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shares her
writing journey

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most out of your
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experience at





President's Column

WITH LOUISA WEST

Can you believe it - we are just one month out from conference! Things are really starting to heat up for Sydney; plans are falling into place like clockwork and we are primed to enjoy what promises to be our very best conference yet. If you haven't booked your tickets yet - never fear. There's definitely still time to make sure you're in the thick of things. Head on over to the conference website to get sorted: <https://willorganise.eventsair.com/2023-romance-writers-of-australia/>

Speaking of conference - our AGM is also coming up that weekend. This is when we'll present our annual report, talking about all the fantastic things we have accomplished over the past twelve months. We're also going to start passing on information to you about our committee. We'll send out a special e-newsletter showcasing positions and key information for

you to have a look at, including how to nominate to join the committee if you're interested or how to sign up to be a volunteer within one of our portfolio areas. These are very exciting and fulfilling opportunities, and ways to be involved in helping improve and shape the future of our wonderful organisation.

Lastly, you will find information in this month's *Hearts Talk* about how to nominate someone for the 2023 Lynne Wilding Award. I urge you to please consider acknowledging a volunteer who has made a difference to your RWAus experience within the last 12 months. It's a wonderful way to ensure that our incredible volunteers get the recognition they deserve - all while honouring RWAus founding member (and our first President!), the amazing Lynne Wilding.

Until August, may the words flow!

Louisa

COMING EVENTS

7 July	Friday Night Writes
7 July	Nominations close for Lynne Wilding Meritorious Service Award
8 July	Deadline for August HT (including new releases)
14 July	Friday Night Writes
15 July	RWAus email newsletter
21 July	Friday Night Writes
28 July	Friday Night Writes



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From Your Editors

CONTENT, GRAMMAR AND LAYOUTS - OH MY!



JAN MACNALLY
HEARTS TALK CONTENT EDITOR

My glittery outfit for the conference cocktail party is ready, although I'm still deciding which sparkly dress to wear to the Gala Awards dinner. And shoes! I need some sparkly shoes! There are also so many interesting panels, workshops and presentations in the conference program that I feel spoiled for choice.

Speaking of choice, this month's edition of *Hearts Talk* has something for everyone, including a feature interview with RWA member and successful author Maya Linnell, who shares her tips on pitching and writing. Three authors also share their conference experiences with advice on how to make the most of this year's Sydney conference, whether you are a first timer or veteran attendee.

Amber Jakeman has reviewed the recent Sydney Writers' Festival, while Kristine Charles shares tips for ramping up your characters' sexual tension (and her recent obsession with *Rookie Blue*).

Best selling author Amy Andrews admits that she loves being a writer but doesn't necessarily *enjoy* the process of writing as much, while Alison Stuart finds inspiration by visiting the places where her stories are set. Samantha Marshall provides illuminating insights into when to use or not use magic in the regular *Otherworldly Bites* column, while newcomer Jer'tarme shares ideas on how to make the most of your Bookstagram account.

RWA President Louisa West is this month's profiled committee member, and we also shine a light on one of our many dedicated volunteers, RuBY coordinator Sarma Burdeu. More of our volunteers will be featured in future issues, as they are the backbone of our organisation and always deserving of recognition. The **Lynne Wilding Award** is one way we can recognise and reward our volunteers, so please consider nominating a volunteer who has made a difference to your RWAus experience within the last 12 months.



JO EDGAR-BAKER
HEARTS TALK DESIGN EDITOR

With the annual conference so close, I've been thinking of my first conference – or what I can remember of it! I didn't know it at the time, but I drove to the Gold Coast under the influence of a brain virus (similar to encephalitis). As a result of this, I'd had my first (and only – touch wood) car accident the day before driving from the Sunshine Coast. During the conference my vision was blurry and my headaches got much, much worse. I vaguely remember some lovely writers who were very friendly and made me feel included at the cocktail party – I knew absolutely no-one. Memories of Saturday and Sunday (and driving home) are very vague. I even met a fellow writer, who is now one of my very best friends and we're now in the same writing group – or so she tells me – it pains me to say I don't remember!

I do remember when I first arrived on the Friday, meeting then president Rachel Bailey who is now a good friend and lives about 10 minutes down the road from me.

Although I don't remember any of the workshops, I still have all the conference handouts and I must have enjoyed myself despite my brain not functioning, because I returned to conference the next year! I also have the notes to say that I pitched to Penguin and Harlequin (so embarrassing!) I must have done okay as I had requests for the first 3 chapters for both – or maybe they were being nice because they felt sorry for me!

Wishing all those who are attending this year a fabulous (and memorable) time! ♥

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 August issue to Jan, our Content Editor at hteditor@romanceaustralia.com

by Saturday 8 August.



Maya Linnell

INTERVIEW BY
J A MACNALLY

Writers are never off duty – Maya Linnell shares her writer's journey, what inspires her, and her favourite recipe.

A self-proclaimed “card-carrying” member of RWA, Maya answered some questions from Hearts Talk editor Jan MacNally, who learned what a “RuRo” is!

Your website mentions that you fulfilled your dream to become an author in 2019 with your first published novel, *Wildflower Ridge*. What inspired you originally to start writing, and do you only write rural romance?

“My dad was a freelance photo journalist, so I grew up surrounded by books and words, crosswords, and magazines. I started writing stories as a little girl, loved English throughout my schooling, scored a journalism

cadetship in my early 20s and switched to fiction in my late 30s.

“I only write rural romance because I feel like RuRo is such a great fit for me, as I’ve lived in small country communities most of my life and even when I didn’t realise I was writing rural fiction (or romance, for that matter), it was instantly clear to the publisher and beta readers.”

In terms of your writing and publishing journey, what has that been like, having had five novels published since 2019?

“It’s been excellent! Having supportive friends and family, ‘scaffolding’ my writing by investing in courses and RWA helped me find a home for my debut manuscript. It’s been excellent working with the team at Allen & Unwin; they know what readers are looking for and have worked hard to ensure my covers, marketing, editing, and promotions give the novels their best shot in the marketplace. I’ve also met so many passionate and inspiring authors, librarians, booksellers, bloggers, podcasters, and readers along the way.”

Where do you find ideas for your novels, and what inspires you?

“Inspiration is everywhere, from newspaper articles and radio news snippets to conversations with friends, neighbours, and complete strangers. This week I was test driving cars and amassed several new story ideas from two hours in various cars with the salesman. It’s not like I’ll be writing a book about a used car salesman next, but my writing brain was noting the way he spoke, his goal of saving for his upcoming wedding, the reasons he changed career and his mannerisms. Writers are never off duty.”

Not only is Maya an accomplished and successful author, but she is also quite handy with a needle and loves baking (mainly sweet stuff). I asked if she had a favourite recipe she’d like to share. “Yes! I have loads of recipes on my website blog, but if you had to pick one, try my [microwavable chocolate self-saucing pudding](#). My son and I recorded a video, too, with a [step-by-step video guide](#) (and bloopers to make you smile!).”

Do you have any advice for writers starting out or trying to get published (for example, doing writing courses, joining writers' groups, attending conferences)?

"I'm a proud, card-carrying member of RWA and recommend it at each and every opportunity because it offers the tools and connections to help you take fiction writing seriously. I also advocate for writing courses because they give you accountability and deadlines. Podcasts and author talks are helpful, too. There's so much free advice out there, you'd be crazy not to utilise it."

The Sydney RWA conference includes a favourite activity, writers pitching to real agents and publishers. Did you go through a pitching process prior to your first novel, *Wildflower Ridge* (2019), being published?

"My first pitch was a Zoom speed-pitching session with the Australian Society of Authors in 2018," Maya explained. "I had three minutes per publisher and agent. I was super nervous, but I practised in the mirror and in front of my kids and husband until I had the elevator pitch down pat. I received two requests for the manuscript after those sessions, and although I didn't end up with either the agent or publisher I'd pitched to that day, I signed with Allen & Unwin shortly after."

Based on your success, what tips or advice do you have for other

writers intending to pitch at a conference?

"Know your elevator pitch or at least come up with a short, snappy one-liner about the story and know your comparison titles. For instance, if I was pitching my latest book *Kookaburra Cottage*, I'd say 'it's a rural romance set on a family winery in South Australia's gorgeous Limestone Coast, for fans of Fleur

IT HELPS TO
KNOW THAT
PUBLISHERS ARE
ACTIVELY LOOKING
FOR GOOD
STORIES AND
FRESH VOICES

McDonald and Karly Lane. Lots of country charm, cheeky lambs, baking, gardening and of course a thread of romance.' I think it helps to know that publishers are actively looking for good stories and fresh voices, so if you've got a finished manuscript and you're prepared to hit 'send' if your novel is requested, then you've got as good a chance as anyone!

"Social media and RWA played a starring role. I speak about this process (and much more) in an interview with my publisher, *Annette Barlow for the Words & Nerds* podcast. If you tune in, you'll understand why I'm constantly singing the praises of RWA."

Like many romance writers, Maya's first experience with reading romance is familiar. "I discovered a Mills & Boon book exchange at our tiny rural post office as a tween and

binged as many as I could, especially those by Penny Jordan.

Although Maya doesn't have one favourite romance movie, she did pinpoint a specific time period. "I'm a sucker for the rom coms of my teenage years, so basically anything with Reece Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Lopez, Sandra Bullock, Julia Roberts, or Julia Stiles." When asked about her favourite holiday destination or favourite place in the world, the answer can depend on the weather. "This is a tough one and changes on any given day! As I write this, it's wet and windy in SW Victoria, so my mind instantly goes to sunny Queensland. We've been there several times and loved it on every occasion."



