. You provide him with a “junk drawer” and give the heroine some reason to rummage through it, thus learning all manner of amusing or curious things about him. (Example: For some enigmatic reason, he saves chewing gum wrappers and possesses a three-inch stack of them, which he has bound with rubber bands.)
41. You show that he’s conscientious. (Example: Even though he has driven half way to work, he turns the car around, because he remembers that he forgot to feed the dog.)
42. You gift him with patience. (Example: He grits his teeth and bears the annoyance of cat hair clinging to his trousers – especially if the feline belongs to the heroine.)
43. You paint him as gracious and/or grateful. (Example: He laughs jovially when he receives a tacky Retro knick-knack for his birthday, and he puts the item in a place of honor to make the giver feel special – at least until that person leaves the house!)
44. You make him classy and sophisticated, capable of mingling with aplomb in almost any crowd. (Example: Despite his New York accent and his Wall Street hair cut, he has no trouble making friends at the Cajun Crawfish Boil.)
45. You reveal his tolerance for other characters’ faults or idiosyncrasies. (Example: He chivalrously walks his eccentric neighbor home in the dark, because she claims she’s afraid of low-flying bats.)

46. You show how much he loves his mother, father, siblings, etc. (Example: He leaves daffodils on his mother's gravesite on her birthday.)
47. You give him an open mind or you strip him of some egotistical bias that stands in the way of his true happiness with the heroine. (Example: Although he received his medical degree from Harvard, he finally comes to believe and acknowledge that the heroine has the extraordinary power to heal through the touch of her hands.)
48. You let him fall in love slowly, scene by scene, even though he may not be willing to admit it yet. (Example: When she leaves on a two-week business trip, he finds himself missing the little things she used to do, like spraying perfume on his pillow.)
49. In the climax ("dark moment") of the story, you make him sacrifice every other story goal for his love of the heroine. (Example: He has to choose, once and for all, whether he's going to act out his revenge against the heroine's card-sharper father — which would break the heroine's heart.)
50. You make him grow as a character, and therefore, as a man. (Example: At the beginning of the novel, he was intolerant of the heroine's overprotective mother. By the end of the novel, they are chatting cozily over coffee – much to the heroine's bemusement.)

Did you notice that very few of the tips in this section related to the hero's physical appearance or his bedroom behavior? I hope so! Because that was my purpose for constructing the list.

Now let's look at ways that you might incorporate a few of the 50 tips for creating Sex Appeal in your hero. The following three book excerpts (in blue) were written to reveal an unexpected personality twist for three very different hero personalities:

- Pragmatic Zack Rawlins, Cattle Rancher ([Texas Wildcat](#))
- Boisterous Wes Rawlins, Texas Ranger ([Texas Lover](#))
- Wily Rafe Jones, Shakespearean Actor and Con Man ([Scoundrel for Hire](#))

[Texas Wildcat](#)

By Adrienne deWolfe

Originally Published by Bantam Books

ISBN 0-553-57482-5

Story Notes:

No cattleman in his right mind would entertain the notion of courting a sheep rancher, least of all outspoken, dungaree-wearing Bailey McShane. The liaison would be political suicide for Zack Rawlins, who aspires to preside over the local Cattlemen's Association for another year. Unfortunately, Zack can't seem to forget the kiss he stole from his feisty, life-long neighbor during the rodeo a few weeks back – perhaps because the fist-sized bruise that Bailey gave him hasn't completely faded from his abdomen.

But when Zack watches Bailey's beloved hunting hound, Boo, defend her from a rabid raccoon, he knows that the coon is Boo's death sentence. Despite his better sense, Zack finds himself searching for some way to ease Bailey's heartache. The scene (in blue, below) starts in Zack's viewpoint. The book takes place in the summer of 1884, during a drought.

Excerpt from *Texas Wildcat*

By Adrienne deWolfe

As Zack rounded the corner of the public livery, his gaze was drawn to the church at the end of the street and the sun-beaten sycamore dominating the front yard. He couldn't immediately say what made him hesitate and peer more closely into the leafy shadows that darkened the grass. Maybe it was the appeal of all that shade, rolling out in gray-green waves toward the picket fence, now tinged a dusky peach in the twilight.

Or maybe it was the lone mourner with the wheat-colored hair, who sat, head bowed, against the tree trunk.

Zack chewed his bottom lip. Bailey really looked like she could use a friend.

Feeling awkward and not at all sure of his welcome, he walked the two blocks to the churchyard. He doffed his hat as he paused at the gate, suspecting he looked like he'd strolled through a dust devil. That was a regular state for him, thanks to cattle hooves and prairie winds, but he wasn't among cowboys at the

moment, and he suddenly felt self-conscious. He hastily combed his fingers through his hair and used his hat to beat off the worst of the trail dust. Then, drawing a bolstering breath, he lifted the latch and pushed inside the yard.

