



HEARTS TALK

RWAus OFFICIAL ONLINE MAGAZINE Edition #354 | April 2023

Pitch Perfect

AMY HUTTON
interview by Jan MacNally

One of the pleasures of being a member of RWA includes reading about other members who experience success in pitching and then publishing their novels. It is lovely to celebrate their successes and also one day hope that maybe we could experience a similarly happily ever after. One such success story belongs to Amy Hutton, who delivered a successful pitch at the 2022 RWA Fremantle conference for her rom com titled *Sit, Stay, Love*, which will be published through Simon & Schuster in August 2023. Amy generously provided some insights into her pitching experience and also shared some of her writing advice.

When asked what inspired her originally to first start writing, Amy said, "I've always loved writing and storytelling. Whether in books,

movies, or TV. English was my favourite subject at school, and that love of reading, writing and storytelling through creative writing and even essays, stuck with me. I always had a journal going, often wrote short stories, and later, took up blogging. But I didn't consider writing seriously until I realised that I wasn't doing it at all anymore. My job and life had become so big and busy (as it does for most of us) that I was no longer doing the thing that brought me joy. My day job was a pretty full-on creative role, and I was too fried in the evenings and weekends to do anything that required a good deal of brain work. That made me realise something had to change. So, I transitioned from full-time work to contract work to give myself a little bit more free time. Once I did that, writing was back in my life and became my primary focus."

In terms of her preferred genre, Amy noted, "If writing for flash

fiction events etc., I may write other genres (probably horror, my second favourite genre to read after romance), but I primarily write romance. And certainly, if we're talking about manuscripts, only romance at this stage. Though I never rule anything out! My first manuscript was a paranormal romance – though I call it a rom com with a spooky twist. I plan for this to be a series, if I ever get around to finishing book two! But right now, my focus is on contemporary rom coms. I love writing love with a side of funny. I love writing stories that are full of hope and laughter. It brings me a lot of happiness. I think I'll be writing rom coms for a while."

Amy didn't know anyone who wrote, so decided to join RWA. "I wanted to find a community that I could become a part of. Writing can be a lonely business, and I wanted to make sure I was giving myself the best environment to give this

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President's Column

WITH LOUISA WEST

Welcome to April, everyone! They say time flies when you're having fun, and I think that statement definitely rings true for my step up into the Presidency role. Since taking on the role in January I've been involved in policy development, membership reviews, and strategic direction as President, while also working on social media strategies and running Friday Night Writes in the RWAus Facebook group as Marketing Manager. We're working on a new and improved website in the background, developing exciting new ideas, and enjoying connecting with you all. I can't wait to see what you all think once we start rolling these initiatives out!

Sydney on sale!

The most exciting news is that our program and tickets for *All That Glitters* in Sydney are live! It's going to be an incredible weekend full

of fun, professional development, and inspiration. We have industry-leading pitch-takers on board plus our cocktail party and gala awards dinner—as well as some brand-new initiatives like our LED advertising board and a few surprises yet to come. Get in early to ensure you don't miss out!

A word about our sponsors

Speaking of the conference, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge **Harlequin Australia** as our continuing foundation sponsor. They have championed our conference for many years, and we are always thrilled and grateful to have them on board. This year they are joined by **Draft2Digital** as a gold sponsor, **Penguin Random House** as a silver sponsor, and **Simon & Schuster** as a bronze sponsor. Thank you all so much for your support and for helping us to assist authors across the nation—and beyond!

At the end of March, the committee came together for our face-to-face Strategy and Planning weekend. Not only is this weekend important

in terms of talking about budget, policies, and strategy for each of our individual portfolios, but it's also a time where we brainstorm new and creative ways to improve our wonderful organisation. There's a full write-up about the S&P later in the issue—I hope you enjoy this behind-the-scenes look into the work the committee does.

April typically brings more time on the roads and such, as we all enjoy things like school holidays and the Easter break. Please drive carefully, look after yourselves, and practise self-care regularly. Happy Easter to those who celebrate.

Until May, let the words flow!

Louisa^{xx}

RWAus Website Update

BY LOUISA WEST

As many of you will be aware, for at least the last seven months RWAus has been experiencing some issues with our online technology. These issues have primarily been:

- Issues with PayPal
- Issues with the website crashing
- Issues with membership renewals not getting reminders
- Issues with members not being able to access the renewal portal

We apologise for the inconvenience these issues have been causing and are very grateful for your continued patience and support while we work through them.

We are currently in the process of creating a brand-new website that will resolve all of these issues. The new website will be supported by better newsletter integration, and will provide some really cool features that have never before been available to members.

If you experience any issues with the website, please email me at marketing@romanceaustralia.com and I will do my best to help you.

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From Your Editors

CONTENT, GRAMMAR AND LAYOUTS - OH MY!



JAN MACNALLY
HEARTS TALK CONTENT EDITOR

Having survived collating and editing my first issue of *Hearts Talk*, as well as writing some content, and thanks to the incredible graphic design assistance of President Louisa West, I'm feeling more at home now in the role. I'm looking forward to sharing many informative, helpful and insightful articles from across our wonderful RWA membership and beyond. I also hope more of our members will submit content, such as a one-off article you have always wanted to write, or something as part of an ongoing series, or the first romance novel you ever read, or hints and tips on successful pitching, writing, publishing or surviving (and enjoying) your first writers' conference. Send ideas or submissions to:

There is an update on our August conference in Sydney, *All That Glitters*, and I hope you are well on your way to finding the perfect, glittering sartorial confection to wear to both

the cocktail party and the gala awards dinner.

Committee Relationships Manager Jem McCusker introduces all our incredible conference sponsors, whom we thank deeply for their generosity and support.

If you ever wondered how it feels to pitch at a conference and land a book deal, I hope you will enjoy reading this issue's cover story, the *Pitch Perfect* interview with Amy Hutton. If you have ever needed to know how hard it is to become published after years of rejection, our talented Vice President/Events Manager, Rachael Johns (a very successful Australian author we are so fortunate to have in RWA and on our committee), has it covered in her new column, *What I Wish I'd Known*.

Best-selling author Victoria Purman will tempt your taste buds with her Historical Harlots column where she investigates 1950s recipes as part of researching her latest novel, *A Woman's Work*. Kristine Charles continues her *Let's Talk About Sex* series, while Helen Howe tackles clichés, werewolves and vampires, not necessarily all in that order.

Cassandra O'Leary shares her arduous journey to regain the rights to her first book, while Jo Speirs has advice on how much time it may take to edit your manuscript. There is more to read so sit back, grab your favourite tippie or snack, relax and escape into the latest issue of *Hearts Talk*.



JO EDGAR-BAKER
HEARTS TALK DESIGN EDITOR

So, this is the first month being in the design drivers seat! Thank you so much to Louisa for smoothing the way for me and to super organised Jan for holding my hand and making my job much easier than it could have been.

After many years of being a member and reading *Hearts Talk* every month, it feels strange to be 'behind the screen', as if I'm being given a sneak preview of what's happening in the exciting world of the RWA. It's an interesting (and tantalising) experience to read segments of the articles as I'm formatting them but not have time to read them.

Now that I have a better feel for the layout, I can't wait to work on the next edition. I'm hoping that I'll have more time to read as I go.

I'm off to grab a glass of wine now and read each fabulous article thoroughly. Cheers!

WANT TO
WRITE FOR 
Hearts
 **Talk?**

We're always on the look-out for content for this fabulous monthly publication. Whether you'd like to run a monthly article or have something you'd like to submit as a once-off, our HT team is eager to hear from you. From craft articles and industry updates through to legal issues that may arise for creatives, to reviews and much more, there's bound to be something you could contribute - whether it's a one-off article or a monthly column.

Please forward all submissions for publication in the May issue to Jan, our Content Editor at hteditor@romanceaustralia.com by Monday 8 May.

writing thing a shot. I was also interested in the support of courses and competitions. It really was a no brainer, and one of the best decisions I made. I joined RWA when I decided to embark on this writer journey full-time, which was around December 2018. I attended the RWA virtual conference in 2020, then Fremantle in 2022. (I was stuck behind a border for 2021!) I have also attended Genrecon, both in person and virtually, along with the Emerging Writers' Festival."

Like many others before her, Amy discovered there have been many benefits to being a member of RWA. "Having the support of the RWA, via email groups, courses across all aspects of craft and business, and conference opportunities has been amazing. Having people you can turn to with questions, no matter how crazy, is a wonderful thing. I've learnt so much, made friends, and of course, I had the opportunity to pitch, which led to my debut novel coming out this August!"

Amy's pitching experience began virtually, which some people might find either easier or scarier than doing one in person. Amy noted "I pitched at the RWA conference in 2020 over Zoom – I had a material request, but it didn't go beyond that. I pitched in person in Fremantle in 2022, and I'm thrilled to say, not only got a material request, but a book deal with Simon & Schuster!"

Amy offered some helpful details on how she prepared for her pitch, saying, "Right from when I decided I was ready to start pitching, I did lots of study. I attended a RWA pitching panel and course. I did the Australian Society of Authors Pitch

Perfect course several times, and I attended the Emerging Writers' Festival pitching sessions. I wrote and rewrote my pitch, practising and practising it until I had something solid which I could adapt for pitch duration and situation etc. Then I pitched whenever the opportunity arose—mostly at the ASA Literary Speed Dating events. It was really a practice makes as good as I could get it kind of thing. I would say that ASA Pitch Perfect course is a must do. It

It's essentially talking to a captive audience about the thing I love most in the world. And the person I'm pitching to wants me to be successful, because they want to find the next book, and they hope it will be mine.

helped me structure my pitch so that I at least received material requests. All my pitches are based on this structure. In Fremantle, because it was the first time I'd ever pitched in person, I also brought flashcards with me, just in case I lost my way. That was incredibly helpful. But I worked at knowing my pitch off by heart. I also ensured that my submission package was ready to go prior to pitching. That means getting a solid synopsis together –

it's good to have a few different word count versions, because everyone seems to want something different! Knowing that everything is ready takes a bit of pressure off if you get a material request and going into a pitch feeling prepared takes the pressure off the nerves."

In terms of the different kinds of support mechanisms available to help her prepare her pitch, Amy explained, "I know that RWA had lots of pitching info and help prior to the conference, but as it was an existing pitch, I just had to make sure it was sparkling and ready for seven minutes rather than three minutes, and that I was prepared. So, I didn't use any support mechanisms in this case. But I knew they were there, which is support in itself. Particularly

via the RWA Aspiring Group where we share pitches and support each other with feedback and plenty of cheering on."