♥ **From country show baking to raising orphaned lambs, bestselling author Maya Linnell writes about the life she lives and loves. A keen bookworm, former rural journalist and radio show host, Maya is also an ambassador for the digital library app Libby OverDrive. She lives in rural Victoria with a menagerie of animals, sweeping gardens, three bookworms and the odd tiger snake or three. Her latest novel *Kookaburra Cottage* is out on May 30 with Allen & Unwin, following on from bestsellers *Paperbark Hill*, *Magpie's Bend*, *Bottlebrush Creek* and *Wildflower Ridge*. Find her online at [@maya.linnell.writes](https://maya.linnell.writes) or mayalinnell.com**

FREE BOOK! Courtesy of Allen & Unwin

We have one copy of Maya's latest novel, *Kookaburra Cottage*, to give away to the first RWA member who sends an email to hteditor@romanceaustralia.com with "Kookaburra Cottage" in the subject field, and their name and postal address in the email body.





RWA COMMITTEE PROFILE

Louisa West

PRESIDENT

What is your favourite romance movie, and why?

The one that I return to over and over again is the 1995 BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth. I love every single thing about it, and my soul soars as soon as I hear the opening credit music start to play. The casting is superb, with Mrs Bennet and Lady Catherine providing ample comic relief, the costumes are incredible and jealousy-inspiring, and there is just something about the timeless tale that makes it a huge comfort-rewatch piece for me. I probably watch the whole thing 3-4 times a year! I also love all the other Austen adaptations, binged *Bridgerton* like a lady-boss, and love a good rom-com!

Do you have a celebrity crush?

Keanu Reeves, forever and always! I have loved that man ever since a fated two weeks of school holidays when I was about 12. Mum had allowed us to rent *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, and it got stuck in our VCR player. My brother and I watched it for two weeks on repeat until she finally caved, bought a new VCR player, and replaced the video shop's copy of B&T. I've loved Keanu ever since! There's just

something about his stoic kindness, a gentle solitude about him that is so intriguing. Add his utterly tragic backstory, his perceived loneliness, his artistic nature, his love of motorcycles, and his ability to be a caring and compassionate soul - what's not to love? Throw into the mix that he is currently dating artist Alexandra Grant. She is stunningly gorgeous, a talented and amazing woman in her own right, and such a perfect fit for him that their romance can't help but make me believe in true love.

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

This is really tough! I love the UK and Ireland and have been several times. If I had to choose one place it would be London, because it's in my blood - the history, the hustle, the art, the shopping - fabulous! But there is also a special place in my soul that belongs to Edinburgh, particularly the crooked and spooky Old Town, where the cobbled streets echo with the dark deeds of the past. And the wild countryside of Ireland, where you feel like you just might catch a glimpse of a fairy in the corner of your vision when you least expect it. Far out, I need a holiday LOL.

If you have a pet or pets, please introduce them, and tell us something interesting about them.

I have a grand old Great Dane who is 90% more human than canine! Her name is Harriet, and she is the sweetest, funniest, crankiest, most loving creature to have ever graced this earth. They say that Great Danes are 'old' by the time they reach 7 or 8, due to the fact they're a giant breed. Harriet is celebrating her 13th birthday this month! She loves chicken nuggets, cuddling on my bed with me while I write, and walks (although they're getting shorter by necessity). She sometimes lets me paint her toenails, and she is always a great favourite with anyone



who comes to the house! She was named after Harriet Smith, from Jane Austen's *Emma*.

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)?

The first 'romance' I ever read was *Flowers in the Attic* by VC Andrews. Although not strictly a romance, it was the first thing I can remember reading that explored romantic relationships. I was much too young to have read it at the time, considering that the subject matter includes really dark themes such as incest, murder, and manipulation/deception. But I remember being equally thrilled and scandalised, to the point where I devoured everything else that I could get my hands on by the author. I feel like reading these books really did instil a love for gothic romance in me - that darkness that hovers on the edge of the light in our lives. It's a fascinating juxtaposition that still intrigues me today.

Do you have a hidden talent? If yes, please tell us about it.

I used to be a competition ballroom dancer! I still dance now, but just for fun and fitness. I also love acting, singing, anything arts and crafts, and I'm hugely addicted to playing *The Sims*.

Why did you volunteer to come onto the RWA Committee?

I had the time and expertise to volunteer for the marketing and PR portfolio, and it was vacant after the Fremantle conference. I'm a

person that loves to help, and really enjoys working to improve things and I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenges I have faced since re-joining the committee (I was also on the committee back in 2017/18). When the President role became available, I decided that I would enjoy using my strategic planning skills to help streamline the organisation's processes and systems. I have to say, I'm having a blast - and I'm supported by the most awesome committee team anyone could ask for. We have already achieved so much together and I'm really looking forward to what the future will bring.

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

Yes! I write paranormal women's fiction as Louisa West and Dark RH Monster Romance as Lucy Lark. My first serious published book was *New Witch on the Block*, book one in my *Midlife in Mosswood* series. It follows a woman who, with her young daughter, escapes a toxic marriage and seeks solace in a tiny town in Georgia USA... and then discovers she's actually a witch. The idea had been floating around in my head for years, and usually popped up when I was walking with Harriet around my neighbourhood. When COVID hit in April 2020 I was made redundant from my day job in marketing and PR, and no one was hiring. I decided I had enough money to make a go of writing full time for six months. *New Witch* was published that June, and I have never looked back. It was so freeing and exciting to finally have

the time to pursue the career I had always dreamed of, and I am forever grateful to the crappy job that ditched me, because without that push I'm not sure I would have ever taken the plunge! I will publish the final *Midlife in Mosswood* book, *Home is Where the Witch Is*, this coming August. It will be the thirteenth book in the series!

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

I can't wait to see Steff Holmes' reverse-harem workshop! As someone new to the genre, I read her 'Writing Reverse Harem for Fun and Profit' workbook and found it really insightful. I also had the pleasure of meeting her in Melbourne this April when I was there for RARE, and I can confirm that she's an awesome person who I believe will deliver an excellent workshop! I'm also really looking forward to Tracey Rosen's presentation 'Unmasking Death', because it's something that I write about a lot and it sounds like a really fascinating session. I also can't wait to catch up with my fellow committee members, old friends, and make new friends along the way. If you see me there, please come up and say hi or introduce yourself. I'd love to meet you!

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

Definitely Jane Austen. Her work is forever in my heart, and I have so many questions I would love to ask her. I could think of no better way to spend time than to sit with her over some tea and sponge cake and fangirl to my heart's content! ❤️





WANTED: Volunteers passionate about the future of RWA and its members

Have you ever considered joining the RWA committee? Then perhaps this is your year!

The Romance Writers of Australia began in 1991 with eight women who had a vision to promote excellence in romantic fiction, to help aspiring writers become published and published authors to maintain and establish their careers, to foster a safe, equitable, inclusive, and diverse community, and to provide continuing support for writers – whatever their genre – within the romance publishing industry. (NB. This was almost the original mission statement, since updated slightly to show commitment to supporting members from all walks of life).

This organisation would not have grown from eight members in 1991 to 805 members today without the passion, dedication, and hard work of its volunteers. Every year at our AGM in August, all committee positions fall vacant, and we are asking you to consider if you might be able to join us. ALL positions involve a portfolio and require daily participation via email. Below are the positions on the RWA committee with brief descriptions and time requirements.

PRESIDENT - the President has the overall strategic, financial, and operational responsibility for RWA's staff, programs, expansion and execution of its mission. They will develop a deep knowledge of the industry, core programs, operations, and business plans. The President presides over the committee and AGM meetings. The President is responsible for managing the Lynne Wilding Award and also overseeing any Hall of Fame or Life Membership awards. This is an executive committee role.

Time requirement: 5-8 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 0

VICE-PRESIDENT – the Vice President (VP) serves as an active participant in making strategic decisions for RWA. This position involves developing plans and enforcing policies and objectives for RWA to ensure we maintain our values and meet goals. The VP shares responsibilities with the President in relation to overseeing and maintaining financial budgets and brand strategy. They will maintain a deep knowledge of industry, core programs, operations, and business plans. The VP also liaises with the Membership Assistance Committee to ensure the programs run effectively. This is an executive committee role.

Time requirement: 3 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 0

TREASURER - The Treasurer has primary responsibility for the oversight, management and reporting of RWA's financial records, and the presenting of reports to internal stakeholders (committee, membership) and external parties. This is an executive committee role.

Time requirement: 5 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 0

SECRETARY - The Secretary is responsible for organising committee meetings, which includes preparing agendas, writing minutes, recording actions, handling incoming and outgoing correspondence, sending online meeting invitations, and also inviting guests to meetings. The Secretary updates official RWA records with ASIC and NSW Fair Trading. The Secretary also notifies members of the AGM date, collates all AGM reports, and after the AGM, updates the Committee Register. This is an executive committee role.

Time Requirement: 1 hour per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 0

COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS WANTED FOR 2024

MEMBER SERVICES - The Member Services Manager (MSM) functions as the liaison between RWA and its members. This includes answering queries, providing information, devising regular communication activities, and maintaining membership records. The MSM also keeps a record of volunteers, promotes volunteer opportunities, recruits new volunteers, and ensures measures to retain those volunteers we have.

Time requirement: 5-8 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 3-5

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION - The DEI Committee Representative is the committee representative for the DEI sub-committee. They attend both core committee meetings and DEI meetings and report back to the committee on ways to represent diverse authors and authors of diverse romance within the RWA membership community, and to nurture an inclusive environment within RWA.