Bailey was too preoccupied to notice him. She was turning an object over and over in her hands, and as he crossed to the tree trunk, he recognized the leather strap that had once been Boo's collar. His heart twisted.

"Bailey."

She started at his gentle tone, blinking up at him with luminous, tear-filled eyes. He thought he recognized a welcome in her gaze before the embarrassment rolled in. She quickly looked away.

"Mind if I sit awhile?" he asked.

She hiked a shoulder, her chin jutting the tiniest bit, and he was reminded of his seven-year-old niece, Megan, who often employed the same tactic when she was too proud to admit she was hurting.

Gingerly lowering himself beside Bailey, he propped his back against the tree and stretched out his legs beside hers. He couldn't help but notice how short hers seemed compared with his, or how slender and delicate. He frowned, wondering when he'd last thought of the woman beside him as delicate.

A couple of minutes passed. He pondered what he should say as he watched her squeeze Boo's collar. Her hands were butternut-brown from the sun, small in size, and undeniably feminine, but he imagined their grip must be strong, the fingertips callused.

Just to think of her touch heated his insides, and he found himself bending and rolling his hat brim in an effort to work off the electric surge of forbidden yearning. He took small consolation in the fact that her own motions had grown jerky now that his thigh was scant inches from hers. Or maybe she was nervous because she thought he might grab her and kiss her again.

He groaned silently, imagining what she and the rest of the county must have thought of his impetuous behavior that day at the rodeo. His Aunt Lally had raised him better than that, and the first chance she had, she'd been quick to remind him of it, too.

Suddenly, he realized his silence had attracted Bailey's furtive stare. He spied her eyes glistening like blue topaz in the charcoal shadows of her Stetson. He cleared his throat.

"I'm real sorry about Boo."

She averted her face. "He was just a dog," she said thickly, giving him another one-shoulder shrug.

"But he was your friend."

When her chin quivered, Zack added gently, "You can raise thousands of animals, Bailey, and for the most part separate your feelings from your business. But every now and then, one'll come along and sneak inside your heart.

"Take Boss, for instance. He's twelve years old now, and Cord says it's time I started favoring a greener cowpony. But putting Boss out to pasture feels like cheating him somehow. He likes to work, and I like working with him. Fact is, he's like kinfolk to me.

"There's no shame in mourning an animal that worked hard for you," he continued. "Boo protected you. He deserves a special place in your memory, because he was special."

Bailey swallowed hard, fighting down her shameful lump of tears. She didn't know which was tougher, trying not to cry, or trying not to hug Zack. Whoever would have thought she'd hear Zack "Mr. Pragmatic" Rawlins wax poetic about some old cowpony, much less a shepherd's hunting dog? She'd fully expected him to eulogize Boo with "good riddance," after all the mischief the hound had caused on Zack's spread. In fact, she'd even begun to regret letting Zack bury Boo, since Zack was the least likely person to give her hound a fond farewell.

Zack had surprised her when he'd volunteered to do the job, and now he was surprising her again. She'd spent years secretly hoping to discover a friendlier side of him. To learn for certain that he truly had one was disconcerting. Why was he being so nice to her?

She studied him through narrowed eyes. "Why did you kiss me at the rodeo?"

He started, and his face flooded with color. She had caught him off guard. Good. It was a business tactic her daddy had taught her, but she'd also found it advantageous in courting, especially when the beaux who came sniffing around slipped in and out of the truth as easily as greased pigs.

Not that one little kiss made Zack her beau, of course.

"Well . . . I reckon I, uh, kissed you 'cause – " He broke off and tossed her a sheepish glance. "Shoot, Bailey. I kissed you 'cause I wanted to."

He did? Her eyebrows furrowed at this revelation. "Why?"

Her question seemed to make him more uncomfortable. His hat looked in serious danger of being crumpled beyond use, and that was saying plenty, since he'd have to pay a full twenty dollars to replace it.

"Because I, er . . . I mean . . ." He released a gusty breath. "You're an attractive woman, Bailey."

Her lips curved cynically. Other men had told her the same thing right before they'd asked her what the market price was for her sheep.

"But I know that doesn't make kissing you right," he added hastily. "I want to set matters straight and apologize."

Did that mean he wasn't ever going to kiss her again? Disappointment pierced her armor of skepticism.

"Why did you wait all this time, then?"

He sighed, staring at the uncreased crown of his Stetson. "I know I should have apologized sooner – "

"Hell, I don't want your apology. I want to know why you waited so long to kiss me."

He blinked. "I beg your pardon?"

"Well, it's like this, Zack. As far as I've been able to tell, you didn't even know I existed until you kissed me one day out of the blue. So when did you decide I was attractive?"

He ran an agitated hand through his hair. "I've always thought you were attractive, Bailey."

"You have not."