Anyone who hasn't pitched before will be keen to know what it's like, and Amy offered what might be an unexpected but positive reaction, saying, "I might be a bit weird, but I LOVE pitching. It's essentially talking to a captive audience about the thing I love most in the world. And the person I'm pitching to wants me to be successful, because they want to find the next book, and they hope it will be mine. So, for me, it's hugely enjoyable. Not that I don't get nervous. I do. At Fremantle, the first pitch day went great, smooth, and effortless with a request during the pitch. But on the second day I had some kind of nervous flop-sweat situation and was sure I screwed up the whole thing royally. I lost my place. I um'd and err'd. Shuffled my flash cards. Sweated some more. Totally not how I usually go. I didn't get a request at the pitch, and I found out that others did, so I thought, oh well, it was a good experience. Of course, that was the pitch that turned into a book deal! So, you just never know with these things!"

Amy has advice for those intending to pitch at a conference. "Learn about pitching anyway you can. Write and rewrite your pitch until it's as good as you can get it. Run it past your writing group (if you have one) for feedback. Practise it on you, on your family, on your friends, on your dog or cat or fish. Practise it in the mirror or record yourself and watch it back. Time your pitch to make sure you're not too over or under the required duration—allowing yourself time at the end of your pitch for questions. Know your pitch so you don't have to read it – so that you can look up and engage with the person you're pitching to, even if you have to sometimes return to the page. Make sure you're pitching to the right person. They must want your genre, so read up on what

they're looking for and make sure it's what you're offering. Be prepared to answer questions about characters, themes, and about you and your writing process. But mostly have fun! Pitching is a unique opportunity. The person you're pitching to is cheering you on. They want to hear what you have to say, and they want to love your book, they want you to be successful. They're on your side. If you're prepared, you're giving yourself the best shot and that's all any of us can do. And if you're not successful, remember, that's just one person. Just because one person didn't want your book this time does not mean no-one will ever want it, or that the one person won't be interested in your next pitch."

Once the pitch is over, Amy offered some advice for those wishing to publish their first novel. "You have to believe in yourself and your story, and if you don't, find a support network who will help you believe. In fact, find a support network even if you do believe in yourself! For me the RWA Aspiring group has been a source of knowledge, friendship, and encouragement, and I'm not sure I would have continued on this path without that touchstone and support.

"Never stop learning. Do courses on all areas of craft, and pepper in some on the business of writing, like author branding and social media. Read your genre. You need to know what's out there in the genre you're writing, and what's hitting the mark with the readers. So, bury yourself in your

genre. Work hard on your manuscript. Get it as neat as you can before you start pitching or querying. I strongly advise having your manuscript beta'd by a few trusted people (outside of family and friends) to receive feedback on craft and structure etc. If you're self-publishing, employing a good editor is a must. While you're doing all of this, you need to be building up your social media, website, eNewsletter etc. If you're going the indie route you'll use your followers to help get your book out there. If you're going the traditional publishing route, the publishers will want to know all about your socials, because they want you to leverage your followers alongside any marketing and publicity they commit to. Social media for authors is super important.

"Stick with it, even through the inevitable disappointments and rejections. It can feel like a hard road and sometimes it can be soul crushing but keep pushing and keep believing in your story and your journey. Always remember, we never know when we're going to have the right story at the right time in front of the right person. I feel incredibly lucky that after only four years I landed a deal with one of the big five publishers. I still can't believe it. I'm still pinching myself. But my experience is proof that it can happen, and it happened via an opportunity to pitch at a RWA

conference."

Thank you, Amy, for sharing your pitching experience, insights and advice, and we look forward to reading your first book, *Sit, Stay, Love*.

♥ **Amy Hutton writes romance. Lots of romance. Her stories are funny and sweet, a little steamy, occasionally spooky, and full-to-the-brim with feels.**



Amy grew up on Sydney's Northern Beaches. An award-winning television producer, she gave up her full-time job in network television to follow her full-time love of writing. She loves writing and reading romance and loves to surround herself with books. Amy is the owner of a rescue dog named Buffy and is an avid supporter of animal rescue organisations. She's an enthusiastic traveller with a passion for Disneyland, adores anything Star Wars, and has a fierce commitment to Hallmark Christmas movies.

Amy's short stories appeared in the RWA Cupcake and Chocolate anthologies, and in this year's Lollipop anthology. Her debut rom com, *Sit, Stay, Love*, will be released in August through Simon & Schuster. Connect with Amy at [amyhuttonauthor.com](https://www.amyhuttonauthor.com) TikTok/Instagram/Twitter - @amyhuttonauthor [facebook.com/AmyHuttonWrites](https://www.facebook.com/AmyHuttonWrites)

Conference advertising

For the very first time, we are offering you the exciting chance to present your books and authorly services to the full delegate and VIP cohort at our annual conference 'All That Glitters' in Sydney this August.

Our LED screen will play on a continual loop Friday, Saturday and Sunday, maximising your exposure and offering excellent return on investment.

And the best part is that you will just supply your covers and text and we will do the design work for you!

Booking costs:

- 1 book placement - \$100 +gst
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Final design is subject to change at RWA's discretion. Spaces are strictly limited.

To get your name on our EOI list, please email conferenceadvertising@romanceaustralia.com

To secure your booking/s complete the following Google form: <https://forms.gle/EXGM4YTPpQEbQu5A>

COMMITTEE PROFILE ON

Dani McLean

GENERAL COMMITTEE MEMBER



A Missing Connection is Dani's latest release (which came out on KU and paperback 7 March).

What is your favourite romance movie, and why?

This is always the hardest question for me to answer because I love so many of them! As anyone reading my current *Movie Magic* novella series can tell, I am a big fan of the romance comedies of the late 1900s (feeling old yet? I know I do). I grew up watching *When Harry Met Sally*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *The American President*. One that I think a lot of people sleep through is *Sabrina* with Harrison Ford and Julia Ormond, but what's not to love? Nerdy billionaire falls in love with the glammed-up girl who is in love with his brother -- there's comedy and fashion and Paris! It's wonderful.

Do you have a celebrity crush? (If yes, who is it and why?)

I definitely try not to crush on actors but their characters instead, and so I'll have to say Rick O'Connell from *The Mummy*, and because I'm rewatching it right now, Dean Winchester from *Supernatural*. Also 100% Michelle Pfeiffer's *Catwoman*. How I didn't know I was bisexual until my thirties is a mystery.

What is your favourite holiday destination or favourite place in the world?

New York in Autumn, Paris in Spring.

What book (or author) was your gateway into romance (or what was the first romance novel you ever read, and what impact did it have on you)?

It's probably the height of cliché, but Jane Austen was likely the first, with *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* being my favourites. What I can remember with absolute clarity is that the audiobook for *Him* by Sarina Bowen and Elle Kennedy was my first MM romance, and the first time I heard both Teddy Hamilton and Jacob Morgan's voices. Little did I know I'd get to one day work with Jacob on the audiobook for my second novel!

Why did you volunteer to come onto the RWA Committee?

RWA was the first author/book community I ever joined and it has helped me grow in many ways, beyond simply improving my writing skills. It's so important for me to be able to give back to everyone who has supported me on my author journey, and it's a great honour to pay that support back to the authors (whether established, emerging or aspiring) who make up RWA.

Do you have any books published? If yes, what was the first one, and how did you feel when it happened?

It is surreal to say this, but I have six!

Three full lengths and three novellas (with two more on the way). *Love & Rum* was my first, published in June 2021. At the time it was a huge deal for me, finishing and self-publishing a whole book after years of unfinished manuscripts. Now I look back and see everything I didn't know, but it will always remain special because it started me on this wild journey! Since then, my writing and my confidence have improved, but I couldn't have gone anywhere without that important first step.

What are you most looking forward to at the Sydney conference?

Am I allowed to say drinks with friends? Workwise I'll say the Friday "12 months to quit" workshop, I'm really looking forward to that. Personally, I really am looking forward to catching up with familiar and new friends. It's going to be a great time!

If you could sit and chat with any author, who would it be and why?

Alice Oseman, because she is incredibly talented and also seems like a lovely person! Her writing and illustrations are warm, sweet, endlessly hopeful, and inclusive. I might have an issue speaking if we ever met, but maybe I could mime my gratitude to her...



IT'S A WRAP!

MARCH STRATEGY AND PLANNING WEEKEND

COMPILED BY
JAN MACNALLY

On 25-26 March, the RWA committee assembled for its face-to-face Strategy and Planning weekend, sacrificing personal time with their families, and some travelling several hours from interstate, to do so. Not only is this planning time important in terms of discussing budget, policies, and strategies for each individual portfolio, but it's also a time where the committee brainstorms new and creative ways to improve our wonderful RWA organisation.

Louisa West is President but at the moment she is also managing some of the other portfolios (including member services). "We discussed high-level strategy for the improvement and development of RWA services and initiatives," she said, "including portfolio streamlining and policy development. We also identified opportunities to value-add for members in terms of community-building and engagement. With Marketing, we explored opportunities for streamlining content distribution

and identified a need for targeted PR and media services, as well as fresh organisational branding. Lastly we approved a way forward for the new RWA website and reviewed all IT services with a view to improvement and cost-savings. I'm so thrilled about all the wonderful and exciting improvements we will be rolling out over the next few months!"

Rachael Johns, Vice President and Events Manager, noted, "The current focuses of the events portfolio are the Sydney and Adelaide conferences and getting up and running more online and state-based events to make sure all members can access events in some format. A lot of exciting decisions were made with these in mind over the weekend. We finalised the theme for Adelaide 2024 (to be launched at Sydney) and approved the invitation of some very exciting international speakers. We also voted on a restructure of the Events portfolio because we are now engaging a fabulous events management company for our conferences, so there is no longer need for a conference volunteer team on the ground. Because of this there will be no conference committee in future, but the Events portfolio will soon be looking for an events team member in each state (if possible) to help organise state-based events and

social gatherings. More on this and how you can apply to be your state rep will be coming in the next month or so."

Jacinta Peachey, Treasurer and Contests Manager, reported, "After we analysed the survey data and comments, we decided to change certain aspects of the contests to make them more accessible to enter as well as easier to manage for the coordinators. Watch out for the next few editions of *Hearts Talk* for more details. Choosing the themes for the next anthologies was a hilarious team effort. Every contest change we made was based on market research, the RWA survey results and a collaboration of the committee members. Big changes are coming. You spoke, we listened and will deliver."



Standing demonstration

Jan MacNally, Secretary and *Hearts Talk* content editor, observed, "I was so impressed by the enthusiasm, creativity, expertise, passion and commitment the committee showed. There were lively, sometimes heated, discussions, but everyone had the chance to comment, challenge and vote on the issues. We achieved a huge amount in terms of ratifying decisions, improving processes, making changes where they were needed. We also bonded as a team, and this, more than anything, will ensure we provide an effective, transparent and supportive approach for all our RWA members."

Jem McCusker, Sponsorships Manager, had this to say. "Relationships have always been a key focus for RWA, and over the past 18 months we have worked toward strengthening key relationships to create partnerships. We are now in the process of finalising some joint venture opportunities between RWA and key industry partners to create targeted opportunities for our membership. In partnering with industry experts, we foster

collaboration, professional development, pathways and insights as a key member benefit. While these joint ventures will take some time to finalise, we look forward to the positive impact and opportunities these will create for the Romance Writing Industry at large."