Time requirement: 2 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 3-5

RELATIONSHIPS MANAGER (previously Sponsorship Manager) - The role of the Relationship Manager is to deepen key customer relationships and provide strategic account management supporting the needs of RWA and our internal and external stakeholders. The RM develops and delivers corporate sponsorship proposals to publishing houses and industry providers; builds and maintains strong external relationships with existing and potential sponsors; works closely with the marketing manager to produce quality communication documents and with the events manager to engage pitch takers for conference from within the sponsorship pool, and to ensure sponsorship inclusions are delivered.

Time requirement: 3-5 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 1

EVENTS MANAGER - the Events Manager's primary role is to liaise with our events company to organise the annual conference and also manage the event portfolio, working with state event liaisons to implement a series of networking, promotional and social events in each state and online. The events manager reports to the committee on their portfolio and works with the president, treasurer, and contracted events company to oversee budget for conference and other events.

Time requirement: 5-8 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 8-9

MARKETING MANAGER - The Marketing Manager is responsible for working closely with each of the other portfolios to deliver quality marketing and communications with the aim of improving the visibility and viability of our various programs and services, both internally to our members, and externally to a range of various stakeholders. The MM works with the Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Blog and Hearts Talk volunteers.

Time requirement: 5 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 4

CONTEST MANAGER - The Contest Manager works with a team of volunteers to ensure the smooth running and continuing development of RWA contests. They report to the committee, liaise with external stakeholders, answer contest queries, and provide support to entrants. From the start of the contest season the Contest Manager works with the Judge Coordinator through to liaising with the Anthology Production Manager and organising the awards night and is involved with every contest.

Time requirement: 5-8 hours per week

Other volunteers within this portfolio: 10

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - The Professional Development Manager is responsible for developing and managing a robust and active professional development program for RWA members and non-members. Programs include but are not limited to RWA Academy Courses. The PD Manager liaises with the Treasurer to ensure all costs for programs are covered by the income from the programs, and a program profit returned.

Time Commitment:

Other volunteers within this portfolio:

The RWA committee meets once a month online, except January. In addition to the monthly meetings there are two Strategy and Planning weekends per year – an in-person meeting in March (flights, meals and accommodation paid by RWA) and an online meeting in September.

Each of the above roles has a detailed job description, outlining further what each portfolio position entails and also ideal qualifications and qualities. If you are interested in finding out more information or nominating for any of the above positions, please contact the Secretary at:

secretary@romanceaustralia.com

In addition to committee roles, RWA has a number of other volunteer positions available. If you'd like further information on these opportunities, please email admin@romanceaustralia.com

To nominate for a role on the committee, please go to the following link: <https://form.jotform.com/231640864620857>

You are required to provide the names of two people (current RWA members) in support of your nomination. Please let them know that an email will be sent to them notifying them of this nomination, which they need to confirm otherwise your nomination will not be processed. The deadline for nominations is Wednesday 26 July. No late nominations will be accepted.

Volunteers don't get paid – not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless.



RACHAEL JOHNS PRESENTS

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

Photo by Thought Catalog on Unsplash

AMY ANDREWS

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LOVE IT

This is a radical statement, I know.

Having known and/or talked with many authors – mostly of the romance persuasion – over a lot of years, I can tell you with confidence whether they be pre-published, emerging, or established, the vast majority will be a'glow with the rainbows and unicorns that is the joy and the excitement of sitting down at a desk every day and creating magic with words, creating swoony characters and fascinating plots and epic love matches.

They'll talk about the pressure of words bursting to come out. They'll laugh at the delights of the story dancing in their head and tell me they get jittery if they're not at their keyboard. They'll say they get caught up and blown along and wake up every morning impatient to get back

to the story screaming to get out.

It doesn't necessarily mean that the process is easy for them but they view the challenges of it through a different prism. Like, they'll confess to being *sad* when they write THE END. That it's like grieving when they finally let go of their characters. That they go into a kind of funk pining for these make-believe people.

And I am utterly in awe of them. Nay, I'm jealous of them. Because I don't think I ever felt like that.

There it is. My deepest darkest confession. My name is Amy Andrews, I have written 85 romance books, won awards, hit best-seller lists and earned a liveable income for many years and...*I don't love writing.*

Sure, that first book written all those years ago was an obsessive exercise. It spewed out of me in a jumbled, loved-up rush in ten days. Five thousand words a day scratched out by hand in a notebook, flying totally

by the seat of my pants until I got to THE END.

But these days? I don't *love* writing. And trust me when I tell you, that took me too many years of pretending otherwise, to admit out loud.

The truth is, I too often find every word a chore. Every page an exercise in grit and determination. Every chapter a journey made in cement boots, leaden down by a pack that would make a Navy SEAL cadet want to ring that bell. And when it's done, I am soooo glad to see the back of my characters. I am euphoric to have this internal struggle between what I keep telling myself I *should* feel, because I am in the utterly privileged position of *published author*, and what I'm actually feeling, come to an end.

But you know what I do love? I love *being* a writer. I love having written a book. *That* is the best freaking feeling in the world! And all the things that

happen after THE END - including edits - to publication day and beyond? I love them all!

I love being a writer and I don't ever want to be anything else.

I love hanging out with other writers and book launches and flowers from my publisher. And

going to conferences and publishing parties and holding my book babies in my hands and seeing my name on the cover and social media shelves. I love seeing them in Icelandic and Afrikaans and Manga. I love walking into a library and pinching myself knowing that the little girl whose most prized possession was her library card, can now look at *her* books on the shelves. And I love getting emails from readers saying how much they adored one of my books.

I love it all.

Which means I gotta keep going back and doing that thing I *don't* love - the writing.

But, you know, a lot of people don't love every aspect of what they do. I was a nurse for 28 years and I can tell

you with utter certainty, cleaning the pan room was not something I ever enjoyed.

I did, however, *love* being a nurse.

And all of this is to say to those out there who struggle to find the love or this mysterious

many readers and publishers out there for whom my books don't work, there are clearly others who disagree. And damn it, I'm just going to say it - I know deep in these old writing bones of mine that I produce good, publishable content.

And here's another thing, just because writing feels like a chore, doesn't mean you won't, or are any less deserving, of achieving your goals and succeeding than the next writer.

You just need to be aware that for you, gratification will be delayed.

Which, as Sting apparently knows quite well, can be pretty f***ing tantric!



"joy" other writers talk about - whether that be only sometimes or almost always or maybe you never felt it - know that you're not some fraud, not some pretender and that you're not alone. And that it's okay.

Because here is the truth - you can still write great books without the "joy". Sure, it makes them more challenging to write and God knows it's hard enough *with* the joy, but you can still do it. Because that's the worry, right? Are the books that you write under this heavy cloud going to be any good?

Well, I've written plenty under the cloud and while I'm sure there are

♥ **Amy Andrews All Loved Up!**

USA Today bestselling author. Triple RITA finalist!

Website Instagram

Check out Breaking All The Rules NOW!



ROMANCE WRITERS OF AUSTRALIA



**LYNNE WILDING
MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD**

NOW OPEN FOR NOMINATIONS

Lynne Wilding Meritorious Service Award Nomination

This award is given to a member of our community in honour of our wonderful first President and founding member, Lynne Wilding. The award recognises those who continually go above and beyond to make a positive impact on RWA, our members, and their experiences. While many of our amazing volunteers have a long history of giving back to RWA, your nomination should focus on the work your nominee has done in the past year of service (June 2022 to June 2023). Being nominated for this special award is a big honour for our members - thank you for taking the time to complete this nomination.

Nominations will close at 5pm AEST on Friday 7 July 2023

To nominate, follow this link: <https://form.jotform.com/231568122884865>

A MATCH MADE IN BOOK HEAVEN



Better
Reading



ROMANCE
WRITERS
of Australia

ROMANCE WRITERS OF AUSTRALIA JOINS WITH BETTER READING TO BRING YOU THE MOST ROMANTIC BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The Romance Writers of Australia's *All That Glitters* Gala Awards night will sparkle all the brighter this August, with the non-profit organisation announcing a brand new partnership with Better Reading.

Representing a wide community of engaged readers from across the globe, Better Reading encourages book-lovers to discuss their favourite reads, share authors, and source reading recommendations. The collaboration sees Better Reading step into the spotlight as the sponsor of the RWA 2023 Romantic Book of the Year (RuBY) Awards.

First awarded in 1999, the RuBY Award is the highest award on offer with the RWA. Australian traditionally and independently published authors submitted their published work by January 2023, competing to join the prestigious ranks of past winners including beloved Aussie authors Anne Gracie, Amy Andrews, Rachael Johns, and Anna Hackett.

As the sponsor for the RWA RuBY Awards, Better Reading will produce live video content and blog post feature articles with the RuBY Award winners on the Better Reading website and social media channels. Better Reading Director Cheryl Akle will also be the master of ceremonies for the Gala Awards night.

An avid reader and book champion, Cheryl has been working in the book industry for over 30 years. She said that this new partnership with RWA was instrumental in promoting romance as a top-selling genre that was accessible for everyone.

"Aussies love to read romance. It's evident in the number of titles available, both featured on our platform and hitting the bestseller lists. What better way to help our readers stay in touch with releases from their favourite

authors and discover new and exciting stories than to partner with the organisation supporting those authors?"

