

sharon page

When Sparks Fly—How to Put Emotion in the First Meeting Scene

By Sharon Page

Conflict tells us why the hero is the last man on earth for the heroine, and vice versa. But to write a romance, I realized I had to answer an even more important question: Why exactly are the hero and heroine right for each other?

And subsequently: why are they going to fall in love?

When I established conflict, I focused on the reasons my h/h couldn't be together and happily crafted first meeting scenes where my couple all but despised each other. After all, the hero was a threat to the heroine's goals and vice versa. Over four hundred pages they would learn to love each other and through that journey they would discover each other's good points.

The only problem I found was the readers didn't like the negative side of my characters. My tough, bitter hero was called insufferable by contest judges. Suddenly I realized I had relied on combat to create conflict. Not bickering but combat from the fact that my hero and heroine didn't respect each other. I had not introduced a reason for them to care for each other.

I looked to other authors, at the first meeting scenes I loved. These scenes truly involved my heart and wowed me with their resonating emotion. The internal reasons why the relationship wouldn't work were all there but I was already rooting for this couple. What had the author done to engage me in the relationship?

Not only had the author introduced strong external and internal conflicts, and built steamy or subtle sexual tension, she gave each protagonist a reason to like the other. She laid the groundwork for the emotional connection that would be the basis of the romance. And what is a more compelling internal fight for our heroine? Here is a man who acts like a hero but she can't fall in love with him due to her internal conflicts.

A powerful first meeting occurs when the scene shows why:

- the hero and heroine will respect each other
- the hero is the right man for the heroine emotionally and vice versa, even if they can't see it
- the characters will fill a void in the other one's life, soul, or psyche and they will be necessary to the emotional growth of the other character

In Jayne Ann Krentz's (w/a Amanda Quick) first meeting scenes, she often allows the heroine to see qualities in the hero that no one else sees—sometimes even by instinct (and the heroine's instincts have been honed by her life and career choices). In her novel “Affair”, the hero believes he is dull, staid, and boring. He applies to the heroine's job advertisement for a man of affairs, believing he meets her requirement that he be as bland as potato pudding. He's astonished when the heroine tells him he is unsuitable because

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he is so obviously a striking and unforgettable man, a man of great passions. No one has ever seen that side of him—he refuses to see it himself.

Another example is from the movie “Maid in Manhattan”. In this story, the heroine works in a glamorous Manhattan hotel as a maid but her goal is to move up into management. Not only will she earn a better salary and provide security for her son; she will achieve what she knows she is capable of and earn self-respect. Though the audience is introduced to the pain that her son feels when his father, the heroine's ex-husband, disappoints him by canceling a special trip, the heroine's goal is *not* to find a new father for her son. The hero, a handsome wealthy political candidate, is introduced in a scene where he notices the heroine's son, chats with him, and enjoys their interaction. The first meet scene that follows revolves around mistaken identity (the hero thinks the heroine is a guest not a maid) but more importantly, they meet because the hero wants to spend time with the boy.

In this first meeting scene, the audience sees heroic and likeable qualities to the hero, but also immediately sees what a great influence this man would be for the heroine's son. This theme is played on throughout the movie. Even though the hero is physically attracted to the heroine at first sight, the audience's emotions are already engaged to a much deeper level. We already believe this hero is the man who can give the heroine complete happiness even though she doesn't yet know it.

The 'why not' is crucial to crafting a page-turner but so is the 'why!' Let your readers know why these characters should fall in love even before they do.