Dani McLean, General Committee Member (and part-time lyricist), said, "The biggest highlight for me was the opportunity to work together with the incredible committee. Seeing first-hand how passionate everyone is about the organisation and our future makes me even more excited to be a part of it. Not only did we have a lot of productive (and rigorous) discussion, but we fit a few laughs in as well. I can't stress this enough - there are so many exciting plans ahead! Between the Sydney conference (that I still need a costume for), the 2024 Adelaide conference, and the themes for our anthologies, there is a lot to look forward to."

Miranda Harvey, General Committee member, summed it up when she

said, "Members better hold on because they are in for a wild ride. There is a lot of change coming but it will be worth it. The change is long overdue and will make RWA the place for Romance. I'm most excited about the new website, and the community interaction it will bring to RWA."

Finally, what started as a personal preference became a running gag, when Jan kept switching the toilet roll over so that the paper was under, not over. Jem would turn it back so that the paper was over again. Neither was aware who the other person was that was doing this, and whether or not it was deliberate, until Jem announced in a rather aggrieved tone, "Someone's messing with me." She looked so serious and rattled that Jan took pity and admitted she was the culprit. Thus was set in motion a weekend of swapped toilet rolls, a roll tied in a bow, and even a message left on some toilet paper. (Yes, we need to get out more.) But as an added bonus, there were actual dolphins frolicking in the nearby canal, as well as cheeky black swans.

MEMORABLE QUOTES

Rachael: *"My Hall Pass is Grant Denyer. I also have a thing for Amish romance."*

Jacinta: *"Don't worry, I have a finger,"* Jacinta said when someone offered her a battery after her mouse died.

Jan: *"If anyone doesn't know what that (song) is, they don't deserve to live."*



Breakfast bonding



Jacinta explains to Louisa



Afternoon tea and work



Dinner brainstorming new themes



Quiet time



Serious discussions



Toilet roll wars



Photo by Hannah Olinger on Unsplash

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

BY RACHAEL JOHNS

Recently I had the pleasure of reading *Writers Inspiring Writers: What I Wish I'd Known*, an anthology published by NYT bestselling author Jennifer Probst and Erin Branscom. They decided to put together this book so that beginning authors could glean invaluable knowledge from bestselling career authors to help them on their own journey. They invited established authors to share with newer authors what they wish they'd known when they were starting out. The essays in this wonderful book range from topics of craft, business to motivation, and much more.

Inspired by this book, I've decided to start a column in *Hearts Talk* of the same essence. Each month I will ask an established author from our membership to share advice they wish could tell their beginners selves. I'm going to go first, so here's my essay:

If You Can Quit Writing, Do It!

My journey to publication was a long one – fifteen years, filled with rejections and many, many manuscripts. During those years I sometimes wondered if I was wasting

my time. When I was sacrificing TV time or the chance to sleep while my babies did, I wondered if my hours writing would ever pay off, if I'd ever achieve my dream, not only of getting a novel published, but being successful enough that I could quit my day job. I'm a qualified English teacher and although I didn't hate this, I hoped one day I'd be able to replace my teacher's wage with royalties.

After thirteen years I hit a really dark patch. I'd been working with an editor at Mills and Boon for two years, editing and rewriting on her advice.

When one of my manuscripts finally went to acquisitions, I thought this is it! But it wasn't. That rejection was tougher than any that had come before. I got so close and STILL didn't make it.

When I first started writing it was pure joy! Every time I managed to carve out an hour or so, from work or family, I was delighted to be sitting down at my computer creating characters and playing God. I wrote because I LOVED it, because I LOVED

reading and because I didn't want to do anything else.

But fast forward all those years and it had become a chore. In chasing the dream of publication, I'd lost the love – the passion that made me want to write in the first place. I'd told everyone I was going to be an author and every spare moment I had

was spent working towards this. If I watched a movie or chose to read a magazine, I felt guilty that I wasn't writing. I felt like a failure.

When this final rejection came, I thought maybe it was a sign. Maybe it was time to admit

defeat, to take up quilting or join the local theatrical society. I'd "wasted" thirteen years pursuing publication and I didn't want to "waste" another thirteen and *still* have nothing to show for it. I told my writing friends I was done. Luckily, a couple of them convinced me to switch targets instead. I was living in a small country town and rural romance had become a thing, thanks to Rachael Treasure – publishers were hungry for it.

I often wonder if I had decided to give up before writing *Jilted*, if I would have been able to.

I felt a bit of a fraud because I wasn't a farmer or a farmer's wife, but I LOVED rural life. Five years of living in a small town had had its ups and downs – in the beginning I'd definitely felt like a fish out of water – but it had become home, and I was a converted country girl. I decided that I was going to give writing a book one last-ditch attempt. I would try writing a rural romance, but I'd not even think about publication. I'd write the book I WANTED to read. So, because I also love drama, I wrote about the revival of the theatrical society in a small rural community and how it felt to feel like an outsider and then find your home.

**Doctors,
plumbers,
teachers, etc,
can't get the job
and earn a living
before putting in
the hard yards,
why should
authors be any
different?**

That is the book that finally kick-started my career. This was because of two big things – I'd finally written the kind of book I LOVED to read about the life I LOVED to live, but also the timing was right. I'd written a rural romance when publishers were actively looking for them. There is a HUGE element of luck in publishing.

I often wonder if I had decided to give up before writing *Jilted*, if I would have been able to. Now when aspiring authors come up to me and say they've been writing for a year or so and have racked up a couple of rejections and are contemplating giving up... I think they want me to say, 'No, you can do it, keep going and you'll eventually get there.' But instead, I say, 'Yes, you should give up.' You know why? Because this isn't an easy career – it might not be brain surgery or rocket science, but it's gruelling and there are highs and lows even after you're published that I'm sure aren't good for your health. (I'm on anxiety medication because of my career, not for any other area of my life.)

So, if you can give up, embrace being a reader and get a job that promises a more consistent secure income, then I say DO it. But if you try quitting and you can't, then you'll know that THIS is what you're supposed to be doing with your life. And then, you just need to keep writing, keep believing and eventually I honestly believe you'll achieve your dream.

But here's the thing... those thirteen years were NOT a waste – they helped me hone my craft (which never stops even now I'm published), find my voice and realise the types of books I was meant to write (for too many years thanks to a uni degree in creative writing, I thought I should be writing serious literary fiction,

when I really wanted to write something like *Bridget Jones' Diary*). Doctors, plumbers, teachers, etc, can't get the job and earn a living before putting in the hard yards, why should authors be any different? I started at 17 so my 'apprenticeship' was longer than some people, but what I'd want to tell my younger self is that there is no rush.

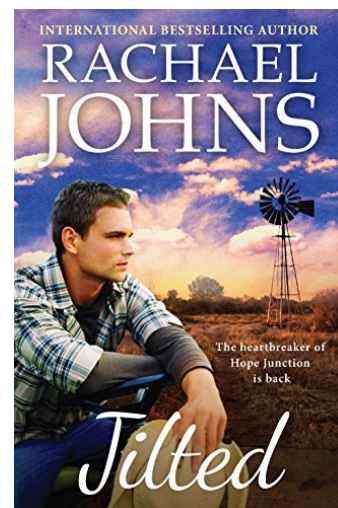
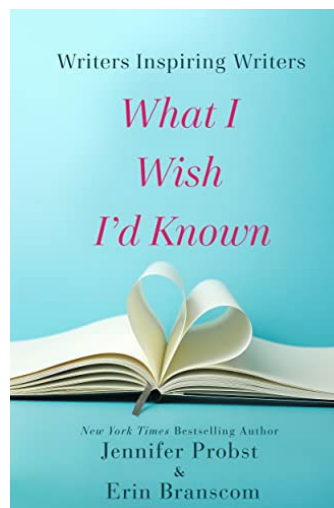
I'm glad self-publishing wasn't an option when I started writing, because young me was desperate for publication and I think I'd probably have decided to self-publish my early stories. But you know what, they weren't good enough. There was a reason they didn't get

contracted and now I'm glad that they weren't. I'm not against self-publishing – I have made good friends making a great living this way and I read indie published authors who are better than many traditional authors, but I do think too many new writers go this way these days without questioning whether their work is actually ready yet. Whether you're considering a traditional contract or deciding to indie publish, make sure you're doing it for the right reasons. You only get one first book!

Sorry, this has been longer than I imagined, but here are my takeaways:

1. Write because you can't not write.
2. Write the kind of book you love to read, not the book you think you SHOULD write or might make you money.
3. Don't rush. Enjoy the journey.

NB. My first rural romance *Jilted* didn't actually end up being my first publication. While I was writing it, I submitted what I call one of my 'M&B Rejects' to a new digital imprint, Carina Press and on April Fool's Day 2011, I got 'The Email' offering publication. But it was in rural romance that I finally found my place.



Introducing our Pitch takers

Many fabulous people including those featured below will be taking pitches with us at **All That Glitters** in Sydney this August. If you'd like to pitch, make sure you book your pitching appointment.

[TICKETS AVAILABLE HERE](#)

**Tanera
Simons**



**from Darley
Anderson**

What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Single title only (80k and upwards)

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

Crime/thriller; police procedural; high fantasy; YA/MG/children's; non-fiction; literary.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

I am always on the look-out for more rom-coms and love stories! I would really love to find a really compelling and plot/character-driven historical novel with an unusual setting. Anything with an evocative or escapist setting, too!

What genre is your personal favourite?

Rom-com or book club/conversation-starting novels.

What is your major turn-off in a book?

If I'm not drawn in within the opening chapters, I'm unlikely to fall in love with the rest of it, therefore a slow opening – with too much scene-setting and not enough action/dialogue – always puts me off.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

A good sense of humour and a fresh take on a well-loved trope/premise. If I can laugh out loud then that's a great start.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Know your genre so that you can be confident there is a market for your work while being able to pinpoint what will make yours stand-out. Easier said than done!

**Stacey
Clair**



from Hatchette

What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Minimum 60k depending on the genre.

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

Science fiction, fantasy, horror or category romance.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

Contemporary romantic comedy/dramedy, uplift, historical fiction, literary fiction, psychological thriller

What genre is your personal favourite?

Romantic comedy/dramedy

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Characters without plausible or clear motivation for their actions.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

Believable stakes and snappy dialogue.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Make sure you are pitching to the right publisher or agent for *your work*, not just the biggest or shiniest ones on the list. Finding the right home can be tricky but doing your research to refine your target will give you a much better shot at being asked to submit.

Introducing our Pitch takers

Liz Pelletier, Chief Executive Officer, Entangled Publisher



Coming out of the dot com era, serial entrepreneur Liz Pelletier has more than thirty years of experience in software engineering, systems analysis, and business management. In 2011, Liz channelled her love of romantic fiction and co-founded Entangled Publishing. Her mission statement was simple: offer authors the highest royalties in the industry, combined with an agile publishing program, intense focus on quality, and market-driven analysis, in an effort to bridge the gap between traditional and self-publishing opportunities. Over the past ten years, Entangled has gone from a small start-up to mid-size romance publisher, with more than 2700 titles released to date and a majority hitting Amazon bestseller lists.