The heart and home of Aussie romance writers, Romance Writers of Australia (RWA) has been supporting, inspiring, and engaging writers both nationally and overseas for over thirty years. The organisation began as a passion-project of nine incredible romance authors developed around a kitchen table in 1991. Today, RWA boasts almost a thousand members both in Australia and overseas, from a variety of backgrounds and careers with varying skill sets and writing journeys.

"This wonderful collaboration is another jewel in our crown of relationships that include teaming up with industry professionals such as Harlequin, Simon & Schuster, and Penguin Random House," RWA President, Louisa West, explained. "It's important to us to continue working with incredible community platforms like Better Reading, not only to strengthen the foundation of what we do, but also to provide members with this incredible moment to shine. We're also putting talent directly in the hands of our business partners, which is an awesome feeling."

Looking for your next read? Visit the Better Reading website to get the latest book news, catch up with the Better Reading podcast and more: <https://www.betterreading.com.au>

The RWA annual conference, *All That Glitters*, will be held at the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth from 11 to 13 August 2023. Tickets are on sale here: <https://willorganise.eventsair.com/2023-romance-writers-of-australia>

The RuBY Award for 2024 will open for entrants on 4 December 2023. For details visit the Romance Writers of Australia website: <https://romanceaustralia.com>

For media enquiries, please contact:

Louisa West - Marketing Manager
marketing@romanceaustralia.com



HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF CONFERENCE

Image by: brooke-cagle-unsplash

BY PENELOPE JANU,
RACHAEL JOHNS AND LUCY
LEVER – THREE MEMBERS
OF YOUR SYDNEY
CONFERENCE TEAM

Lucy's late grandmother had a thing about squeezing bottles. Glass wine bottles. She never tired of the joke. Attending an RWA conference is like squeezing a bottle of good wine. It's worth decanting every drop. But how? As a presenter might say, that's a great question. We three seasoned conference veterans put our heads together to bring you our collective wisdom in the form of tips and insider information about Sydney, the city with a glittering heart.

Random conference tips and tricks (including the unsubtle art of networking):

Before you arrive

Study the program and work out which sessions you most want to go to; plan your outfits, so you don't have to waste time doing so during the weekend; remember, hotel function rooms can get cold, so pack layers. Rach also recommends comfy shoes!

Attend as many workshops and events as you can

Don't make the same mistake that Lucy did at her first conference and avoid the cocktail party and the conference dinner. No need to be shy! Almost everyone at the conference is open to meeting and talking to strangers. Established writers tend to be generous souls who remember

what it was like to be new to the game, and everybody is interested in learning about each other's writing adventures.

Introduce yourself to others

Don't only talk to people you already know but make it your mission to meet new people. You never know, the person in the elevator or in the queue next to you might be your new crit partner, your new bestie or even your agent. Be curious. Smile. Be friendly. Engage. This is essential practice for a writer, and a great way to live.

Are you an introvert? Feeling shy about talking to strangers?

Rach's suggestion – wear something that's a conversation starter! Fun earrings, a crazy t-shirt, book print dress, bright pink hair – anything that will help draw like-minded people to you.

Follow those you meet on social media

This shows your support and will help you stay in touch.

Be generous

Talk to people who you notice aren't comfortably ensconced in a group like you are. Introduce them to your friends. Invite them to drinks. It's about looking out for others, and paying it forward, and who knows? Perhaps one day that quiet, shy, fledgling writer you took under your wing will be an international bestseller who'll be only too happy to read and endorse your books.

Keep an open mind

So many people only attend sessions they think will be of interest to them, but sometimes the workshops you

think you won't get anything out of can blow your mind, so make it your mission to try at least one session or panel that's outside of your comfort zone or something you've never thought of pursuing before. Even if you only walk away with one gold nugget, that session wasn't a waste of time. Take the time to reflect on each session and identify one or two things you learned.

- **Take notes** so you can return to them for inspiration later, especially if the workshop is dense with information.
- **Ask questions** - Many of us feel too intimidated to speak up in group situations, but even if you think your question is silly, it's likely that someone else in the room will want to hear the answer.
- **Don't forget to take photos.**
- **Use the conference hashtag #RWAus2024 when you post them on social media** – Let's get Romance Writers of Australia trending!
- **Go outside and exercise** – Hotel guests can avail themselves of the gym, but conferences require intense concentration, which is hard to maintain without a break, especially in artificially lit, air-conditioned rooms. Some of us (i.e., Lucy) can't resist piling up our plates at the buffet lunch and suffer badly from afternoon food comas. At least go for a walk each day. Sydney's stunning Botanical Gardens aren't too far from the venue. More about them in a while.

Pitching prep

Hopefully your novel is finished and polished by now. If it isn't, you might need to curtail your hectic social life in the lead-up to the conference. The article in the May edition of Hearts Talk, "Putting your pitch together", described what to cover in a pitch, and you can RSVP for the Australian Society of Authors' free online pitching workshop with Jodie Spiteri-James on Wednesday July 26, 7.30-8.30pm by emailing Lucy at pitching@romanceaustralia.com. Anyone pitching at the conference is welcome to join the pitching Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rwaconferencepitching>, to share information and ask questions about pitching. And remember, the agents and publishers are REAL people who have the same goal as you, to publish amazing books. Don't be scared of them but do be professional.

Especially for newbies

Whether you want to introduce yourself to the Newbies Facebook group and tell us a little about yourself and/or your writing, or stay up to date on everything from workshops and core conference sessions, to dressing up for the cocktail party or winding down in the HQ Writer's Room, there's a lot to enjoy on the RWA Facebook Newbies group! Penelope has loved getting to know a number of Newbies coming to the conference, and in the next couple of months she's looking forward to answering questions on pitching and anything else. The Newbies group might also be a good chance to meet up with others from your region—quite a few friendships have been formed in the Newbies group. Here's the link if you'd like to join—we'd love to see you there! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rwaconferencenewbies>

Don't forget there will be **two bookshops at the conference** – the Indie Bookshop and Dymocks Sydney, both of which are run by Ebony McKenna, and will have an assortment of novels by presenters and also writing craft books. If you're

an indie author wanting to sell your book at the Indie Bookshop, contact Ebony at: author@ebonymckenna.com

All that glitters...insider information about Sydney

Like most cities, Sydney has its beauty spots, including its beaches and the jewel of a harbour. Penelope finds that when the conference is full on, it's great to have a break in the fresh air (with or without a coffee in hand), and where better to head than two of her favourite locations in Sydney, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the NSW State Library?

The Royal Botanic Gardens are around 550m from the Sofitel and whether you're running, strolling, silently wrestling plot points or walking with friends four abreast, the gardens are a wonderful place to be. In August, the spring gardens will be budding, the herb gardens will be sprouting and the greenhouse will be a conservatory of delight. There are fabulous eucalypts, gums and introduced species, many over a century old. And if you keep on walking, you'll hit a beautiful part of Sydney Harbour and will eventually reach the Opera House! See: <https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/>

The NSW State Library

There's a new wing to the State Library which is lovely but ... new. So the place to go for inspiration and down time is the old section of the library (the large sandstone building just off Macquarie Street), which is less than 500m from the Sofitel. The Mitchell Library Reading Room is a reference and research library that also holds special collections. Once inside, the reading room is a welcoming (and quiet) space that can't help but inspire you to write



in any genre! There are old timbers, small and large desks, wrap-around two storeyed bookshelves and ... all sorts of other fabulousness. One of Penelope's daughters (an English teacher) was married in the reading room (see photo), or follow the link for more about the library:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/plan-your-visit/spaces-research-and-study/mitchell-library-reading-room>

If you're staying for a few extra days, Lucy says it's worth catching the train from Martin Place to Bondi Junction, and hopping on a bus to Bondi Beach, doing the stunning walk around the cliffs to Bronte or Coogee, then catching another bus back to Bondi Junction. There are lots of cafes on this walking route. Or hop on the ferry to Manly for an ice cream and an hour's return walk to Shelly Beach. As for cafes, the Adora Chocolates shop and café in the Sofitel Arcade is chocoholic heaven. Otherwise, it's worth doing your own research, as you can head in any direction and you'll be spoiled for choice in Sydney.

Epilogue

All the best romances have an epilogue, so we thought we'd include one in this article. A few months after the conference we hope that you'll still be walking around with a warm inner glow, and fond memories of what you learned, the conversations you had, and the kindred spirits you've met and are still connected with on social media, and perhaps in person. Your writing will be better and stronger.

Some of you will have publishing contracts, others will be waiting to hear back from agents and publishers, and still others will be reflecting on the pitching experience and working out how to develop the story they pitched, or to pitch it differently.

Any which way, it's our dearest wish for you that squeezing the last drops out of that conference bottle will have brought you a couple of steps closer to achieving your very own happily ever after. ❤️



Image by: naassom-azevedo-unsplash

RWA VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Sarma Burdeu

RUBY COORDINATOR

When did you join RWA?

I first joined RWA so long ago I can't remember! Before the turn of the last century (lol!). I've had periods of non-membership along the way I think, but it just feels like RWA is a part of my life.

What is your volunteer role in RWA? What does it involve? How long have you been doing it?

My current volunteer role is RuBY Manager and I've been doing that since 2018, but I did also run it for a year or two back in the days when it was the Single Title and Loving It contest, which then became Romantic Book of the Year. I was also registrar for a few years way back, in charge of memberships.

Why did you volunteer? Was it what you thought it would be?

I seem to end up volunteering for something in whatever group I become associated with. I think if I'm passionate about the group I belong to and like the people, I just want to be a part of helping it be successful and stay successful.

What do you enjoy about volunteering?

