

Building Character



Anna Adams
Harlequin Superromance Author

How many times have you heard someone say, “Read this one--the hero’s a hunk”? But a romance hero is far more than his hunky appearance. We build heroes and heroines out of traits and behavior. Characterization.

Believable characters are born in deep-down impulses and flaws that provoke empathy. Characterization is often the motivation that drives our plots. Empathy for our characters drives readers to keep turning pages.

A lifelike character balances so-called good impulses and not-so-attractive flaws. A shy, but hardworking caterer heroine becomes more interesting when she picks up a rolling pin to protect her baby sister from burglars. Manly Mr. Alpha Hero can be so arrogant and autocratic he jars a modern woman’s teeth, but he hears a kitty meowing on his roof and something within him won’t let him rest until he shinnies up the drainpipe in the snowy night to effect a rescue.

What sends the hero onto the waving drainpipe? What circumstances formed this man? Was his father a traveling salesman who rarely came home during the week? Did his mom drop his dog off in the woods one day after it bit a neighbor’s pet? Did she try to persuade the hero the dog stood a better chance roaming free than with animal control? And when he gets to the roof and finds himself at the caterer’s attic apartment window, what makes her wield her rolling pin rather than calling the police? Had she been abused by a spouse? Is that why she’s living at home with her baby sister? Did the police doubt her story?

How do you discover the incidents that have formed your characters? Try the Internet. You’ll find a character checklist on the “Learn to Write” channel on www.eHarlequin.com. Many writers also provide checklists you can use to create lives for your hero and heroine that place them in conflict with each other.

When our caterer sees the hero and his kitty, does she open the window or shut the blind? Does she live with her sister because her abusive husband killed her parents, but persuaded the police he was innocent? He’s whispered, “I meant to get you. Someone you trust will kill you.” She’ll never trust a guy enough--no matter how many kittens he’s clutching--to ask him in.

But our hero sees her fear and descends the drainpipe cursing her for all eternity even as he thinks she needs saving more than the scratching, hissing feline ever did. He can’t ignore a compulsion to discover why the caterer upstairs would rather let a man break his neck than give him safe passage.

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This woman who refuses help and the man who can't bear to see a living being in need, will be in conflict. She'll resist any offer of assistance or protection, but he won't be able to stop offering. Their lives have formed them into characters worth writing about. Just keep asking why they do what they do.

Anna Adams most recent release was *Maggie's Guardian*, a September 2002 Harlequin Superromance. She's currently working on a trilogy for Superromance, *The Calvert Cousins*. Look for the first cousin in *The Secret Father*, out in September 2003.