He gaped at her challenge. "If you're referring to the time when I was courting your Cousin Caitlin, and I called you skinny – "

"You said I'd have to put an anvil in my britches to keep from blowing away."

The corners of his mouth twitched. "I did?"

"Yeah. And once you said I'd have to stand up twice to cast a shadow. Remember?"

"Well . . ." He cast her a sidelong glance. "I reckon you must have gotten me plenty riled up to say a thing like that."

"I riled *you* up?" She blew out her breath. "I went and sicced Boo on you that day."

"Now, *that* I remember."

"Course, he was only a puppy then," she said more glumly.

"Lucky for me." Zack flexed his right hand, gazing at the tooth scar below his knuckles. Then he shook his head. "That dog loved the hell out of you, Bailey."

His quiet observation nearly did her in. Biting her lip, she squeezed her eyes closed, struggling hard against the renewed surge of grief and guilt that ripped up her chest. Boo had trusted her. Even when she'd told him to sit, even when she'd raised the gun and pulled the trigger, his yellow wolf's eyes had never shown anything but loyalty and love for her.

Oh, Boo, I'm so sorry. I hate what I had to do to you. I keep praying it was the right thing . . .

The ache swelled from her chest to her throat. She turned her face way, and Zack's hand closed over hers.

"I miss him already," she whispered.

"I know."

He sat with her in silence for many minutes, his leathery fingers wrapped warmly around hers, Boo's collar gripped between them. As the orange glow beyond her eyelids slowly faded, turning bluer, blacker, with the shift from day to night, she heard the crickets singing to their mates. She heard the tree frogs and an owl, and the voice of some townswoman calling her husband to dinner. Everyone, it seemed, had someone to love. Except her.

A tear slipped down her cheek.

Dropping her head back against the tree, she opened her eyes and stared at the stars, praying to God Zack hadn't seen her crying.

"I'm glad you kissed me, Zack."

His breath caught. It seemed like a full minute passed before he finally, slowly released it.

"You pack a powerful wallop for a girl who likes being kissed."

"Well . . ." It was her turn to blush. "I didn't punch you for that."

"You didn't?"

"No. I punched you for saying my daddy spoiled me."

"Hmm." His thumb grazed the knuckle of her forefinger. "Then I apologize for that, too."

She swallowed, feeling his skin brush hers again. And again. It was nice to know he hadn't done it the first time by mistake, but his caresses felt scary,

too. She didn't worry that he'd overstep his gentlemanly boundaries. That was the last thing she ever worried about with Zack.

No, her uneasiness came from sensing things were different. Things had changed between them. Her girlhood fantasy was holding her hand. For the first time ever, her dreams were within reach.

Her stomach flipped at the thought.

Let's Review *Texas Wildcat*

The devices used in the above scene to give Zack sex appeal included:

He volunteered for the onerous task of burying Boo (kindness, support)

He was concerned about his appearance (dressed to impress)

He gathered the courage to comfort Bailey, even though he wasn't sure of his welcome (nobility/chivalry)

He gave honest answers to uncomfortable questions (integrity)

He revealed an endearing streak of shyness (emotional vulnerability)

He apologized for causing her embarrassment (consideration of others' feelings through authentic remorse)

[Texas Lover](#)

By Adrienne deWolfe

Published by Bantam Books

ISBN 0-553-57481-7

Story Notes:

Texas Ranger Wes Rawlins (Zack's younger brother) is off on his own romantic adventure. In this scene, he's standing in the heroine's kitchen. At Wes's side is the heroine's nine-year-old ward, Topher. Ginevee is the heroine's housekeeper. The scene (in blue, below) is written from the viewpoint of the heroine, Rorie, who is a divorced schoolmarm. The book takes place in Texas in 1883.

Excerpt from *Texas Lover* By Adrienne deWolfe

Rorie blew out her lamp and headed down the stairs. She avoided the creaking floorboard in the dining room, more out of habit than necessity, and approached the kitchen door. She was intending to fetch the basket in which she always put her eggs, but the sound of voices stopped her.

“You got that batter stirred up, Topher?”

“Yeah, but . . .” Topher sounded mutinous. “I don’t see why we got to do it. Men don’t cook. That’s women’s work.”

Wes’s chuckle floated out to her. “And just who do you think cooks for the cattlemen, the Rangers, and the buffalo hunters when there aren’t any womenfolk on the trail?”

Rorie let a traitorous smile steal across her face. She edged forward, her footsteps muffled by the rattle of pans, and furtively poked her head around the corner. What she saw nearly left her choking as she stifled her amusement.

The kitchen was in a shambles. A bucket had been overturned beneath the sink, and one of the window’s curtains was twisted and wrinkled as if a small hand had grabbed it, probably to haul Topher up onto the sideboard to steal cookies. On the table, nestled between little mountains of flour, were several discarded egg shells, each dripping the last of their remains into the powdery residue sprinkled across the floor.

