

## A WRITING ASSIGNMENT FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

February 12, 2010



Love scenes are often the ones that fall. The lines feel hokey. The writer is lost at sea. She knows that the scene isn't working but there's no getting around it... the story calls for it. This is where the two characters must bond...

So what do we do? How do we create love scenes that actually work?

A few tips:

**TIP #1: Add conflict.** The conflict can be entirely external to what is happening between your two love-birds. They could be happily making out but ouch! One of them has a toothache. Or ate something bad. Or the phone keeps ringing. Or one of them has a deadline at work; file must be sent in by 2am. It's 1:45am and we've only just begun... Any bit of external conflict can spruce up a love scene.

**TIP #2: Add conflict.** There can be tremendous conflict between two people who totally love each other. In fact, the more they love, the bigger the conflict. Conflict doesn't mean "bad things happen". Bad things can happen without there being any conflict. Like: my computer just crashed. Except I'm on the beach having a blast playing Frisbee. Who cares if my computer crashed.

Conflict means that someone *wants* something, but an obstacle is in the way of them getting it. If I have to turn in a report by midnight or I lose my job, the computer crash is definitely conflict.

How does this apply to our love birds? Give each lover a goal: something they want to achieve. Make it very concrete and measurable. No vague, immeasurable goals like: "I want him to approve of me". Blugh. Give them each a measurable goal: meeting it is a yes or no answer. For example: "I want him to touch my hair", or "I want him to ask me how I'm feeling", "I want him to suggest that we get married." These are measurable goals. Whether or not they are met is a yes or no question.

If each person in a love scene has a goal like, no matter how "lovey" the scene is, it will be *filled* with conflict and therefore: with entertainment. (More on that in your assignment below.)

**TIP #3: Add conflict.** A third way to spruce up a soapy, campy love scene is to add conflict. That's right. I said it again: conflict. Consider adding *internal* conflict. Not something environmental like a toothache, not something inter-personal like the other person's cluelessness about what you want, but internal conflict: stuff inside the character's brain that makes them

reticent: feeling shy, insecure, worried about coming across as sleezy. Oh, the list goes on with all the noise that plagues our mind as we try and get close to another human being.

Add conflict. Add conflict. Add conflict. The greater the love, the greater the conflict.

And remember: people don't bond by blabbing away and talking about their lives. People bond through *action*. Let's see the two love-birds do something together (that adds opportunity for conflict!) rather than sit across the table and discuss their childhood.

Ready for your weekly assignment?

### **THIS WEEK'S ASSIGNMENT**

In the spirit of this holiday that's designed to make single people feel horrible about themselves: write a romantic scene. For the purposes of this assignment: it's a hetero couple. A guy. A gal.

Pick two characters. Could be two characters from a project you're working on, or you can base two characters on two people you know from your life. They'll become fictional as soon as you start writing them. The real-life people are just there to inspire and launch you off

Now let's write that bonding scene. Pick and choose any or all of the following sources of conflict:

**1) External conflict:** the slumlord hasn't fixed the heat. Whichever apartment they're hanging out in is freezing cold. (the other apartment is far and snow makes it impossible to drive.) As you write the scene, remember that your characters are freeeeeeezing!

**2) Inside the guy's head:** he's aware that he has a reputation as a "womanizer", and that this woman may be leery of him for this reason. Therefore, to win her trust, he makes it a policy not to initiate any physical contact. He will not touch her unless she touches him first. His goal: to get her to initiate physical contact so he can be assured that she trusts him.

**3) Inside her head:** The woman is not sure if he's attracted to her. On top of that, she's self-conscious about a horrible hair-cut she got that day. She decides that she won't make a fool of herself by initiating something. Only if he initiates contact, she'll know that he's attracted to her and take it from there. Her goal: your guessed it. Her goal is to get him to initiate contact so that she can be assured that he's attracted to her.

OK! Let's get to work.

Remember that what is in their head never needs to be said, spoken, uttered, or even hinted at. People don't share their thoughts.

Write this as an improvised scene and let's see how these two live-birds duke it out, in the cold, on Valentine's Day.

Happy writing!