With the RuBY, I love being involved

with both the writers and the readers. The readers/judges on my list are so passionate about reading romance and are so thrilled when they get books they love and it's great seeing members being published.

With the RuBY I've also discovered I really like being 'organized' (RuBY involves quite a few spreadsheets!) and it gives me a sense of satisfaction to see things running smoothly (despite the always present glitches). Even though the number of print entries is dwindling, I love seeing the piles of books in my study, ready to send to avid readers (who are so excited to get a 'real' book).

Would you recommend volunteering to others? Why or why not?

If someone has the time and the inclination, absolutely. But they would need to understand that it does take a chunk out of your time and you have to be prepared to do that without resentment. Also, there will be inevitable frustrations at times, so you have to be able to keep your cool. But there is always support from other volunteers and the RWA committee and it's a great way to

feel a real part of the association and get an understanding of what a big job everyone does for nothing.

If you are going to the Sydney conference in August, what event/s will you be most looking forward to attending?

Yes, I'm coming to Sydney! I love it all, but the cocktail party is always fun to catch up with friends and see some fabulous costumes. And who doesn't love an excuse to 'dress up' for the theme?

If you have attended other RWA conferences, what advice would you give to newbies?

Having been to many conferences now I'd tell newbies that they will be well looked after and will make fabulous new friends and will feel part of it right from the start - and (like all the rest of us) will be hanging out for the next one each year. They will be so motivated seeing so many like-minded people all talking about our passion for writing romance. They'll meet others who are at the same place in their journey and see those who've been there and have soared and will realize 'that can be me, too'.

What is your favourite romance movie, and why?

I may be a bit controversial here but I'm not a huge fan of romance movies (ducking for cover!) but one I've watched over and over again is *Last Christmas* with Emilia Clarke. Another is *Bridges of Madison County* and Baz Luhrman's *Romeo and Juliet*. Hmm, a bit of a theme here (controversial again?). I personally prefer movies that don't have happy endings but show that true love exists, even if it doesn't always have a HEA. I hope this doesn't get me booted out of RWA!

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)?

Kathleen Woodiwiss and I think it was *The Flame And The Flower*. I think it was my mum's book and I must have read it in maybe my mid/late teens and I was hooked. I'm talking back in the early 70s! After reading that and then other romances I borrowed *How To Write A Romance And Get It Published* by Kathryn Falk and so it all began!

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

Yes, I'm published. My first book was with a very small digital publisher (I don't think they exist anymore). It was a novella and they'd put out a submission for a small anthology. Honestly, I only wrote and submitted

the story because then I could say I'd finished a short book and submitted it somewhere! And they took it. The overwhelming feeling was that it was a validation - that maybe I can actually write! That someone 'in the know' believes I can write ok. It was called *Diving In*. I got the rights back a while back and now it's called *Jasmine* and is part of my *Hothouse Flowers* box set under my Andra Ashe pen name.

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

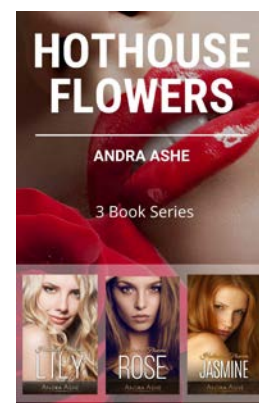
I know and have talked to so many fabulous authors already, but I really enjoy Christina Lauren's books. She writes such amazing sex scenes and her stories are so full of emotional and sexual tension. I would love to meet the woman behind the words!

Website: www.andraashe.com

Newsletter sign-up: <https://www.andraashe.com/subscribe.html>

Blog: <https://eroticink.blogspot.com>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Andra-Ashe-erotic-romance-author/483920084958829>



Bite-sized

Kiss & Tell with Maya Linnell



Featuring special guest
Tricia Stringer



Bestselling author, Tricia Stringer's latest release for October 2023 is *Back on Track*. Delving into life experiences, our relationships with family and friends, and what makes us the people we are, is a topic she finds delicious.

My favourite thing about writing romance is... the dance of the characters.

If anyone gives me flack for writing in the romance genre, I tell them... name me a book that doesn't have some romance in it or at least a love interest.

triciastringer.com.au mayalinnell.com

As originally published on RWA's Kiss & Tell with Maya Linnell blog, Jan 2018



Let's Talk About Sex

(IN ROMANCE)

Image by StockSnap from Pixabay

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

Sexual Tension – Let's get it on!

So, this month's column is brought to you by my very late-to-the-party obsession with *Rookie Blue* (a 2010s police drama set in Toronto, Canada, following five newly graduated police officers) and, specifically, the sexual chemistry between the lead rookie, Andy McNally, and her training officer, Sam Swarek.

Google #McSwarek. Watch the shorts on YouTube. Enjoy the Canadian accent. And his back. Thank me later.

What is sexual tension?

Anyway, you don't have to buy into my love of Sam and Andy to understand the pull of sexual tension... just think about some of the greatest couples in movies and TV. The Captain and Maria. Baby and Johnny. Scully and Mulder. Donna and Josh. Olivia and Elliott.

All that unfulfilled desire... delicious!

It is all that unfulfilled desire that creates sexual tension. And a quick divergence here to say that when I say 'sexual tension' I'm not talking about sex per se. Even closed-door romances need to have sexual tension between their main characters.

All that delicious sexual tension is what keeps people watching (and rewatching) these shows. In fact, a 2020 [HuffPost article](#) has a whole argument about how unresolved sexual tension is the secret weapon keeping ratings high on various CBS crime dramas.

Sexual tension is also what keeps your reader turning the pages of your romance and, frankly, I think it is harder to put tension on the page than it is on screen. It's something you need to really think about, and to layer into your work.

What creates unfulfilled desire?

As a #3 Harmony and #4 Restorative (ifykyk), this is a very difficult thing for me to admit (because I have much trouble writing it!) but it is **CONFLICT** that creates unfulfilled desire.

There are many other writers who do a much better job at explaining conflict than I will here, so try [Debra Dixon's GMC: Goal, Motivation and Conflict. The Building Blocks of](#)

[Great Conflict, or Sarah Maclean's Mastering the Art of Great Conflict](#) course.

For our purposes, what we want to think about here is the type of conflict. We all know that conflict is both internal and external – and both can create sexual tension. But it is internal conflict that will be your key building block for sexual tension, those character struggles with their opposing desires and beliefs. Those are the things that drive character development and tension.

But while internal conflict is key, all those gnarly external problems in the world around our characters still have work to do, raising the stakes. It can be a way of pulling your characters apart but beware too much coitus interruptus from external forces. External conflict works to build sexual tension when used well, when it's linked with internal conflict, but too many convenient external interruptions – whatever they are – can be frustrating to your reader (in more ways than one!)

What creates conflict (in romance)?

[Lyss Em](#) provides a simple recipe for creating conflict in romance, which made a lot of sense to me when starting to plot my latest. She says that your point of view characters

must have:

1. relatable, believable reasons for falling for someone; and
2. relatable, believable reasons for resisting falling for that someone.

What creates relatable, believable reasons?

In my humble opinion, the answer to this question is **CHARACTERISATION**.

The conflict in any romance is founded in the characters. Who they are, their backstory, life experience, personality, strengths and weaknesses, and wounds. All those big and little things that make each of us who we are – those are the things that will govern how your characters relate to the predicaments in which they are put. So, before, or when, you are writing, think about your characters, and how they will play off each other. Think about how a younger character might challenge an older one (or vice versa). How a lawyer might behave differently when compared with a landscaper, or a police officer compared to a pre-school teacher. What are your tropes, the tone of your setting, the power relationships, a character's wants, desires, kinks. What's their world view?

Your point-of-view characters must always be reacting to each other (think about this like actors do: action and reaction, listen to the other character, and don't worry so much about the script) and why they act the way they do needs to be seeded in their backstory because – and while I can only attribute this to user [DavesWorldInfo](#) on Reddit – any emotional reaction in a scene happens, not because of what happens in that scene but because of all the elements that came before it.

Read that again. Any emotional reaction in a scene happens, not because of what happens in that scene but because of all the elements that came before it.

So, focus on keeping things – especially the important things – between your characters. The important things should be shared by your characters with each other (unless there's a good reason for having that action done, or information imparted, by others). You want your characters interacting as much as possible – even if that interaction is remote (see, for example, *The Flatshare*. The characters are together, but they also aren't!). Keeping them close keeps things intense. **Fated Mates** talk about watching two people fall in love inside a phone booth, and it's a description I love. That intensity is also why the forced proximity trope works so well. And, coming back to action and reaction, don't forget to build those visceral reactions between your characters, the body language, the glancing touches, the silence and the loaded questions, the innuendo and suggestive language. This is the stuff (technical term!) that gives your characters' relationship that fire. You need to find the words to describe that look in the Captain's eye as Maria steps out of his arms after they dance, or that feeling you know caught in the pit of Baby's stomach when Johnny announced that nobody puts her in the corner.

Other things to think about when building sexual tension.

- In contemporary Romancelandia, more so than most other sub-genres of romance, as much as there should be a good reason for your characters to have sex, there has to be a good reason for them not to have sex (see earlier point about *coitus interruptus*).
- Whatever the sexual interaction is... whether it's the main course or just an entrée, the interaction

has to heighten the tension and make your characters more *something*, whatever that is (it could be one or more of vulnerable, needy, committed, scared, trusting, or threatened, or something completely different).