What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Single title only (80k and upwards)

Category length (45k-55k)

We take both of the above but we're flexible on those word counts. A single title digital book can be as low as 70k as long as it tells the story in the best way possible. And a category book will sometimes go up to 60k for the same reason. Every book has different needs.

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

We do not publish short stories or collections, novels in verse, literary fiction, or cosy mysteries. For everything else, as long as it feels commercial and has a high concept, we will consider it.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

Fantasy with big world building; sci-fi that feels accessible; rom-coms and humorous romance; F/F romance in any genre; Regency and Victorian historical romance; mainstream fiction such as domestic thriller, commercial women's fiction, and new takes on real historical events.

What genre is your personal favourite?

Fantasy.

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Cheating in a romance.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

A unique hook, something about how the plot is presented that feels different, or a twist in the plot that feels new, or a character type you wouldn't expect; anything that lends itself well to film, feels cinematic.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Present the pitch clearly and succinctly so it's easy to follow. Relax, have fun, we're all here for the same reason—we love stories!

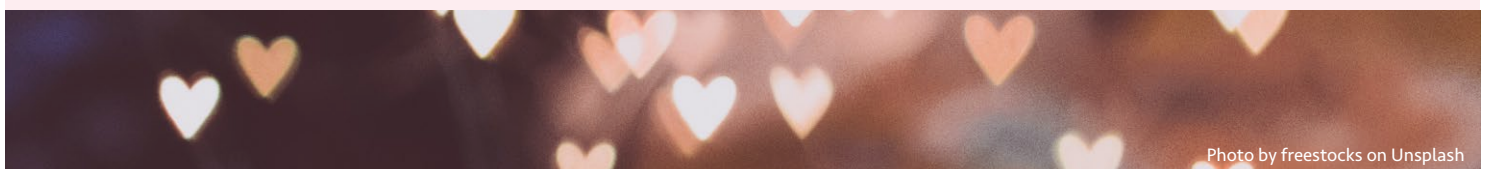


Photo by freestocks on Unsplash

Introducing our Pitch takers

Rochelle Fernandez from Alex Adsett Agency



What are you acquiring?

I'm looking for great characters that ring true. I'm looking for diversity - both diversity in authors and diversity of characters. I'm looking for stories that include sexy consent, difficult conversations, and love that means not having to compromise who you are. I'm not looking for fantasy or supernatural, nor BDSM/kink.

What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Single title only (80k and upwards) - I'd say 65K and upwards.

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

Supernatural, fantasy, BDSM, historical.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

No.

What genre is your personal favourite?

Contemporary Rom-com.

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Infidelity.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

A surprising and satisfying romance that turns the tropes on their head.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Stay relaxed! Tell me what is unique about your story, not the story itself.

Rochelle joined Alex Adsett Literary in 2021 after being an editor and then a publisher for a major Australian publishing house. She has worked on fiction, biography, memoir, cookery, current affairs as well as editing copy and messaging for the corporate sector in a career spanning nearly 20 years. As one of the first digital editors for an Australian publishing house, she has spent her career so far adapting to and maximising opportunities arising from changes to the traditional business models.

As a literary agent, Rochelle is seeking well written manuscripts of any genre with a compelling premise and three dimensional, interesting characters. Based in Sydney, she is passionate about hearing and seeing diverse stories that represent the wonderful multicultural, multifaceted society that comprises Australia.

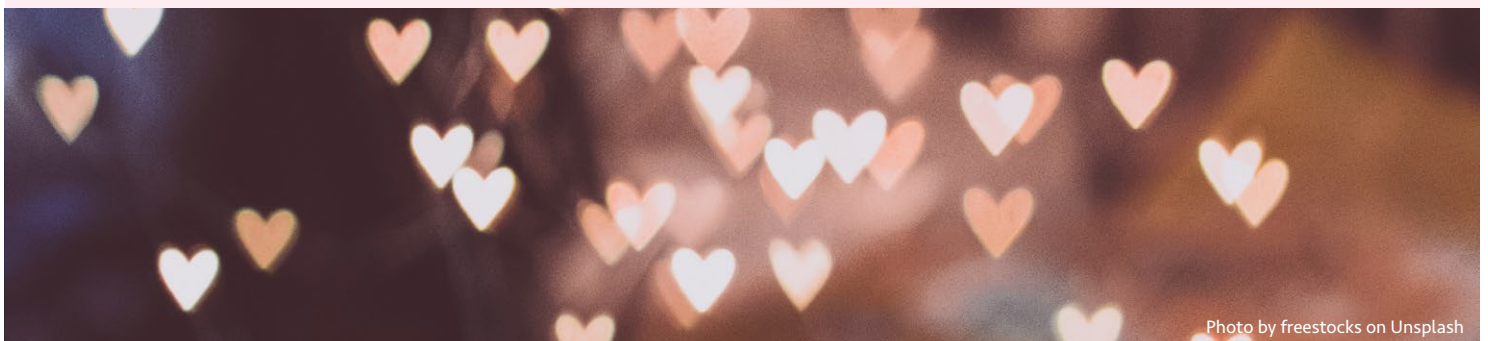


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Introducing our Pitch takers

Anthea Bariamis **Associate publisher of fiction & audiobooks at Simon & Schuster Australia**



What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Full novel length (75k words and upwards).

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

At this stage I'm not particularly looking for fantasy or erotica – but I'm always open to hearing exciting pitches!

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

Contemporary romance (both rom-coms and emotional), historical (all time periods) and sports romance. And I'm always, always looking for diverse stories!

What genre is your personal favourite?

I'm not sure I can pick one favourite, but if I had to narrow it down, I'd say contemporary and historical. The most important thing for me isn't necessarily the setting, but rather that I'm emotionally connected to the characters and invested in the plot.

What is your major turn-off in a book?

I think the biggest turn-off is when the characters (and the story) don't feel authentic – when they don't feel realistic. No matter how light or heavy the story is, it's important that I care about the characters and feel invested in their storyline.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

The best thing is when I'm reading a novel and I think I know where the story is going, but then it completely surprises me; or when I think I know what a character is going to say or do and the unexpected happens. That always results in the best reading experience.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Know your book! If you can describe the heart of your book in just a couple of lines that will make a big difference – then you can expand on more later. The second piece of advice I'd give is to know the genre – what tropes are in your book? What are some similar titles in the genre? For example, if it's a rom-com, does it sit alongside Emily Henry or Elena Armas? If it's historical, does it sit alongside Evie Dunmore or Natasha Lester? Knowing the nuances of the genre and where your book sits goes really far.



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Introducing our Pitch takers

Danielle Binks Jacinta di Mase Management



What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Single title only (80k and upwards)

Category length (45k-55k)

Novella or less (40k down to short story)

Young Adult fiction can be between 60K - 80K

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

Nothing medical romance.

No autobiography or memoir, no family memoir.

Nothing science-fiction in any genre or sub-genres.

No romance thriller/suspense.

No urban fantasy/paranormal romance.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

I'd take a look at some fantasy (high or low) with romance/romantic elements. Particularly keen on some 'Romantasy' (romantic-fantasy!); contemporary romance or women's fiction (I love Helen Hoang, Katherine Center, Talia Hibbert, Kylie Scott, Mhairi McFarlane and Rachael Johns!); cosy mystery with romance through-line (think; M. C. Beaton and Elizabeth Peters).

What genre is your personal favourite?

Historical romance, and contemporary romance - particularly love family sagas! I do love a Romantasy (romance/fantasy) and I adore the 'cosy fantasy' trend (Travis Baldree and Sangu Mandanna).

Cosy mysteries (with potential for series) choc-full of love triangles, will-they-or-won't-they, friends-to-lovers, or enemies-to-lovers etc.

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Taking too long to get started (no good telling me that things don't get going until Page 60!) It can totally be a spicy, five-chillies delight but don't put smut and smexy times right SMACK, BANG on page one. Ease us into it, please. Show, don't tell - I don't want long monologues and info-dumps.

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

I do love voice, voice, voice. When the character already sounds like a friend I want to hang out with, right from Page One - love that! A good genre mash-up. A clever mash-up. Not just 'dark academia cosy mystery' because that's what is currently trendy and is chasing the market. Someone who really knows their stuff and is writing the mash-up of their heart. 'Dark romance monster horror,' with Guillermo del Toro *Shape of Water* overtones type stuff. I'd love more diverse romance, written by diverse romance authors - of all backgrounds. Disability, Gender and Sexuality, Cultural backgrounds ... all of it!

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Don't be nervous (but it's also totally okay to be nervous!) and if it is a "no," it's only because agents/editors/publishers are romance readers just like any other, with our own tastes, preferred tropes and proclivities. Just because something is a "no," from me, doesn't mean it's a "no" indefinitely from the WHOLE industry. I am one person, with one opinion.

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Introducing our Pitch takers

Kate Cuthbert Pantera Press

Kate Cuthbert is the Editorial Director at Pantera Press. Previously, she held senior roles at Writers Victoria and launched the Escape Publishing brand at Harlequin Australia. A genre fiction advocate and enthusiast, she is currently pursuing a PhD examining representations of Australia on book covers and in book titles and is a co-host on the podcast What Would Danbury Do?



What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

Pantera Press only accepts full-length, single-title novels.

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

We are not currently looking for YA or erotic romance.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

We're interested in all varieties of contemporary romance, romantic comedies, historical novels with strong romantic elements, rainbow romance, and any kind of cosy story: cosy crime, cosy fantasy, whatever is going to make us feel warm and fuzzy.

Pantera also publishes commercial women's fiction, crime, literary cross-over, and non-fiction titles, and we'd be very happy to hear about your writing in these areas as well!

What genre is your personal favourite?

Fantasy? Historical. No, contemporary. Maybe SF? How does one choose?

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Lack of character development. I want your characters to be changed by the events in the book!

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

Clever conflict, well-resolved.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

Take a deep breath and take the chance. We're here because we genuinely want to hear from you!



Photo by freestocks on Unsplash

Introducing our Pitch takers

Beverley Cousins Publisher, Penguin Random House



What is the minimum word-count your agency takes, or your publishing house requires?

- Single title only (80k and upwards)
- Category length (45k-55k)
- Novella or less (40k down to short story)
- Other (please provide detail)

What sub-genres or genres are you not looking for?

I'm not looking for sci-fi, fantasy, horror, dystopia. I also don't publish children's or YA.

Is there a genre or sub-genre you're particularly keen to see?

Crime and suspense, rural romance and sagas, family dramas, dilemma fiction, historical fiction.

What genre is your personal favourite?

Crime fiction

What is your major turn-off in a book?

Telling not showing, particularly with regard to characters – I want to get to know them, I don't like being told how to see them (even if that information is coming from the creator of those characters!).

