

Tough scene to write

By Holly Lisle

Talyn walked into trouble today, eyes wide open. Writing the scene was tough – I've never put myself in quite as self-destructive a spot as she is in right at the moment, but chronicling her actions and feelings and thoughts as she does something that she knows is wrong even as she'd doing it really churned up memories of my own that I could have gladly left buried in the bottom of the muck for the rest of forever.

And it made me think about what you have to go through to get a good story. Writing funny stuff is never easy – humor is basically all the pain and screw-ups of your life put on public display with a twist that startles. Writing romantic bits always feels risky, because you know that no matter how careful you are to write the story about **other people**, some of **you** is going to sneak in, and there are some things about yourself you'd rather not have hanging out on the laundry line with the T-shirts and the jeans, where everyone can see them. Writing bad things happening to characters you care about is brutal, because you do care, and you tend to identify what is happening with them in a 'what if' sense – 'What if this happened to me, or to the people I love?'

But writing about characters making bad decisions when those characters know what they're doing even as they're going ahead with it is sort of like watching the train-wreck portions of your own life in excruciating slow motion. You cannot help but identify with your character, cannot help but feel the acid in your stomach and the ache in your muscles that comes from being pulled in two directions at the same time by the memories of past bad choices, cannot help but want to turn away so you don't have to watch what happens next, or maybe to cheat a little and soften the blow so that it doesn't turn out as bad as it could, or even let the character experience a

last minute change of heart that will save her from the awfulness you know (and they suspect) is coming.

Perhaps not everyone has done something stupid knowing the whole time that it was a bad, bad idea, but drawn on by the sort of bone-deep want that permits you to push common sense out of the way and do it in spite of yourself. But I'll bet a lot of us have. And I'll bet the scene I got today – and the next few Talyn scenes I write – will be as uncomfortable for y'all to read as they were for me to write.

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