- Where physical intimacy happens for your characters early, think about what conflict that might create for them. Sex can be *just* sex – but in romance it's never just sex, so turn those screws hard on emotional intimacy. The physical stuff is great – but your characters are seeking something *more*, so how does the sex heighten that need?
- Last month we explored writing the senses – don't forget to think about those when you're writing all the feels. Put all that awareness and anticipation on the page so that your reader *lives* it with your characters. There are only a few better things than the tingle in your chest or the tightness in your belly that you get as your characters live out their HEA.

Let me know how you go with writing your #sexualtension @ wordsbykc (Twitter) / @ wordsbykristinecharles (FB)



And PLEASE find me if you want to talk *Rookie Blue*... being so late to the party, I have NO ONE to fangirl with!



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 or @wordsbykristinecharles on Instagram.



Bookstagram: A Series

I made an Instagram account but what do I post?

BY JER'TARME

So, you've set your account up, have a cute handle, and shared your very first post with the world. Congratulations! But where to from here? Now the hard work begins, the process of content creation. Yes, it sounds complicated, time consuming, but don't fear, that's why I am here! So, my first tip...do not look at it like a chore. If you consider content creation with this mindset, it will quickly become a burden.

The other bit of advice I want to begin with is change your Instagram account from a personal one to a business one. This can be achieved through Instagram 'settings.' It just means you'll be able to see your insights and track engagement. This will be useful for our future discussions.

Now that is out of the way, let's chat about content creation! Content creation for 'bookstagram' is rewarding, especially when you see your number of followers rise. Consider it your soft sell, after all how else are you going to get your book into the hands of your audience? Irrespective of how good your book is, it won't sell itself. The key to content

creation is to be creative. Share bookish things that interest you. Whether it's a picture of your current read or a reel with quotes from your latest release, it is content that readers want to engage with!

Why is content creation important?

Content creation is crucial because it gives you something to share with people. This can result in sales of your books, visits to your website, and/or newsletter sign ups. The only way readers will find out about your work is if they have something that directs them to it. This is where posting becomes incredibly influential.

Don't get caught up on numbers in the beginning

Throughout my experience, I have had to learn to put likes and followers secondary. These do not matter until you have experimented with the types of posts and times of days, to find out what works for your brand. When you prioritise quality content over the quantity, you will see that engagement comes naturally. Readers want to see the authentic version of you and your characters.

How do I make quality content?

Be organised! Schedule days that you can take photos and film, that way you won't feel rushed to post

whatever. Get a calendar and plan what days you will post each content idea. For example, maybe you might want to post about a book that made you cry on a Tuesday. Organisation is the key to success on social media.

What is the best type of posts to be shared?

There are a few post options offered by Instagram that include static, graphic, carousels, reels, and stories. Instagram's algorithm is currently prioritising 'reels', although it is recommended to use a balance of all formats.

Static Posts

Static posts are single photos that speak for themselves; they are considered the simplest form of posting. You might be out having a coffee, reading in the park, so it's a perfect opportunity to take a pic for a static post to be posted at a future date.

Graphic Posts

Graphic posts are posts made with elements, text, and colours. This can be achieved through apps like Canva. It is free, although you can upgrade to the paid 'pro' version if you want a wider range of elements. They are great for giveaways and for important messages where you need to be clear and concise.

Carousels Posts

Carousels are a series of static or graphic posts. Instagram allows you to choose multiple photos, to create a 'story' for viewers. I suggest the first photo be one that will intrigue readers to swipe for the next image.

Reels

Reels range from 15 seconds to 1 minute video clips. You can complement a reel with trending audio. (Trending audio can be found under the music icon when creating a reel, and will have an arrow pointing up). Currently, they are the highest performing content types since Instagram is trying to compete with the features of Tik Tok.

Reels are great for when you want to film yourself talking about a new plot idea to gauge people's reactions by analysing likes and comments. I love reels for their convenience! Use them consistently, by selecting images and quotes from your novel to create a video that will appeal to new readers.

Now that you know the different formats your content can take, let's think about what these posts should be about. As I said earlier, your content can be anything you feel comfortable sharing with the world. Some of my highest performing content ideas have been:

- Reel - Quotes with black and white images of character aesthetics from my book

- Reel – reviewing a book by speaking to the camera
- Carousels – pictures of me in my happy place, e.g., bookstore
- Static – creative way of picturing a book, e.g., a book with a baking scene could be pictured amongst baking ingredients and utensils.

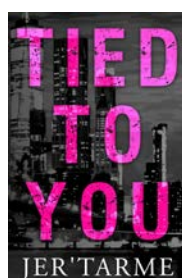
Here are some content ideas you can use for your posts

For all these ideas you can substitute your own book, for example, for 'where do you read?' you could photograph you reading your book in the library. When you go to my account (@jertarme) you will see I have cleverly 'product placed' my debut novel, among other novels of interest.

CONTENT IDEA	REEL	STATIC/GRAPHIC OR CAROUSEL
Quote	Images + text with trending audio	Graphic with quote or static of highlighted quote
Book reviews	Speaking to camera	Aesthetic photo of book with review in caption
Can you be tempted to read...	Speaking to camera (recall of key plot details)	Graphic/carousels of images that will entice a reader
Where do you read?	Collage of visiting places	Graphic with text that reads as a poem
Your writing process	Collage of ideas to finished product	Static photo of you writing
Timelapse of you writing	Timelapse of you doing your thing!	
Offer how your book will be helpful	Talk about your book's purpose	Graphic with readers' reviews of your book
Share lessons you've learnt along the way	Speak about challenges you faced and how you've overcome them	Carousels of before and after the challenge you faced
Day in my life (what do you do to fit in time for writing / reading?)	Collage of clips of how you spend your day	Carousels of happy snaps throughout your day
My favourite...	Video of your favourite bookish thing/place/trope etc	Static photo of your favourite....

Have a go at making some content! There is no wrong answer, it's all trial and error, but you won't know if you don't give it a go. Track what content you like and use this to help guide you in your 'bookstagram' journey.

Happy content creating!



♥ *Jer'tarme is from Melbourne, Victoria and recently self-published her debut dark romance, Tied to You, which can be found on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) and Kindle Unlimited. She loves to help other aspiring and emerging authors create a community of readers for themselves. Jer'tarme focuses on connecting authors to readers. If you wish to learn more about using social media to increase your exposure, visit www.jertarme.com or @jertarme on Instagram*



FREYA MARSKE
SAMAN SHAD
YVONNE WELDON
RUDI BREMER

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Please turn your phone to silent, dim your screens and subtly tweet away.

In love with romance at the Sydney Writers' Festival: A roundup

BY AMBER JAKEMAN

It was gratifying to see the Sydney Writers' Festival honour the globally popular romance genre this year with a dedicated panel, *In love with romance*. Under the festival theme, *Stories for the Future*, the panellists and compere discussed the breadth of the genre, along with their experiences of writing characters, settings, and tropes and beats, including the "meet cute", "the breakup", the "afterglow" and "happy ever afters".

Echoing the diversity seen in many recent line-ups at Australian writers' festivals, the panel included novelists Dr Freya Marske, Saman Shad and Yvonne Weldon, who were billed to "reveal the thrills, spills and secrets of penning page-turning love stories", with interviewer ABC Radio National *Away!* host Rudi Bremer, a self-confessed lover of romance.

Yvonne Weldon, the City of Sydney's first Aboriginal councillor, is a proud Wiradjuri woman, born and raised in Redfern while maintaining strong

ties to her homelands of Cowra and the Riverina. She has dedicated three decades to "driving positive reform in health, education and child protection". Her novel, *Sixty-Seven Days*, was published last year by Penguin. Yvonne said she wrote her romance, set mostly in 1990s Redfern, at the rate of 500 words a night, the bargain she set with herself each evening before allowing herself to watch mind-numbing Netflix.

"It was a labour of love," she said, noting that her people were not represented in literature in the ways she thought they should be. I wanted these characters to be in the world. I was resigned that it may never have been published."

Yvonne's manuscript was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards in the David Unaipon Unpublished Manuscript category in 2016 and was awarded a Faber Writing Academy Scholarship in 2017. The book was originally in third person. "People come into our lives and remain," Yvonne said, praising her editorial mentor, Bernadette Foley. "It's the beauty of sharing ... I was honouring so many that haven't been honoured,

including cultural practices and belief systems. The novel and all the issues are about exploring who we are as individuals and what difference we can make to each other, the impact we all have. We should have the opportunity to make others feel okay, not worse. Life is about change."

Journalist and story teller Saman Shad's *The Matchmaker*, released by Penguin earlier this year, features a match made in "her" Sydney. Penguin describes much of Saman's work as "inspired by her experiences as a third culture kid, growing up and living in Pakistan, the Middle East, the UK and Australia". Like Yvonne, in *The Matchmaker* Saman wrote mostly "about something I hadn't seen before in literature; my community, the Sydney I know, the western suburbs. I wanted to try and bring that to life; two brown people with a similar background, but very different within our communities."

Saman said writing romcoms was a way to bring a little bit of joy to people, to take them away from the real world for a while and give them an inside view into another community and culture. "It's about

love and joy and hopefully a bit of lust," she said. Writing about a Sydney most people didn't recognise worked in her favour, she noted.

"We sit within our suburbs. I wanted to give people a little tour guide of these areas. It's fiction. You have leeway. You colour it in, in ways you know these places to be. Hopefully people will go along with you."

Saman said she loved the romcoms of the 1990s though she recognises that some are no longer politically correct.

"I also want to make people laugh. It's tricky. With comedy, you just don't know if it's going to land or not. I love that unique blend of making people fall in love when they think they're not falling in love. You need to be invested in the two people who are ultimately getting together. There's a lot of art involved in writing something romantic and you have to balance that dramatic part. It's very subtle... How do you bring in all the big and meaty topics, yet keep up the conventions? People don't realise how hard it is."

