

**Good Girls Don't Go All The Way
Or
How I Got Over My Fear Of Writing The Sex Scene!**

By Lynne Marshall

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Your fingers are flying over the keys. Your head is filled with images and ideas and you can't type fast enough to keep up. You have solid goals for each character and their motivations are so well thought out, you even know why the heroine uses cloth hankies instead of Kleenex. Conflict invades each scene leaving the reader (which is only you, so far) tied up in knots and turning pages. The story arc is perfect. This work-in-progress is something you can be proud of. Then, WHAM! Something throws the brakes on your creative burst quicker than daylight on Dracula. It's time to write THE LOVE SCENE.)

Multiple-choice question:

When it's time to write a sex scene, I...

- A. Develop a sudden desire to check my e-mail.
- B. Am overcome with an intense craving for a latte and a large chocolate chip cookie even though I must shower, dress and drive ten miles to get it.
- C. Decide that it's time to do spring cleaning, regardless of the time of year.
- D. Break out in a rash and take to my bed.
- E. All of the above.
- F. None of the above.

Recently, I asked fellow critique partners and friends from my local Los Angeles chapter, LARA, how they got past any resistance to writing their love scenes. I hope some of the

following suggestions may help you get over the hump (sorry) in your own writing.

So light some candles and incense, put Dusty Springfield's classic version of "The Look of Love" on your CD player and snuggle into your favorite chair. It's time to talk about...ES...EE...EX.

"I don't write sex scenes," TJ Bennett, a 2005 Golden Heart Finalist in the paranormal category for *Dreamweaver*, told me. "I write love scenes in which my characters may or may not have sex. I go for an atmosphere of sensuality and longing, not raw sex. At least that is what I tell myself as my fingers hesitate over the keyboards, trying to choose between 'moan' and 'groan' and *exactly where should his fingers be?* In the end, what I'm shooting for is sexy but classy."

I asked Thieme to tell me what happens when she faces the blank page knowing it's time to write that special scene she has been leading the characters toward (not to mention the reader) throughout her books.

"My characters don't just fall into bed, they jump there after a great deal of mental foreplay. As to the mechanics: what I do first is to write the scene as hot as I can make it—salsa hot, nuclear hot, chicken pot pie hot—then walk away. I wait a day or two, and then come back to it. Whatever makes me cringe I take out or smooth it over a bit. Whatever makes me blush just a little I leave in because my tolerance level for sex in my own writing is lower than it is for what I like to read. Also, when I take too much out, people yell at me to put it back in."

I'm not sure a bedroom scene could get any hotter than the sensuous kissing scene I recently read from Thieme's historical novel *Alonsa's Choice*. Her hero, Gunter, is so appealing

I'd consider time travel to meet him. I think her methods for writing sex scenes have definite merit.

For Roben Schaerf, aka Robena Grant, published author of two books, *Granton Manor*, and *Morgan's Ridge*, the character calls the shots.

“I recall feeling a bit awkward when advised by my editor to write a more descriptive sex scene in *Granton Manor*. The one I finally wrote, even though more descriptive, is what I still call a ‘fade-out’, lots of kissing and groping and clothes being tossed around the room, but no descriptions of the sexual act itself. My heroine was a quiet English woman who was being reunited with the father of her child after a long absence. She was in her thirties and it seemed appropriate to write it that way.”

If you're like me and are running out of creative ways to avoid using the anatomically correct word for a certain male part, Roben's approach may be just what the doctor ordered. Hey, it worked in all of the wonderful black and white movies of the forties! Talk about romantic.

I tried reading a fade-out scene filled with metaphors and innuendos in my first romance writing class and almost got booed out of the room. As readers of romance, our tastes run the gambit. Roben told me this about her own preference in reading.

“Personally, as a reader, I do not need a map or guideline of what parts go where and find those descriptions a turn off. I think the sexual act itself should be left to the two people involved and if we become too descriptive our words shriek of porn. It seems to me that some things should be held sacred and anyway, it has been said that the mind is our strongest sexual

organ so we should keep it active by using the imagination.”

So use it or lose it, right Roben?

“Fear of sex scenes? Never had it. They are the easiest part of a novel to write, in my opinion,” the fearless Christine Cunningham, writer of Chick Lit says.

The sex scene...“gives a writer a terrific excuse to really use all of the senses, in a very natural way. If your reader isn’t touching, tasting, seeing, smelling and hearing what your lovers are, then you know it’s not a complete scene. It’s easier to access those senses during a sex scene almost over any other scene you can imagine. The senses are what takes it from a recital of body parts to lovemaking.”

For those of you still cringing about writing “The Scene” Christine reminds us, “It’s not you-the-author having sex on the page, it’s your characters.”

Perhaps you could explain that to my mother and pastor, Christine.

Kate Willoughby, author of *Carnal Devotions*, is another fearless sex-scene writer and confesses, “I never had any resistance to WRITING sex. It’s the ‘fessing up’ to it to friends and family that is still touchy. I tell family members that I’m writing a book, and then they always say, ‘let me know when it gets published. I’d love to read it,’ and I always think, ‘yeah, and then you’ll know the real me, and that I’ve been masquerading as a prim girl all of my life!’”

If Kate’s confession doesn’t prove my point that good girls don’t, or as we tend to think, *aren’t supposed* to go all the way in their writing, I don’t know how else to explain it. My advice to Kate, don’t leave this article lying around on the coffee table unless the *real* you is ready to be outed.

Aren't emotions what drive the supercharged love scene in your favorite books?

Linda O. Johnston, multi-published author for Harlequin Intrigues, and Berkley Prime Crime Mysteries, says, "Some writers thrive on writing sex scenes. Not me! But to me, the sex scenes are an integral part of showing how the romance progresses, so they're necessary to each story.

"As a result, the more I've written, the more comfortable I've become writing sex scenes. At first the idea of friends and family reading what I'd written was rather daunting, though the worst part was reading the scenes aloud in critique groups. I've gotten used to it and I think even my husband has gotten used to the ribbing about research."

I, too, have found my comfort zone has expanded since I have written more sex scenes. However, without the gentle nudging and prodding from my critique group, I would still be leaving the reader wanting more. Recently, I shocked myself when I reread a scene between one of my hero and heroines. I swear, I wasn't even in the room when it happened and I'm thinking, they did that? Oh my gawd!

The beauty of the romance genre is there is something for every reader's preference. We all have our favorite authors, those that take us along a wonderful, unpredictable path of love, which we eagerly follow. But what makes one reader swoon leaves another cold. One may get revved up and another turned off by the same scene. As the editors tell us, everything boils down to subjective, individual taste.

Stephen King espouses, read a lot and write a lot. I suggest the same to you in your romance writing. Read a lot of romance novels, figure out where you fit in, what your comfort

level is, what style is closest to yours, and then write, write, and write more. When the big, lurking resistance to writing es-ee-ex rears its ugly head, don't whither and shriek. Ignore it. And when the time finally comes to write that sex scene for your book, don't check your e-mail, but plant your fingers on the keyboard and, like the Nike ad suggests, "Just do it!"

In the end, it's up to you, the author, at that crucial moment of truth, to decide how far to go, whether to leave the lights on, or fade to black.