What is likely to really knock your socks off besides an engaging voice and well-written book?

A very clever, saleable plot hook or story concept. And an elevator pitch that is original and intriguing.

Any advice to your potential pitchers?

If possible, and I know it's hard because pitching is nerve-wracking, talk to me rather than read from a script. I rather you fluffed what you were saying and just looked at your notes occasionally, than read from a smooth, pre-prepared script. It helps me engage more when there is eye contact, plus authors have to be able to sell their books in public events when they won't be able to read from a script.

TIMEZONES
 PERTH: 4PM AWST
 BRISBANE: 6PM AEST
 ADELAIDE: 630PM ACDT
 SYD/MELB: 7PM AEDT

FRIDAY NIGHT WRITES!
 JOIN US FOR TWO HOURS OF LIVE WRITING SPRINTS

EVERY FRIDAY IN THE RWA FACEBOOK GROUP!

Join us for two hours of cozy sprints - whether you need to catch up on words, study, work, or simply make time for some evening reading. We'll have a quick chat and then get stuck in for four 25 minute sprint sessions, with 5 minute breaks in between.

Love being part of the community? Have a new release you'd like to share with us? Why not sign up to be a special guest?

Email Louisa (marketing@romanceaustralia.com) to express your interest.

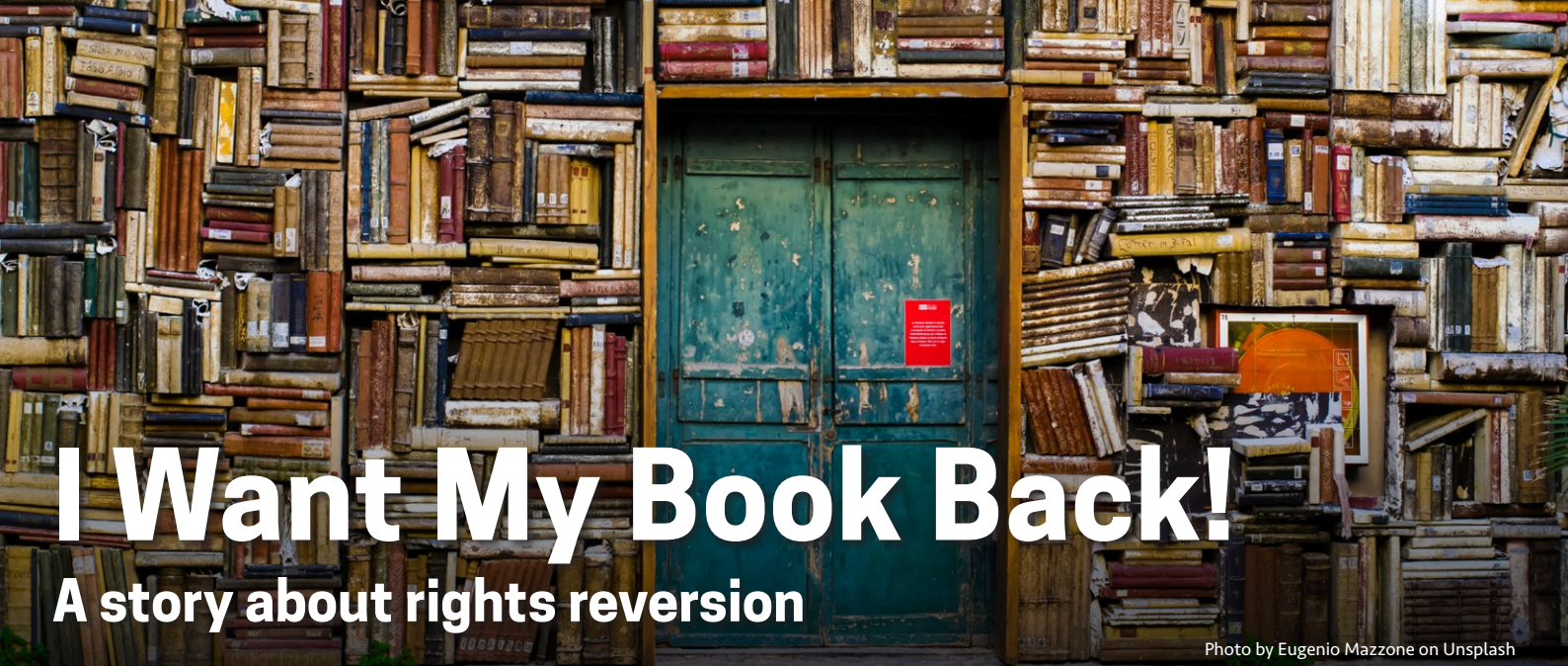


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I Want My Book Back!

A story about rights reversion

BY CASSANDRA O'LEARY

Once upon a time there was a baby author with a shiny new romance manuscript who entered lots of writing competitions. She was green, enthusiastic, and (maybe) too keen to publish immediately. She won a global writing contest and was offered a publishing contract. Fantastic, right? But that's just the beginning of the story.

That baby author was me, back in 2015. I signed on the dotted line with a digital first imprint of a Big Five publisher in the UK. I did the recommended things to protect my rights as an author, including having an agent review my contract for any curly clauses or rights grabs. I asked questions about timelines and editorial processes. My debut novel, *Girl on a Plane*, was published in July 2016 in ebook format globally. A while later, it was translated and sold as *Letuska* in the Czech Republic in eBook and paperback. Awesome, right? Well, mostly.

I had some misgivings about patchy communication from my publisher, but I ignored this at first. But about four months after publication, my main editorial contact at the imprint left the company. So did the marketing contact. The editorial intern who had sometimes contacted me was also gone. There was a new

team that didn't provide updates on how my book was doing.

Importantly, they didn't seem interested in my other writing, or in going ahead with a paperback of my book (although other authors with the imprint had paperback releases). The publisher had licensed worldwide rights for eBook, paperback, anthologies/reprints, translations, and audio books. There was also a 'first right of refusal' clause in my contract, meaning I had to submit my next full-length book to the publisher.

Time passed, but I drafted another novel, and several chapters of a third book. After finding out my imprint had folded and nobody bothered to tell me, I found the new contact people at the publisher on social media and emailed them. I sent a substantial excerpt of my draft book. A new editor said she may be interested in another idea, and to let me know how I got on. She...also left the company.

It took a pandemic to make me realise I was done waiting around for that publisher. I planned to write more in the world of the original novel, but I was nervous the publisher could try to claim my next full-length novel, unless I could terminate the contract.

It had been a few years, so I read the contract's fine print. There was a rights reversion clause, which I've copied below:

In Section 8 of the contract, *Author's Rights of Termination*, section (ii) states:

(4) income due to the Author from the sale or licensing of the Work is less than £100 in any twelve-month period no sooner than three years from publication of the Work.

Without prejudice to the conditions above, the Publishers shall at all times act reasonably and in good faith on receiving a request from the Author for rights to revert.

To me, it was clear I was entitled to ask for rights to be reverted, and to terminate the contract. My royalties had dwindled to a level well under the stated threshold and it was more than three years since publication.

However, big publishing companies can be tricky to deal with. I contacted the Royalties department in a different city than the editorial team and asked for an updated statement. I received royalty statements by snail mail through international post, and this was quite slow. At this stage, I realised I hadn't been paid any royalties for a few months.

Then, I researched how to ask for rights reversion. There are a few guides out there, including a free PDF booklet from Authors Alliance, available online (see the references below). I used a sample letter template as my starting point, and also read the eBook called, *Take Back Your Book*. This included

real examples of the problems authors have faced in requesting rights reversion. These included the publisher being in receivership, having to buy-back large quantities of paperback stock in a warehouse, or paying for cover artwork and manuscript files as part of dissolving the contract.

I thought my case would be easy and the publisher should simply hand my book back. That's not how it went! I drafted my formal request for rights reversion and emailed it to the senior publishing contact at the new imprint. I was surprised to receive an email the next day, because usually I either had no response to emails, or they were slow to respond. But the contact person had dug through my contract and noted that the publisher reserves the right to take a 'grace period' of six months to attempt to increase sales above the minimum threshold.

I queried whether they could return my rights immediately, as the book hadn't been selling well for some time. They didn't agree but said they would explore all publishing options and try to increase sales above the minimum.

So, I waited. I stopped promoting that book on social media, and after a couple of months, deleted links on my website. I noticed the publisher had tweaked my book blurb on online retailers, but I didn't see any other promotion.

I wanted my book back. It had become a thing blocking me from progressing with other projects, an annoyance in the back of my mind. Also, I received a hard copy royalty statement for the princely sum of 13p (GBP) and I saw red! Why was the publisher hanging onto my book when no-one was making any money? Overall, they owed me about \$25 AUD. I still hadn't been paid and I didn't know why.

After the six-month 'grace period' expired, I emailed the publisher again. I stated I couldn't see an

increase in royalties, and it was time for my rights to be reverted. And I was ignored. I emailed again several times, getting terser with each reminder. I was within my rights to request my rights!

To make a long story short, I got mad. It was late 2022 when I posted in the RWA Facebook Community Group and asked for other authors' advice. How could you make a publisher revert your rights when they ignored you?

On the advice of a few authors, I looked into legal representation. I joined the Australian Society of Authors who offer free contract reviews for members, and a low-cost legal service. Unfortunately for me, their service was fully booked for a few months. So, I researched UK publishing lawyers. I contacted two firms and received quotes that made me spit out my coffee. Suffice to say, they are expensive. I kept them on the backburner in case I decided to proceed.

Next, I drafted my Angry Author Email. I said I had contacted a lawyer, and I threatened legal action. Also, I stated that I believed the publisher was in breach of contract, as I hadn't been paid any royalties for over a year. This got a response.

Within a day, I had multiple emails from the publishing contact apologising for their lack of communications, saying the staff member who was looking into this had left the company (again!) and the Royalties team would pay out any money owing in full. Finally, I received an email confirming that I now had the rights to my book as of X date in December 2022.

It was such a relief! Because I had done my research, I knew that I had to make sure the old eBook was taken down from all online retailers before I could re-publish. The twenty-

something dollars in royalties hit my bank account and that was that.

I contacted a cover designer and started work on a hardcover layout of my book as a special edition. Just because I could! As I write, I'm preparing to re-publish my book *Girl on a Plane* as an indie publisher. It will be out in eBook, paperback, and hardcover, and it's looking gorgeous!

References:

- *Take Back Your Book* by Katlyn Duncan, available from major eBook retailers
- *Understanding Rights Reversion* (PDF guide) from Authors Alliance at <https://www.authorsalliance.org/resources/rights-reversion-portal/>
- Australian Society of Authors - Authors Legal (low fee legal service) at <https://www.asauthors.org/services/legal-advice>



Cassandra O'Leary is an Aussie romance, rom com and women's fiction author, corporate communications escapee and film and TV fangirl. In 2015 she won the global We Heart New Talent contest, and her debut novel, *Girl on a Plane*, was published in

2016. She has since indie published several titles including *Hot In The City: A Romcom Story Collection*. Cassandra lives in Melbourne, Australia and can be found drinking excellent coffee with her superhero husband, while chasing her two high energy mini ninjas.