Saman said she's been working on screen projects and continuing to write and "write better, learning every single day".

Queer historical fantasy writer Freya Marske's debut novel, *A Marvellous Light*, was an international bestseller; her second book, *A*

Restless Truth, is described as "a sapphic adventure on the high seas"; and her next book, *A Power Unbound*, will be released later this year by Tordotcom Publishing and Tor UK.

Rudi described Freya's books as "genre bending" and Freya agreed that she enjoys fantasy and sci fi as well as romance. Romance was always "a place where queer stories have existed at the margins. I am writing and reading in a time when there's so much more happening in this space," she said. Freya enjoyed building up a family of people who find one another and come together, and her novels share some characters. All three are queer historical romance with fantasy elements such as magic.

A Restless Truth is set in Edwardian England, on a ship similar to the Titanic, steaming from the UK to the US.

Freya said she generally spent around nine months on each novel, and that "sex lessons" was one of her favourite tropes, with "the rake and the ingénue". She referred to the characters kidding themselves they are having sex without emotional attachment, though the reader knows better.



Other tropes and techniques discussed included fake dating, enemies to lovers, forced proximity, a shared project with a deadline, and exploring characters' good parts and their flaws.

Freya said she enjoyed creating settings and scenes in which the characters saw each other at their best and worst.

"A really well-crafted romance leaves you in awe of how it's done," Freya said. "You are trying to get people to buy into the angst. We are interested in the wounds people are carrying around with them. What is it that makes them think that everyone will leave them? It's a careful back and forth of emotional progression, bringing them to the point where they will say 'Yes, I deserve happiness.'"

The audience demonstrated their happiness with enthusiastic applause. I hope a romance panel will become a festival fixture.

♥ **Amber Jakeman**
www.amberjakeman.com
AmberJakemanSydney@gmail.com
Instagram: @jakemanamber
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Otherworldly Bites

KEEP ROLLING (OR, WHEN TO NOT WAVE YOUR MAGIC WAND)

BY SAMANTHA MARSHALL

We've all been there.

Seized by the kind of inspiration that has us up typing until the wee hours in our dressing gown, glasses skewed and hair twisted into a messy knot, tea long gone cold by our elbow. Our genius knows no bounds. The brush strokes of a true master, a manuscript for which editors the world over have been waiting for decades. All it needs is a few finishing touches in the morning, and that chapter will be perfect. Only when we come back in the morning, we plant our backside in front of the keyboard, crack our knuckles and...Well. This is embarrassing.

That's right, friends; we have written ourselves into a corner. Also known as a dead end, a block, a disaster, creative doom, "oh ****," or whatever other creative terminology you have for it. Now obviously, these moments happen for authors in all genres, not just those of the speculative branch - but I find that for speculative

authors these moments come with a particular brand of danger.

Because we can do *anything*. Literally. Anything. Good? NO. As both an author and an editor, I have seen our ability to do anything backfire in many an awful fashion. (Before I go any further, I will state the following example is shared with the full permission of the author for the purposes of this article, so nobody panic!)

I once worked on a manuscript involving a young woman with the ability to see visions of the past when she touched inanimate objects (psychometry, for those interested). About two thirds into the story, she was trapped in an alley by a band of thugs, only to suddenly sprout claws and fangs, turn into a vampire, and tear the men apart. When I queried this, the author explained they'd realised there was no way the character could escape, so they'd made her into a vampire and attributed her psychic powers to her previously latent vampire genes. Magic! She's saved! The problem was, there were no clues anywhere else

in the manuscript leading up to this point, and no mention of vampires at all in the world at large - so the entire thing was a complete surprise. The story was also meant to be sweet and cosy in tone, so the act didn't fit the character's personality and jarred the entire mood so badly the rest of the novel felt completely off. Vampirism was also never mentioned again after that incident, as it'd only been introduced to rescue the character (and author) from that sticky spot - so it left the reader (or, in this case, me) very confused by the end of the book.

When the author and I talked it over, she admitted the choice was for a quick fix, not because it was the right fix. Which, unfortunately, made it the wrong fix. This is not the only instance I've seen where speculative authors have backed themselves into a corner and then 'magicked' their way out. The problem is, though, when we pull an impossible solution from the ether, we shatter the ever so fragile suspension of disbelief we're asking the reader to maintain - which risks them walking away from our book entirely.

So. What now? First of all... remember that just because you can do anything, it doesn't mean you should. It's really important to stick to the rules and customs of the characters and world you've established so far. Cool? Cool. Now, look back through your chapter/work/manuscript/papyrus until you find the spot that last feels comfortable to you. Open a fresh document, and copy everything from the start of that section or chapter onwards into that fresh document. (Copy, okay? I'm going to say that again. COPY.)

Now that you have a duplicate, save it as something really witty like 'alternate chapter seven' or whatever. Move down to that spot at which you last felt comfortable, highlight everything which comes after and delete it. I know, I know, lots of authors don't like the delete key. I personally love the delete key. It's really satisfying to watch those words which gave me such angst disappear, leaving a fresh space full of new possibilities. In any case, this is a copy, remember? Since we're currently in an alternate universe, we can't harm the main timeline if we try something completely different - so that's what we are going to do.

If we use our previous example, let's say the last place we were comfortable was before our heroine (we'll call her Callie) fled from her pursuers into the alleyway and became trapped. This time around, she spots the alleyway, considers turning into it, then notices an open bar/restaurant two doors further up. Callie's pursuers are closing in, but she recalls seeing this particular establishment in a psychometric vision earlier in the story and knows it's important for some reason - so she takes the risk and tries to run that little bit further. One of the thugs manages to catch hold of her arm as she arrives at the door, but as luck would have it, said door opens and our hero steps out with some of his friends and a general air of

'what's going on here?' After a not-quite-tussle, the thugs realise they're outnumbered and retreat, and Callie is drawn into warmth and safety without having to do anything out of character. As a bonus, she has an opportunity to further connect with the hero and explore the building she saw in that earlier vision.

This is much neater than the original, and already feels smoother to read. It's also opening up a lot more opportunities for plot and character progression, rather than closing them down and/or creating problems that need to be solved. So, with the two side by side, it's clear the alternate universe is the winner - and therefore, I would swap the alternate chapter with the original, and continue writing the manuscript from this new point instead.

Sometimes, more than one alternate universe is needed before I hit the right one. I've done five or six before I struck gold before - but I can promise you, it's always worth it. Even if it means you've got an entire completed book, so you go back to edit chapter one, realise something's not quite right, ask a couple of author friends to look at it, they agree that something's not quite right, meaning later on you whip out a quick alternate chapter one, then like it a lot better, resulting in the horrific realisation that you now need to re-write that particular main character's entire character arc for the whole novel.

Not that I'm currently doing that right now. Ahem. *grumbles*

Anyway, I digress. In a world where waving our magic wands is ever so easy, I hope I've convinced you to refrain, and instead, to roll back and write on. I don't believe there's ever such a thing as a mistake; only an opportunity to make our stories better. With that in mind,

writing ourselves into a corner is our characters' way of telling us to hold up a moment; because we haven't lost our way so much as taken a path which doesn't suit - and if we give them the chance, they're itching to show us what's happening down the road less travelled.

♥ **Award-winning and nominated author Samantha Marshall writes a fusion of adventure, magic, and romance - as long as it's got paranormal creatures, space odyssey features or anything in between she'll be there writing happily ever afters to rule them all. When she's not hiding in her dragon cave, Samantha can be found at www.sliceofsammy.com Samantha's latest release is **Blitzen**, featured in A Perfectly Paranormal Christmas - Nothing says relaxation like a post-Christmas cruise through the Bahamas - until Sin's ship breaks down in the middle of the Caribbean ocean, and her post-rescue lunch is hijacked by a blisteringly handsome man who goes by the name of Blitzen and may or may not be one of Santa's actual reindeer. Wherever she looks, he's there; rescuing her from overzealous vampires, embroiling them in a piracy plot and walking around shirtless as though his chest and abdomen weren't weapons of their own. All Sin wants is to get home - but to do that, she'll have to put her faith not in the miracle of Christmas, but something far, far worse: true love.**





#EditorChats

5 things you MUST do BEFORE you revise

Image by expresswriters from Pixabay

BY LIBBY M IRIKS

So you've finished a manuscript? Written "THE END"? Congratulations! You've accomplished what so many never manage to achieve — you've written a book!

I've been where you are now, dear writer, and I know how incredibly exciting (and daunting) it can be. You've no doubt got lots of ideas swirling around in that clever little head of yours about how to improve the story you've just written, and you're itching to jump in and start revising that manuscript.

Well, I'm here to say: **DON'T!**

Because here's the thing: **you owe it to your story, your future readers, and yourself to take your time with this hugely important task.** It's like this . . .

Everyone knows you don't pull a lasagne from the oven and immediately start chowing down. (And not just because you'll scald

the lining of your mouth if you do!) No, you need to let it rest, to let the steam rise and the layers settle. Meanwhile, the garlicky scent of that cheesy, saucy dish of delicious carbohydrates is making your mouth water and your appetite grow, and by the time you shovel in a tastebud-tingling mouthful, the meaty pasta dish tastes better than you ever thought possible, and you can't help but let your eyes roll back as you let out a satisfied moan . . .

But I digress. What I'm trying to say is that your story is a lasagne— no, wait. You need to let the lasagne settle. *Aargh!* Third time lucky.