In fact, flour seemed to be everywhere. It decorated the milk pitcher with the imprint of a large masculine hand; it trailed footsteps to the butter churn and Ginevee’s prized rack of spices; and it made Topher look like a ghost – or rather, a raccoon, since his big, blue eyes stared out from a pasty mask.

At the moment, Wes’s back was turned to her. But after he slipped his head into the bib of Ginevee’s apron, Rorie saw he had not been left untouched. The flour storm had blown into the crevices of his rolled-up sleeves and had rained down on his auburn hair, giving him a sort of confectioner’s halo. She had to clap a hand over her mouth to hold back a giggle when he brushed a rakish curl off his forehead, leaving a smear of white in its place. Then he grabbed a bowl and began filling it with the flour mountains, sweeping them off the table with his forearm.

Topher’s brow furrowed, dribbling a few flakes of flour into the batter he was stirring. “Just what are slabberdabs, anyway?”

With a deft flick of his wrist, Wes broke an egg into his bowl. “Why they’re my Pa’s prized trail flapjacks. Pa passed the secret on to my brother, Cord, and Cord passed it on to Zack and me. Now I’m letting you in on the recipe. It’s a time-honored tradition, son, and no women can ever know about it.” He fixed Topher with a stern stare. “You’re going to have to swear a pinky oath.”

Topher’s eyes nearly bugged out. “Gee, that’s serious!”

This time, Rorie clapped both hands over her mouth.

Wes nodded gravely. “Do you hereby swear to take to your grave the Rawlins brothers’ secret slabberdab recipe?”

Topher linked his smallest finger with Wes's. "Ain't no woman going to pry it out of me until the worms eat out my eyeballs."

Rorie's mirth lodged in her throat when she heard a footstep behind her. She turned guiltily, recognizing the squat, round form of Ginevee approaching through the lifting shadows of sunrise. Rorie hastily pressed a finger to her lips, grinning as she beckoned her friend closer.

Meanwhile, Topher was standing on a chair, straining to get a better view of Wes's bowl. "Whatcha got in there? Another secret recipe?"

"Naw. Just some biscuits. I could be making huckydummy, though, if I had raisins."

"We got raisins," Topher said brightly. Jumping back down to the floor, he blazed a trail through the flour drifts and stood on tiptoe to haul a tin container down from the shelves. "How many raisins do ya need?" he called as the metal lid clattered to the floor.

"Well," Wes said thoughtfully, raising his spoon and watching the batter plop back into the bowl. "We got eight hungry people coming to breakfast, and I reckon they'll want at least two biscuits each. I figure we'll need about ten raisins per person, so how many does that make, Topher?"

The enthusiasm on Topher's face dwindled to confusion. "I don't know." He scowled. "Sixteen?"

Ginevee nudged Rorie, as if to say, "That boy hasn't been doing his lessons," and Rorie shrugged helplessly. Topher had known the answer to eight times ten two weeks ago, when she'd tested the older children on their multiplication tables – or at least, he had seemed to. Had the boy been cheating again?

"No," Wes said gently. "Try again. Eight tens are how many?"

Topher's chin jutted. "I ain't any good at numbers."

"You want to know a secret?" Wes winked. "Neither am I."

The tenseness eased from Topher's shoulders. "You're not?"

"Nope. That's why I made up a song to help me. Want to hear it?"

Topher nodded eagerly. Wes grinned and belted out:

*Grizzly's in the honeycomb,
Queen bee, she's a bawlin',
Hound dog treed a cougar cat,
And Kitty's up there squallin'.*

In spite of Wes's total disregard for pitch, Rorie recognized the tune because it belonged to a childhood game she had played in Cincinnati. Wes had taken liberty with the lyrics, though. Either that, or he was yodeling the Texas version, because she couldn't remember singing about grizzly bears or cougars in Ohio.

Perhaps it was just as well, she thought, delighted to watch the enthusiasm return to Topher's face. To hear the boy finally memorize his multiplication tables under Wes's tutelage, she had a hard time remembering how angry she'd been when she'd caught Wes snooping through her journal. Her hired hand might be insubordinate, but he was gifted with children.

Suddenly, painfully, Rorie realized Wes would make a wonderful father – the kind of father she would want for her own children, if she could have them.

Grinning from ear to ear, Topher threw back his head and joined Wes for the second refrain:

*Ten times 5 is 50, ten times 6 is 60;
Ten times 7 is 70, ten times 8 is 80.*

The combination of squeaky soprano and rusty baritone was so awful, so wonderfully blessedly awful, that Rorie couldn't help herself. She snickered. Ginevee, who was the county's undisputed fiddle-playing champion, covered her ears and did the same.

The next thing Rorie knew, the two of them were howling with laughter, clutching their sides, and staggering against the wall for support, tears of mirth streaking their cheeks.