Read more at cassandraolearyauthor.com





Let's Talk About Sex

(IN ROMANCE)

Photo by Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition on Unsplash

CONTEMPORARY
ROMANCE AUTHOR
KRISTINE CHARLES
SPILLS THE TEA ABOUT
THE NUANCES OF SEX IN
ROMANTIC FICTION

Chapter Two: Safe Sex and Contraception

More than 10 years ago now, [Susan Quilliam](#) published an article which, while it has been fairly criticised for various reasons, raised an interesting point. Quilliam observed that women's exposure to formal education about sex and relationships might be as little as a few hours in a lifetime, while their exposure to informal sex and relationship education via romance novels could be as much as a day or more a week.

In my (completely unresearched) opinion, I think that:

- Quilliam underestimated the amount of romance women (and others!) chose to read; and
- That ratio of a few hours of formal education sex and romance education to (at least!) one day per week of informal sex

and relationship education via various media (books, movies, TV, the interwebs) hasn't significantly changed (and probably applies to most people – not just women).

I can honestly say that I got most (but not all) of my sex education from Mum's bookshelves (thankfully, she'll never read this because she'd be rightly horrified at that fact!) and I expect that's still the case to date for kids throughout the world. Possibly even more so for teens and young adults in countries where sex education is particularly limited or non-existent.

Abstinence might make the heart grow fonder, but it does not stop people having sex.

And while there is lots of consequence-free unprotected sex going on in real life, just as there is consequence-free unprotected sex in romance novels, there are some things that writers should get right, beyond the standard condom application (that can be outrageously sexy).

So, safe sex and contraception are things any writer of sexy times should consider – even if, ultimately, you choose not to put them squarely on the page.

If grown ass adults can't talk about safe sex and contraception, then they shouldn't be having sex.

In my honest opinion, conversations about safe sex and contraception should be squarely on page in contemporary romance – both are current issues that deserve consideration by your protagonists (whether separately or together). How you do that, though, is completely up to you – and can be amazingly sexy. A personal favourite is in chapter two of Nalini Singh's *Rock Addition* where a conversation about the purchase of condoms is used as foreplay.

It might be a different conversation in historical romance – especially if you have a more sheltered or naïve heroine – but don't try and tell me contraception didn't exist or women didn't know about it *back in the day* – it did, and they did. These discussions are also not necessarily limited to preventatives and prophylactics. For example, there could be a discussion of what might happen should there be consequences of a dalliance, or an arrangement made for everything but penetration. Or the unprotected sex could be a plot device (personally I'm a fan of an unplanned pregnancy or a surprise baby as a plot device...).

And there is still room for such conversations in paranormal romance although, depending on the world you're building, it's not necessarily as key as in contemporary or historical. In paranormal, given you're the one making up the rules of the world you can choose to use technology to eradicate STDs, for example. Or have pregnancies be the outcome of certain, limited, fated couplings.

Butt stuff requires lube (and lube is not butter or spit, no matter how dirty hot the boat scene is in 365 Days).

While the above is clearly true – safe sex is not just about condoms nor is it just about lube (although lube is important, people!).

It's also about the physical and mental environment of the act – particularly in the case of BDSM.

If you're going to write about activities outside your wheelhouse, please do your research (and we

will come back to research in a future article). The internet is a weird and wonderful place and, while you need to be a little circumspect in identifying good resources, you can find all manner of information to help you write safe, sane, and consensual sex. This is even more key if you're writing things like restraints, wax, or breath play (or any other of the many different types

of kinks and fetishes that are out there). You don't want your protagonist accidentally burning an essential part of their partner or cutting off the circulation to their hands and feet, as neither of these things are particularly sexy.

Final thoughts

This discussion is by no means a comprehensive exploration of all the possible facets of safe sex and contraception that could be raised

in romance novels. I've tried to stay broad and applicable across all elements of romance – but there will absolutely be others.

It's also not meant to place responsibility for the world's sex education on romance authors.

But the one thing I hope that you take away from this quick canvass is, as I said above, safe sex and contraception are things any writer of sexy times should consider – even if, ultimately, you choose not to put them squarely on the page.

Let me know your favourite safe sex or contraception scene: @wordsbykc (Twitter) / @wordsbykristinecharles (FB)



♥ **Kristine Charles writes sexy contemporary romances where coffee (and red wine) is abundant, designer shoes and handbags are cheap, chocolate has no calories and men always put the toilet seat down. Find her at www.wordsbykristinecharles.com @wordsbykc on Twitter**

RWA Academy

WITH LISTYA ELLIOTT

This year we have another exciting round of delicious courses for you.

As you will know, we have moved into using the self-registering platform of Teachable. (Yes, we are very excited about it!) We hope that you enjoy being able to self-register and start your self-paced course immediately.

This year you will see courses from our tried and trusted Michelin five-starred course presenters such as Paula Roe, Sandy Vaile, Jan-Andrews Henderson and Kim Lambert, along with some truly delightful and sustaining presenters

who you will quickly include as your 'must-complete' course providers. We are looking forward to introducing them to you over the year.

Things to lookout for this year:

- Q&A sessions with presenters
- New course categories
- Completion certificates
- Presenter interviews

Keep an eye out for our website updates, Hearts Talk information and our newsletter snippets. We can't wait to help you with your writing journey.

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EDITING

TIPS

#EditorChats

How long does it take to edit a book?

Image by Shotkitimages from Pixabay

BY JO SPEIRS

With a deadline looming, this is what you need to know ...

Self-publishing a manuscript can be daunting when you consider everything that needs doing: editing, proofreading, cover design, marketing, building a readership and planning your launch party. Not to mention creating your wonderful piece of work in the first place! Many factors come into play – it's not just about achieving a word count.

So, with a deadline looming and a never-ending to-do list before your book is ready for the world, when should you start outsourcing to a professional?

Investing in a professional editor is one of the best things you can do for your manuscript. Not only will your story be much stronger with enhanced readability, but your writing skills and knowledge will also improve.

You have to know what you are looking for in the first instance, though, as there are different types of editors and each editing step comes with its own checklist and time frame.

What type of editing do I need?

Three main types of editing occur on a manuscript before it's ready to be published: developmental/structural editing, line and copyediting, and proofreading.

Developmental/structural editing

is the first stage of the editing process and usually takes the longest. During this process, the editor assesses the big picture elements of your story, such as plot, characterisation, theme, and organisation.

Once these areas are on track and your manuscript is structurally sound, you are ready for a **line**

and copyedit. This is a line-by-line and word-by-word edit, ensuring consistency and tightening your prose, looking at everything from dialogue, show vs. tell, grammar, punctuation, pace and, most importantly, readability.

Finally, before you hit publish, your manuscript requires a final and critical step of **proofreading**. This looks for any pesky typos or

formatting issues that could pull or distract your readers from the story. No one wants a one-star review for poor grammar, punctuation, or typos.

How long does my manuscript need to be?

There's no right or wrong length for your manuscript – as long as it's telling your story. The number of words will impact the time it takes for a professional editor to work on

Starting with your release date, you can work back and set deadlines for each editing and proofreading stage

your manuscript, but it's important you don't change your story, voice or writing style to make it shorter and save yourself some editing time. Shortening it at the expense of a compelling plot or captivating characters will simply hurt your manuscript in the long run.

How many drafts do I need to do before I hire an editor?

When you're self-publishing, you need to budget for everything, and your budget may determine how many levels of professional editing you undertake.

Before you bring your manuscript to a professional editor, be sure that you have taken care of the first steps to make it as polished as possible. This will ensure the editing process is efficient and effective. To ensure your manuscript is structurally sound, undertake a structural edit, manuscript assessment and beta readers before engaging a line and copyeditor.

Am I ready for a line and copyedit?

You've finished writing and are wondering if it is time to engage a professional copyeditor for your manuscript. This checklist will help to ensure you complete all the key elements before hiring a copyeditor, so the editor doesn't have to spend time fixing things that should have been taken care of earlier.

- Have you completed a structural/developmental edit?
- Have you completed a manuscript assessment?
- Have you given your manuscript to beta readers for feedback?
- Have you drafted and reworked your words as much as you can?
- Can you see your manuscript has been enhanced and polished, but it's gone as far as it can with you?

What's involved with a line and copyedit?

Line and copyediting are where I focus my energy at Nurturing Words, and typically, a manuscript (approx. 80k words) will be in my care for

about 4–5 weeks as I work on one manuscript at a time and fully immerse myself in the story.

Keep in mind that editors work at different speeds, and an editor's schedule or work process will also impact the time your manuscript is with a professional editor. The state of the writing and the number of editing drafts undertaken before engaging with a professional will also affect the time.

As an example, when I work on a manuscript, my editing time involves:

- formatting and preparing the file for editing
- the actual editing – line by line, word by word
- a follow-up read-through
- running automated software and macros
- writing the editorial summary
- the construction of the personalised style guide.

"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail" – Benjamin Franklin

Planning and settling due dates for the key steps of your self-publishing journey is critical. You can't type "The End" and expect an editor to be available the next day to pick up your manuscript.

Starting with your release date, you can work back and set deadlines for each editing and proofreading stage. This allows you to book your editor/s and proof-reader in advance to avoid disappointment. Keep in mind that these dates will also vary based on your writing schedule and other "life" factors.

Release Date:

1. Six weeks prior to release date = send to proof-reader and allow 2-3 weeks turnaround
2. 15 weeks prior to release date = send to the copyeditor and allow 4-6 weeks turnaround

Why does it take so long to edit a manuscript?

Book editing is a meticulous process. Editors go through the book with a fine-tooth comb, checking for inconsistencies and grammatical errors. They must ensure the book has a cohesive voice, consistent tone, and a clear plotline. They have to make sure the book makes sense, is entertaining and is a book that people will want to read.

Editors have a wealth of knowledge in the technicalities of writing and an eye for a good story with pace and readability. Investing in a professional editor will give you the peace of mind that your book is the best it can possibly be and that you're putting your most professional and polished work forward to publication.

So, if your manuscript is nearing the line or copyediting stage, or you want to budget for editing in the future, please drop me an email and we can chat.



♥ **Jo Speirs is an experienced line and copyeditor + proof-reader, ready to help authors reach their writing (and book sales) goals. She provides gentle, constructive, and insightful feedback and edits, and many suggestions to improve, not change the author's story or voice.**

Find Jo online at
www.nurturingwords.com.au
on Facebook at
<https://www.facebook.com/nurturingwords> or email **hello@nurturingwords.com.au**



Photo by JESHOTS.COM on Unsplash



What is a gill of water?

HISTORICAL HARLOTS

Image by Oberholster Venita from Pixabay

BY VICTORIA PURMAN

Readers of this column may have surmised that those of us who write historical fiction are, it's fair to say, addicted to research.