"Uh oh," Topher said to Wes in a mortified whisper. "*Women!*"

Let's Review [Texas Lover](#)

Devices that were used to give Wes sex appeal in the above scene included:

This rugged, gun-toting Ranger *cooks!* And he sings with abandon, heedless of pitch (hobbies)

He teaches Topher a rhyme to help him remember his multiplication tables (Wes likes and understands children.)

He has a wry sense of humor (playfulness/whimsical dialogue)

He's unconcerned about being coated by flour (appearance)

Scoundrel for Hire
Originally Published by Avon Books
ISBN 0-380-80527-8

Story Notes:

Con man Raphael "Rafe" Jones is relaxing by himself in the heroine's parlor and enjoying a snifter of brandy. The hour is well after midnight. He is just contemplating whether to make good on his private vow to prowls the mansion's second story to seduce the heroine (Silver), when he hears a footstep on the stairs. The scene (in blue, below) starts in the hero's viewpoint. The book takes place in Aspen, Colorado, in 1886.

Excerpt from *Scoundrel for Hire*
By Adrienne deWolfe

Silver was coming downstairs. But why?

His brow furrowed. He'd like to think she was searching for him, but the chances of that were slim. Perhaps she was searching for her father.

Rafe strained his ears, but it was the faint whiff of lavender, not the rustling of satin, that heralded her arrival at the parlor doors. She glided past him, her hair spilling over her modest décolletage like a perfumed veil, the white muslin of her night wrapper billowing like angel wings in her wake. He thought how incongruous his carnal appetite was in the face of this apparition of purity.

But then, he was a product of lust, eternally damned for the sins of his parents. Old habits died hard.

More silent than the shadows that camouflaged him, he watched her intently, a predator hungry for the feast that paced just an arm's length away. He had imagined many methods of seduction; he had plotted many scenarios in which to woo her. His fondest fantasy had always been unconditional surrender, in which she'd come to him, aching, unable to resist her own need for pleasure. Was this the signal he'd been waiting for? Was this the night he would finally taste her?

She seemed agitated. He wondered if she sensed him there. She made a brisk circle around the room before pausing before the piano. Her chest heaved, and she quivered. She appeared reluctant to linger, and yet her fingers slowly, grudgingly reached, as if drawn by some magnetic force. For a moment, she did nothing more than touch the keys. Just touch them. The upset on her features dissolved into something wistful, perhaps melancholy.

Intrigued, Rafe stilled even his breathing.

She traced a tentative finger along the ivory. Not a single note was struck, and yet the longing in that feather-light caress tugged at Rafe's dormant conscience. He thought he should announce himself, but she suddenly sat, turning her back to him. Her fingers spread in earnest. Low, mournful, and

haunting, the first few notes she played made him think better of intruding. The melody was unmistakable to his ears.

"Softly goes my song's entreaty, through the night to thee . . ."

Rafe could almost hear the lyrics in every plaintive stroke of the keys. His mother had also been fond of the bittersweet *Serenade* by Franz Schubert. His throat constricted, and he closed his eyes, lost for a moment in the chords that plucked at his own heart.

"Ah, I know a lover's longing, know the pain of love . . ."

Mama would sing the song over and over, consumed by her own misery. Was that how Silver felt? Was she still in love with this Aaron Townsend? Or was she playing the melody for some other beau who was closer to home?

Rafe's jaw jutted the tiniest bit. Was that why she barely gave him a second glance?

*Let thy heart as well grow tender,
Sweetheart, why so coy?
Anxious, fevered, I await thee.
Come and bring me joy.
And bring me joy.*

The repeat of the final plea reverberated in his mind as the last chord sighed into the darkness. Slowly, inevitably, the music faded into silence. Silver sat as still as a bust of her namesake, and he drew a long, winding ribbon of breath. For once, no witticism came to mind to leaven the spell.

"Forgive me," he murmured, "for intruding."

She started. "Wh-where are you?" she demanded, rising quickly, her anxious eyes raking the shadows.

He sat up on the couch, and moonbeams splayed across his brandy, shirt, and hair.

"You should have announced yourself," she accused shakily.

He inclined his head. "I know. But I couldn't. You play so . . . beautifully."

He heard her swallow. He wondered fleetingly if it were his presence or merely his compliment that had her so unsettled.

"I often play when I can't sleep."

"Ständchen is hardly a lullaby."

She raised her chin, but its quiver betrayed she was not her confident self. "You are familiar with Schubert, then?"

"That particular piece, yes. But for piano, I prefer the *Moonlight Sonata*."

"Beethoven?" She sounded incredulous.

He smiled to himself. No doubt she thought his musical tastes ran toward *Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair*. "Do you know it?"

"Not well enough to play for an audience."

"Would you allow me, then?"

"Y-you play?"

"Of course."