We can easily get lost in archives, both physical and digital. We can spend hours staring at grainy old black and white photographs to imagine what colour clothes the people in the image were wearing. We give ourselves eye strain attempting to read the very small font sizes in old books (honestly, had they ever heard of 12pt and some spacing between the lines?).

And we often head straight to our favourite search engine when we're faced with an unfamiliar term or an expression we haven't come across before.

My most recent novel, *A Woman's Work*, centres on two women who enter *The Australian Women's Weekly* 1956 cookery contest. I studied recipes from that year because I wanted to include some in the novel. My first move was to go to Trove to look at back copies of the popular

magazine to see what was featured in the cooking pages in those days. I also sourced old recipe books from vintage stores and op shops—CWA cookbooks, Mrs Beeton, and the good old *Green and Gold*—and looked at what was popular.

So, what were people eating in the mid-fifties? Lots and lots of cakes and slices and biscuits, which makes sense in an era in which women (and it almost always was) were cooking most everything at home; when it was common for a housewife to set aside a baking day so the whole family could be supplied with cakes and slices and biscuits for the next week.

There were lots of recipes and ingredients that—thankfully—aren't so popular now, such as various kinds of offal and boiled cabbage. Honestly, when was that ever good? I have to admit to being stumped by Curried Steak with Spaghetti (yes, you read it right), Stuffed Mutton Flaps, Lamb Shanks with Sweet and Sour Sauce, Fish Roe Cutlets and Snapper Supreme stuffed with curried rice and sultanas.

Not things that would appear on the fabulous, multicultural menus of today, thank goodness.

And while the recipes were slightly horrifying, I was stumped by one thing in particular. While I expected to see Imperial measurements used in the recipes, I have to admit to being perplexed at the measure of a 'gill'. It was from a recipe for Rice Pudding from *Australian Cookery of Today*, which called for one gill of water and one of milk. These days, when search engines are at our fingertips, it's easy to find out that a gill is a quarter of a pint (five fluid ounces) or 2/3 of a cup or 150mls in metric.

And just to stump you even further, it's pronounced 'jill' like jillaroo, not 'gill' like you'd find on a fish. According to Websters Dictionary (a 1956 edition I have on my shelves) it derives from the late 13th century, from the Old French word *gille*, a wine measure, and from the Medieval Latin word *gillo*, a cooling vessel.

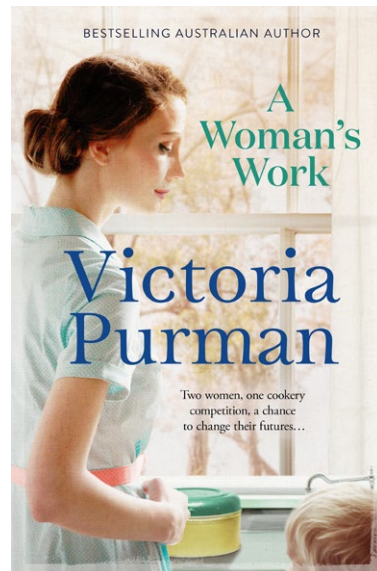
See what I mean about historical fiction writers and the old research rabbit hole?

So, there you have it. I shall be very handy to have at the next quiz night should one of the categories be Weights and Measures. I'm not sure such knowledge will really come in handy anywhere else, but it's the finding the answer that makes research so much fun.

And of course, if I'm scurrying along that research rabbit hole, I don't have to think about that scene I need to write...



♥ **Victoria Purman is an Australian top ten and USA Today bestselling fiction author, with novels including *The Nurses' War*, *The Women's Pages*, *The Land Girls* and *The Last of the Bonegilla Girls* having all been Australian bestsellers. Her earlier novel *The Three Miss Allens* was a USA Today bestseller. She was a RuBY finalist with her first novel, *Nobody But Him*. She is a regular guest at writers' festivals, a mentor and workshop presenter. Victoria's new novel *A Woman's Work* (HQ HarperCollins) is out this month.**



Otherworldly Bites

DEALING WITH CLICHÉS

Image by Imstudio1989 from Pixabay

BY HELEN LUCY HOWE

What's a cliché? Well, according to Ms Google, 'a cliché is a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought'. In essence, a stereotype. A couple of excellent examples are: 'the grass is always greener on the other side' or 'you can't judge a book by its cover' (although people often do as we authors all know).

When we write, we're advised to avoid clichés. Mostly, it's because they're tired and overused. Plus, readers have developed certain

expectations of particular themes. What do I mean? Well, think of werewolves: they change at the full moon, run in packs with alphas, betas, mates, rogues/lone wolves, and they're naturally furry, with fangs and claws. In addition, they can turn you (or mate you!) with a bite.

Then we have the quintessential fanged vampire - complete with long or eternal life - with an aversion to garlic, wooden stakes, and daylight; who drink blood for food and are frequently portrayed with their dinner all over their face and clothing (come on - who just throws their food all over themselves?). They're usually compellingly beautiful/

gorgeous/handsome or brimming with darkly gothic broodiness, and we can't help being drawn to them because, according to the 'lore', their attractiveness is how they lure their prey, how they 'glamour' us. Yes, us. To most vampires, life is cheap and humans are simply choice menu items.

So there we have the cliché versions of both werewolf and vampire. Anyone writing about either of them may find themselves subject to: 'oh, it's just another vampire/werewolf story, why bother - they're all the same'. And that's a brush off any author wants to avoid.

But many authors desperately want to write about vampires or werewolves - so how to succeed without clichés? The way I see it, there are two options.

- One - write that sucker better than anyone's ever done before, or
- Two - write around the clichés, break the rules, and make your book sing.

Whichever path you choose, your vampire/werewolf needs to be different and stand out from the crowd.

In Nalini Singh's *Guild-hunter* series there are some fabulous examples of vampires both good (Dimitri) and bad (Slater Patalis). Nalini also writes about werewolves, and other shapeshifter breeds, in her *Psy-changeling* series. Her characters include the gorgeous werewolves of the Snowdancer pack and who couldn't fall in love with Alexei or Hawke?

Naturally, when we're talking about vampires, there's no way to go past the famous 'Dracula' by Bram Stoker. Stoker wrote Drac based on the folkloric tales of historical figure, Vlad the Impaler, which he embellished with local vampire rumours, plus his own authorly twist. Over the years since, Drac became a cliché, influencing thousands of writers to create a similar version. Vampires are fascinating. I get it. But after a while so many of the same thing tends to run together and

becomes, dare I say it, boring. To keep our fascination alive, we need same, same but different.

Okay, how do we portray them differently? How about a 'vampire-that's-not-a-vampire'? This idea is done well by Christine Feehan with her *Dark* series, commencing with 'Dark Prince'. Her heroes only become vampires when they reach a personal, critical threshold, from which they can be saved if they find their mates. In my opinion, the series starts slowly, but improves with each book, as her mortality curse-driven heroes/heroines undergo danger and adventure in the search for their soul mates.

A writer whose werewolf, and other shifters, tick my boxes is Shelly Laurenston with her *Magnus Pack* trio of tales. The trilogy connects into her *Pride* series containing various shapeshifter types, including werewolves. It's an urban series, like Nalini Singh's *Psy-changelings*, but that's where the resemblance ends. Most of Nalini's changelings populate wide-open spaces bordering suburbia, but Shelly's changelings are very urban and mostly live in cities. They're also a bit cray-cray and the books are loaded with snarky humour, as opposed to the serious and world-conscious heroes and heroines in Nalini's stories.

So, if you're planning to write either vampire or werewolf - and I hope you do - brainstorm an original twist and do the best you can to avoid

becoming just another cliché. Get your vampire out of the coffin and give them a shakedown. Are they going to be day-walkers? Perhaps modern-day business people? Get their sustenance from coffee instead of blood? Will your werewolves be a space-faring race not subject to change on the full moon because, as space farers, which moon would have that power over them anyway? However you write them, I hope your version is so marvellous that Dracula is left shaking his fist and screeching: 'what about me?' as he chokes on the dust of your success.

♥ ***Helen Lucy Howe, aka Hellucy Howe, loves to write fantasy, aka fairy tales with romance. "Sometimes sci-fi rockets in or I'll paddle in the mythology pool and bring in old gods and goddesses, along with their rituals and beliefs. I enjoy creating worlds and writing a series of loosely linked adventures. But there's always romance of some kind in my fantasy fairy tales, and each book has a different set of protagonists. There are often guest appearances from previous main characters in my romantic epic fantasy stories, as it's hard to let good characters disappear. I've been writing stories all my life, but it's only recently I was convinced to share them. When I'm not inventing stories, I adore ice cream, tea, reading, quilting, my family and my dog, Lexie (who snores louder than anything you can imagine!)."***

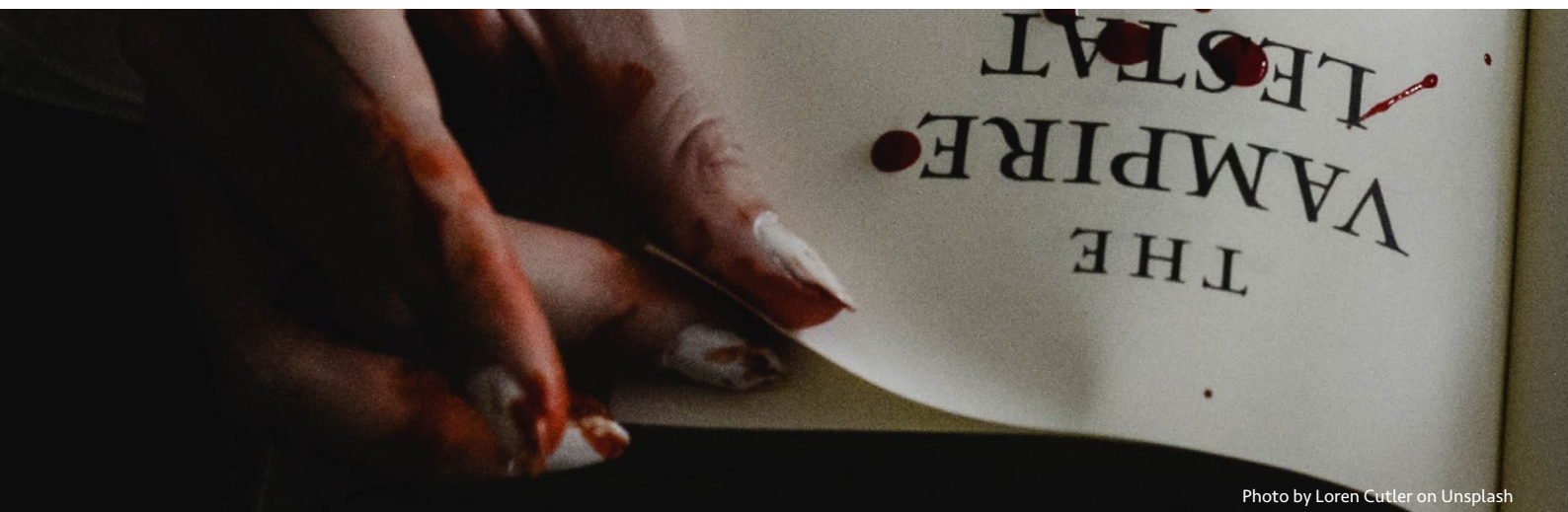


Photo by Loren Cutler on Unsplash

Keywords

Alone

Walking Away

Escape

Epiphany

New Beginning

Sweet April
showers do
spring May
flowers

Thomas Tusser 1524 - 1580

Inspiration jumpstart

WRITING PROMPTS

BY NICOLE
HURLEY-MOORE

Hello and welcome back to a new year of inspiration and fun. I hope that the writing prompts can give you the freedom to explore an idea with no pressure. Sometimes our best ideas turn up when we least expect them. So, if you'd like to play, take a breath, open your mind and see where this month's prompt might take you.