Crossing the room, he set his brandy snifter on top of her box piano. She moved quickly out of his way, as if she were frightened of him again, and he frowned, wondering if his nearness or his half-buttoned shirt were to blame. He couldn't think what he had done to alarm her.

“Where . . . did you learn Beethoven?” she asked tentatively.

Her curiosity appeared stronger than her wariness. He was glad for that. Perhaps he could lure her closer.

“My mother,” he answered truthfully. “She preferred the classics to church music. It was the one other thing Jedidiah couldn’t break her of.”

“Jedidiah?”

Rafe’s smile was mirthless and fleeting. He hadn’t meant to crack open that powder keg, especially not tonight. “My siblings’ father.”

“But not yours?” she murmured.

He steeled himself against a sharp retort. He should have known better than to think she would leave that keg firmly sealed.

Glancing over his shoulder, he cast her a veiled look. “You sound surprised. Don’t tell me you didn’t once suspect that I sprang from the bowels of Satan.”

Her brow furrowed. “Why would I think something so horrible?”

“Jedidiah did.”

He lowered onto the bench, placing his feet on the pedals. She shifted the tiniest bit closer. He could feel her warmth, like springtime, hovering just beyond his range of vision. He willed her closer, but kept his back turned, rolling the overlong lace at his cuffs. As much as he wanted her sitting beside him, her muslin-swathed thigh pressed to his, he wasn’t willing to open the Pandora’s box of his childhood to achieve her seduction.

“You sound angry when you speak of him.”

Sympathy throbbed beneath the unspoken question in her voice. He grimaced, then hastily smoothed the telltale irritation from his face.

“Do I?”

He heard the rustle of fabric. He suspected she’d fidgeted, dissatisfied by his response.

“You’re so good at hiding your feelings. I . . . don’t think I’ve ever seen you angry before.”

“Ah. Well, it’s terrible to behold, isn’t it?” He stretched his fingers over the keys.

“Rafe?”

He hesitated, reluctant to yield even that small concession.

“What happened to your mother?”

He tensed. He hadn’t expected that question. For a moment, a flood of feelings welled inside him, feelings that he managed to lodge somewhere between his throat and his tongue. He couldn’t be funny or witty about Mama. He couldn’t spin heroic yarns to absolve himself of his bastardy or make light of the shame that his birth had caused her. He couldn’t ever avenge the degradation she’d suffered at the hands of Jedidiah Jones.

And for those reasons, he couldn’t bear to speak of her.

“She’s dead,” he said flatly.

Then he struck the first note of the last piece Mama had ever taught him. Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*. He played it for her.

Silver listened in perfect stillness, hardly daring to breathe. The nightmare that had haunted her sleep was temporarily forgotten. At last, Raphael Jones’s playactor’s mask had slipped to reveal his own private haunting.

Silver's stomach churned in a mixture of guilt, empathy, and relief. When Rafe had first surprised her here, she feared that he would try to press his advantage, that he would capitalize on her vulnerability, the way Aaron Townsend once had.

But the man sitting at the piano wasn't even thinking of her. His eyelashes fanned lower, as if his hands would feel their way across the ivory, and to her bemusement they did – passionately, poignantly, and without error. He was lost in the music, in the memories that flitted like specters across his chiseled features. His throat worked; his chest rose and fell to the melodic lament. Watching the tumult he struggled to keep corked inside him, she felt like a voyeur.

More than that, she felt foolish to have presumed he would pounce on her like some savage jungle cat. By the river, in her bedroom, and during the few times when their conspiracy had necessitated a secret rendezvous, he'd had plenty of opportunity to force his attentions upon her. But that wasn't Rafe's way, she realized in growing wonder. He might be wild and wicked in ways she couldn't comprehend, but he'd proven that he wasn't heartless. He wasn't cruel. No matter what this Jedidiah had done to him, Rafe wasn't violent. And he didn't take what he wanted by force.

No, she realized with a tiny, shivery thrill, he waited with canny patience for the thing to come to him.

The last strains of Beethoven's masterwork shivered into silence. Silver could almost feel the perfect stillness of the mansion crowding her throat and weighting her shoulders. She knew that Rafe felt it, too. His fingers moved, impossibly slow, lifting from the now soundless keys.

An aching sympathy speared her chest. She told herself that was the only reason she allowed herself to perch beside him on the bench.

"I miss my mother too," she murmured.

His head turned slowly, and his eyes, more haunting than the ghost that had robbed her of sleep, glistened when they touched hers.

He said nothing, but she sensed that, too, was his way.

Let's Review *Scoundrel for Hire*

The devices that were used to give Rafe sex appeal in the above scene included:

His recognition that the heroine was nervous or afraid of him, and therefore, inappropriate to seduce (nobility/integrity)

His jealousy over Aaron Townsend (vulnerability)

His appreciation for – and ability to play – classical music (hobbies)

His deep and conflicted feelings about his bastardy (vulnerability)

His silent dedication of the *Sonata* to his mother (love for a parent)

Sex Appeal Review:

Ten Questions to Consider When Writing a Romance Hero

1. Does the hero's character possess universal hero qualities?

Heroes tend to be leaders in some way. They are smart, resourceful, and larger than life. Other characters will admire – or hate them – for the very thing that makes them stand out in a crowd.

Many times, a protagonist doesn't start out with fully developed "hero" qualities. In fact, he may not have any relationship with the dormant "hero" inside him. Leadership, nobility, and courage are thrust upon him as he embarks upon his story quest and acts under stresses that help to grow his character.

2. Have you written situations in which your hero can prove his heroic qualities?

If your hero is chained to a bench as a galley slave for most of the book, he won't have many opportunities to behave heroically. By the same token, if your hero's a research assistant who spends all of his time in a library, you're going to need some extraordinary scene (example: the library burns down and he rescues trapped toddlers) before the reader will embrace him as a larger-than-life protagonist.

Many plot twists will arise from the hero's personality and his personal history, so I recommend that you develop him on paper, writing his biography, to glean interesting facets of character that may surprise you. In fact, I've developed [*Create Colorful Characters for Your Romance*](#) (a set of characterization worksheets) specifically designed to help you write heroes, heroines, sidekicks and villains. Look for these worksheets on the navigation bar of my website, WritingNovelsThatSell.com, under the "Romance Writers" section.

3. Does the hero's persona reflect the cultural values of his era? Or must you write him as a "man beyond his time" to make him appealing to modern-day readers?

In genre novels, movies and other popular entertainment, the harsh realities of an historical period are often glossed over. For example, you never saw a 14-year-old whore during the Golden Age of Hollywood Westerns, even though 14 was the average age of "Calico Queens," and few of those girls survived to their 18th birthdays.

In genre Romance, it is especially important to strike a balance between the harsh realities of your chosen era and the romantic ambience that your readers expect.

For instance, if you're writing a book set in the Antebellum South, and your hero is a planter's son, he probably has a code of honor. Realistically speaking, however, that code would not have extended to his slaves, whom the average plantation owner used to beat or take as recreational lovers. As a writer, you must find realistic ways to portray the Southern planter class, perhaps through sidekicks and villains, especially if you decide to create the hero as a "man beyond his time" – in this case, a man who treats all men and women as equals.

4. Have you given your hero an engaging foil?

One of the quickest and most revealing ways to characterize a protagonist is to give him a sidekick or confidante. This secondary character usually plays a major role in one or more subplots related to the Romance. He (or she) will know all the hero's strengths and weaknesses due to their long-standing (or intimate) relationship. Thus, the sidekick won't be shy about teasing, coaxing, bullying, or charming the hero into some predicament that the hero dreads.

For example, in my fifth award-winning Romance, *Always Her Hero*, Michael's younger sister/ward is constantly trying to match-make for her overprotective, bachelor brother so she can distract him from the sparking mischief that she enjoys with her own beaux.

When sidekicks complicate the hero's life, the reader has an opportunity to see the hero acting under duress. Thus, sidekicks help to reveal the hero's mettle.

5. **Have you gone on a virtual date with your hero?**

Visualize (daydream) about his courtship style. Where would you meet for the first time? How would he approach you to ask for the date? Would he want to encounter you several times in a social setting before inviting you out, or would he initiate an outrageous flirtation the moment you meet and ask for your company that very evening? Where would you go? How would he dress? How would his cologne smell? What does his laughter sound like? What endearing or romantic gestures would he exhibit to woo your trust? Would the whole evening be geared toward your seduction, or would he be a gentleman from the outset? Would he shake your hand to say good-bye? Kiss it? Kiss your lips? Quote poetry? Leave a gift on your pillow?

Become acquainted with your hero's romantic side, so you can portray him as an appealing lover.

6. **Do you know your hero inside and out?**

To write a credible man, it's imperative that you understand what makes him tick. Sure, you need to know what he *looks* like. But do you know how he thinks? Do you know what he'll notice first when he walks into a party? Do you know the secret he's trying to keep from the world (if only to protect himself from additional hurt?) Do you what frightens him about love and keeps him from committing to the heroine? Do you know the role he played while growing up among his siblings, and how loving his parents were to him and to each other?

Just for fun, would you know exactly how he'd behave if you put him in a totally different time period, or exposed him to a stressful scenario that might never occur in your book (ex: he wins the lottery; he gets ship-wrecked on a deserted island; he encounters a ghost or otherworldly creature)?

If you can't answer these and similar questions *without hesitation*, you don't know your hero well enough to understand what motivates his behavior. Motivation drives the hero's goals, and his goals are linked to obstacles (the internal and external conflicts) that keep him from experiencing true love with the heroine. In order to create a well-rounded hero, you need to know him as well as you know yourself.