Then write down a paragraph about the scene or a brief outline of a story (e.g. an elevator pitch). Or just write down what the image and the words make you feel. The keywords are there for inspiration but you don't have to use them all.

Feel free to send your prompts to nc-moore@hotmail.com as I would love to read them and maybe include them in next month's edition.

So here we are in April and I couldn't get a part of an old poem out of my head – April showers bring May flowers. So, I thought that maybe

it could be part of this month's prompt. When I looked into a little more, I realised that not only had I misquoted it but it was way older than I first thought and originated from sometime in the 1500s.

Anyway, I found an interesting image and thought that you could play around with the different keywords and the themes they point to.

I like to think that even though our heroine might have gone through something awful, she looks determined to change her life.

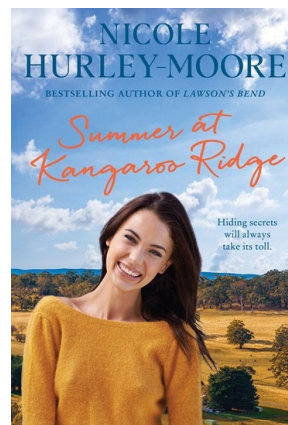
Hope you enjoy the prompt and until next time, happy writing!

Nicole

♥ **Best-selling author Nicole Hurley-Moore lives with her family in the Victorian Central Highlands. She writes full time, concentrates on writing contemporary rural stories but occasionally dabbles in the odd medieval tale. Her most recent release is *Summer at Kangaroo Ridge*.**



Our new e-newsletter is a round-up of RWAus info and is delivered to inboxes around the middle of each month.



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connect@romanceaustralia.com or
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RWA COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT

Louisa West
president@romanceaustralia.com

VICE-PRESIDENT, EVENTS

Rachael Johns
vicepresident@romanceaustralia.com

TREASURER

Jacinta Peachey
treas@romanceaustralia.com

SECRETARY

Jan MacNally
secretary@romanceaustralia.com

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jem McCusker (Sponsorship)
Miranda Harvey, Dani McLean

RWA CONTACTS

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS

Jacinta Goodsell
admin@romanceaustralia.com

Contact admin for:

- Member Services
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IT MANAGER

Louisa West
ITManager@romanceaustralia.com

BLOG MANAGER

Nancy Cunningham
blog@romanceaustralia.com

FACEBOOK MANAGER

Louisa West
facebook@romanceaustralia.com

INSTAGRAM MANAGER

Nas Dean
instagram@romanceaustralia.com

SPONSORSHIP

Jem McCusker
sponsorship@romanceaustralia.com

MARKETING

Louisa West
marketing@romanceaustralia.com

CONTESTS MANAGER

Jacinta Peachey
contests@romanceaustralia.com

RUBY COORDINATOR

Sarma Burdeu
ruby@romanceaustralia.com

RIPPING START

Clare Miles
rippingstart@romanceaustralia.com

EMERALD

Fiona Marsden
emerald@romanceaustralia.com

SAPPHIRE

Jacinta Peachey
sapphire@romanceaustralia.com

SWEET TREATS

Ann Poole
sweettreats@romanceaustralia.com

SPICY BITES

Annette Laarakkers
spicybites@romanceaustralia.com

FIRST KISS

Linda Joyce
firstkiss@romanceaustralia.com

RWA ACADEMY COORDINATOR

Listya Elliott
academyinfo@romanceaustralia.com

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Listya Elliott
pd@romanceaustralia.com

CONFERENCE/EVENTS TEAM

events@romanceaustralia.com

ASPIRING AUTHOR AMBASSADOR

Dannielle Line
aspiring@romanceaustralia.com

EMERGING AUTHOR AMBASSADOR

Samantha Marshall
emerging@romanceaustralia.com

ESTABLISHED AUTHOR AMBASSADOR

Elizabeth Rolls
established@romanceaustralia.com

FACE-TO-FACE GROUPS

exist throughout Australia. For queries, contact:
groupliaison@romanceaustralia.com

HEARTS TALK TEAM EDITORS

Jan MacNally (content)
hteditor@romanceaustralia.com

Jo Edgar-Baker (design)
editor@romanceaustralia.com

TEAM MEMBERS

Louisa West, Rachael Johns, Jem McCusker, Jo Speirs, Alison Stuart, Beverley Eikli, Elizabeth Rolls, Kristine Charles, Libby M Iriks, Penelope Janu, Victoria Purman, Cassandra O'Leary, Nicole Hurley-Moore, Sandy Vaile, Pam Eldridge, Cassie Laelyn, Leisl Leighton, Helen Lucy Howe, Samantha Marshall, SE Welsh, HM Hodgson, Jodi Gibson, Sasha Cottman, Megan Mayfair

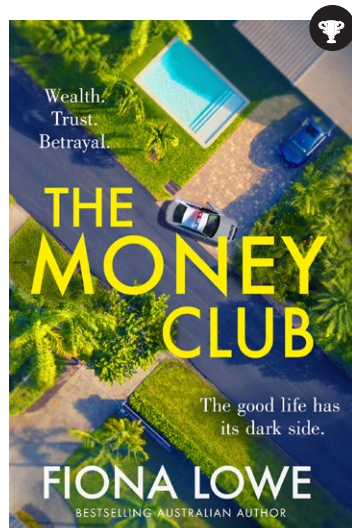
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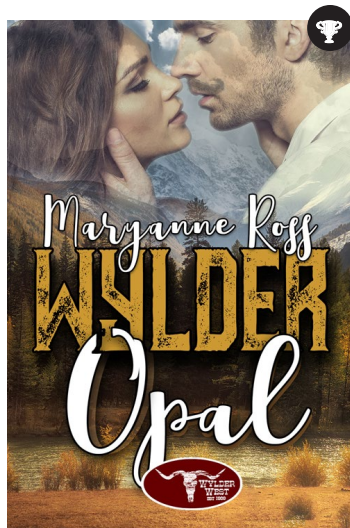
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The deadline for *Hearts Talk* submissions is the **8th of the month** before publication. Send submissions to: hteditor@romanceaustralia.com

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HQ Fiction



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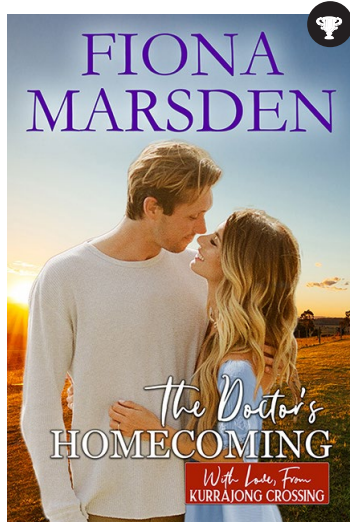
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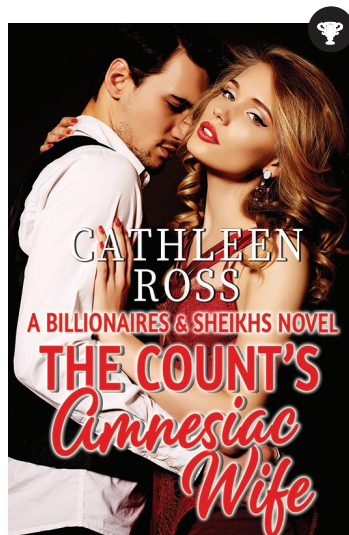
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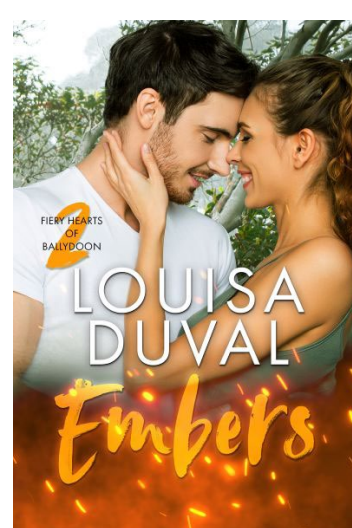
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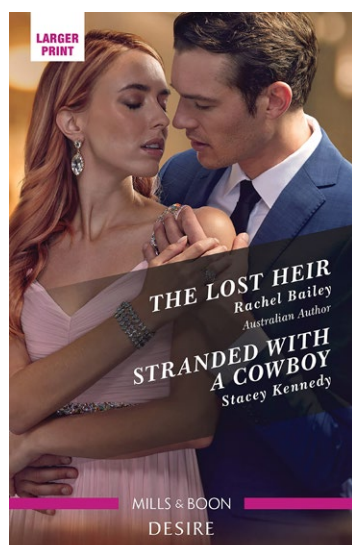
Love to Hate You
Pippa Langhorn
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Girl on a Plane
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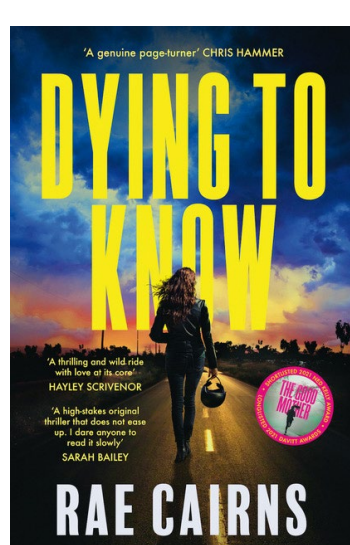
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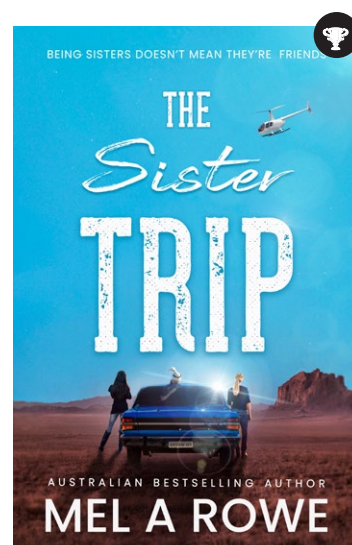
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