7. **Have you given your hero internal dialogue (thoughts) and external dialogue that ring true for a man of his era?**

There's nothing more off-putting than reading a hero who thinks and speaks like a woman. And I'm not just talking about shoe conversations!

In the name of research, you will have to spend time around a *variety* of men (relatives don't count). If you can't bring yourself to hang out at a gym, pool hall,

golf club, or other male haunt, study movies or use the Internet to unearth additional research about male speech and thought patterns.

8. Have you fallen in love with your hero's cranky side?

Let's face it, if your hero doesn't make *your* heart pound, he's not going to elicit sighs from your readers. But you probably know that. In fact, you probably have little trouble writing scenes in which your hero is suave, noble or cheerful. The trick comes when you're writing him as cranky, overbearing, or uneasy. Remember: perfect people make boring characters. Whether you like it or not, your hero must have flaws to make him endearing.

9. Does your hero reflect your writing style and personal preferences?

When developing a character, it is important that you create a man whom you would like and want to know intimately. Until you have mastered the art of characterization, I suggest that you avoid creating a character just because you think the archetype is popular with readers. If you struggle to write a male whom you secretly dislike, that struggle (subconsciously) appears in your writing. You may even lose interest in completing your story. Since you're going to have to "live" with this virtual man for a long time inside your head, you might as well enjoy his company.

By the way, some best-selling authors have made careers out of writing the same hero-archetype book after book, so repetition, apparently, isn't a crime in the minds of readers or editors.

10. Does your hero's character conform to your targeted publisher's guidelines?

If your hero is Afro-American and your heroine is Caucasian, and your target publisher doesn't buy books about bi-racial love affairs, then you may be out of luck. Study your market! I recommend that you read at least 30 books written by new authors in your favorite Romance line before you try to write for that line.

By the way, a "new" author is one who has been published five or fewer times in the last five years.

If you want to see where the industry is headed, or how "hot" you need to write your love scenes, watch what the new authors are writing – especially those authors whose debut novels were released during the last 18 months.

Need More Writing Help?

[The Secrets to Getting Your Romance Novel Published](#) (E-Series or PDFs)

Adrienne's popular e-series, *The Secrets to Getting Your Romance Novel Published*, is available on Kindle and Nook. It can also be downloaded in PDF format directly from her website, WritingNovelsThatSell.com.

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[How to Write a Novel That Sells](#)

(Online Course)

“I’ve taken a lot of fiction courses from a lot of published writers, but this was the best nuts-and-bolts class I’ve ever had. Adrienne has given us the tools to be successful.”

~ Larry Tompkins, Student

Adrienne originally developed [How to Write a Novel That Sells](#) for a college in her community. The novel-writing students in that institution were frustrated, because the standard creative-writing curriculum was not preparing them to write and sell Mainstream Fiction, nor was it helping become published in genre fiction (Romance, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Mystery, Horror, Thriller and Western.)

Adrienne taught [How to Write a Novel That Sells](#) at that college for three years. Now she has made this standing-room-only course available to aspiring authors around the world.

[How to Write a Novel That Sells](#) is an 8-week course, with 12 hours worth of live lecture material and 4 additional, 90-minute workshop sessions, in which students will be invited to submit segments of their manuscript to the instructor for live critiques during class.

[How to Write a Novel That Sells](#) will take you step-by-step through the progression of your story, arming you with the skills that you need to sell and market your book-length fiction in today’s marketplace. For more details, visit [WritingNovelsThatSell.com](#).

[So Close But No Sale](#)

(Online Workshop Series)

Adrienne developed her workshop series, [So Close But No Sale](#), to assist writers who have submitted manuscripts to editors and agents, without success.

The workshops in this series are designed as refresher courses. (For complete instruction in novel structure and the foundations of fiction, see [How to Write a Novel That Sells](#).) The workshops in *So Close But No Sale* target key areas of novel-writing that are notorious for keeping a manuscript from selling. The topics in this series include:

- How to Pitch Your Manuscript to an Agent or Editor
- How to Write a Novel Proposal that Sells
- How to Fix the “Sagging Middle” of Your Book
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For more details about these online writing workshops, visit [WritingNovelsThatSell.com](#).

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Finalist, Best Short Historical Romance, Rita Awards, RWA
Finalist, Best Debut Novel, Reviewers' Choice Awards, *Romantic Times Magazine*
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Hero Wes Rawlins won the K.I.S.S. (Knight in Shining Silver) Award from *Romantic Times Magazine*
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Best Historical Romance of the Year, Reader's Poll, *Calico Trails Magazine*
Heroine Bailey McShane won the Cameo Award for Strong Women Characters, Reader's Poll, *Calico Trails Magazine*
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Winner, Readers Choice Award for Best Hero, Avon Books Website