You need to resist the urge to revise your manuscript lest you scald yourself— I mean, lest you set yourself up for a whole lot of confusion and feeling overwhelmed.

Trust me, letting the story settle and giving yourself time to properly prepare for revisions will mean that when you're eventually ready to send your book out into the world, it's going to be so much stronger, so deliciously palatable, that you'll want to fall in a heap and weep at how

beautifully talented you are.

So, while we wait for the lasagne to cool, let's look at **five things you MUST do BEFORE you revise** — plus, I've included a bonus step, just for you!

- 1. Finish the manuscript:** This is essential because you can't edit a blank page, as they say. In order to revise your manuscript, you need to evaluate the story As. A. Whole. Don't grind to a halt halfway through writing because you realised a fundamental error and want to go back and fix it. Simply make a note of it, then carry on as if you already made the change. Because the fact of the matter is, without a finished draft, you cannot effectively edit your story.
- 2. Set it aside for 2-4 weeks:** Remember the lasagne? As tempting as it may be to start revising your manuscript as soon as you write "the end", giving yourself some distance from the story and your characters is a very wise move, because in order to see your story as objectively as possible, you need distance. So let that sucker sit!

And, hey, you can use your free time to:

BONUS STEP - Celebrate! You. Just. Wrote. A. Freaking. Book! You are amazing, persistent, determined — all the things! And you deserve to treat yourself, whether that's having dinner with friends, splurging on a piece of jewellery, or recharging your creative well in some way. However you want to celebrate, be sure to acknowledge your accomplishment by doing something special.

3. Print out the manuscript (or create a PDF copy): This step is important because you don't want to get distracted by the little things, the things that *don't matter at this stage*. For now, working with a hard copy (or non-editable) version of your manuscript will remind you not to waste time fixing grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and typos. That's NOT the focus of a developmental edit — which is exactly what you need to do in order to revise. Your focus MUST be on the story. There will be plenty of time for polishing the words later.

4. Read the manuscript: This step is perhaps the most difficult. Why?

Because it's important to read the manuscript *as a reader*. Not as the author. Not even as an editor at this stage. You simply want to read the story as if you are experiencing it for the first time. With those fresh eyes of yours (because you haven't let yourself be immersed in the story for weeks), read through the manuscript from start to finish, focusing on the bigger picture and your response as a *reader*. Feel free to jot down any thoughts, feelings, or concerns so you don't forget them, but DO NOT get distracted by taking copious amounts of notes.

5. Create a scene list:

Now that you've experienced your story as a reader, it's time to condense the entire thing into just a few pages. Create a scene list, noting down for each: whose POV the scene is written in, the supporting characters who make an appearance, the scene location, the day/time/season (whatever is relevant), and a brief explanation

of the events that occur. You're going to use this list to plan and guide your revisions.

Once you've carried out these steps, you'll be ready to conduct a developmental edit on your story by focusing on the "big picture" issues, such as theme, genre, structure, character development and more.

Keen to get started? I'll walk you through the process!

Head to romancebookcoach.com/ revise, download my free guide, *How to Developmentally Edit Your Romance Novel* and learn the ten steps involved in improving an early draft of your manuscript.

Are You Ready To Get Your Writing Mojo Back?

♥ Libby M Iriks is a developmental editor and writing coach who

helps new and emerging

romance writers improve their storytelling skills so they can write the kind of story they've always dreamed of writing.

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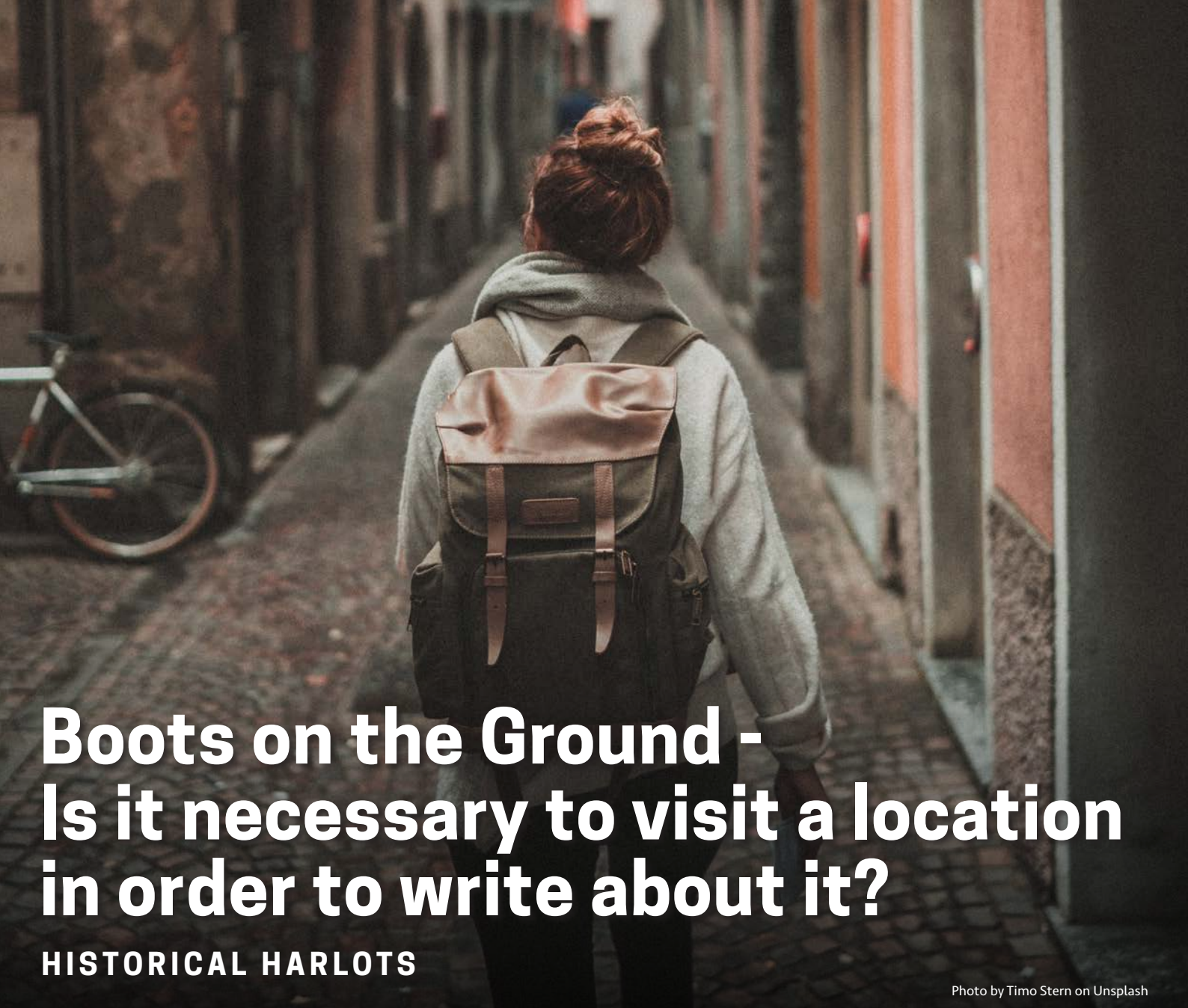
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Boots on the Ground - Is it necessary to visit a location in order to write about it?

HISTORICAL HARLOTS

Photo by Timo Stern on Unsplash

BY ALISON STUART

I have just returned from my first overseas adventure since 2019... five weeks in France and the UK and yes, it did involve some book research, which got me thinking about the question I posed above.

It is a writer's truism that we should write about the things we know, but isn't that what imagination is for? Certainly, as a historical writer, I have no personal experience of life during the English Civil War, the Regency or the first World War. All I can do is build that world in my head (as I explained in my article about world building that I wrote for *Hearts Talk* in March 2022).

Having said that, and I hasten to add, this is purely personal, one aspect of research for my books that is important to me is visiting the place I am writing about. If you read my books, you will know they are set in places I know well... the goldfields of Victoria, Singapore and of course the United Kingdom (particularly Worcestershire and Warwickshire). I have either lived in these places or visited them so often that I am comfortable writing about them and I know from reader responses that writing from the soul of a place does resonate with them. It's more than just visiting; it's *knowing* a location and this is an integral part of my personal writing toolbox.

Nothing is more irritating to a reader than the writer getting it wrong. Not just a little bit wrong but completely wrong. Yes, I do have a particular book in mind... set in Melbourne in 1837 and not only wrong in every historical fact but also wrong about the physical location, for example, the Yarra River does not slow to a trickle in summer... (cue grumpy face emoji!). Surely these simple facts could have been ascertained by a quick glance at Wikipedia! She did manage to work in some 'red winged parrots and gaudy cockatoos'... not that I've ever seen a gaudy cockatoo – they tend to be rather monochromatic. I could go on and on about this particular book... from the bananas in the orchard to ghost

gums spontaneously combusting... but you get the picture.

The reason for me visiting a place is not so much about the physical look of a place, it is about the 'feel' of the place. For example, the light in Melbourne is quite different from the light in Adelaide. Even in summer, Melbourne has a gentle light whereas Adelaide has a harder, brighter light (no offence meant to my South Australian friends). This is something I wouldn't necessarily know unless I visited Adelaide. And (having just returned from the UK) I was struck by the greenness of England. It is a green we just don't see here. None of these facts may appear in my book but they are there in the back of my mind as I am writing.

For me the place I set my books is often as much a character in its own right as any of the human (or animal) players. It is the weather, the light, the icy wind off the Atlantic, the soft rain of Picardy, the stifling humidity and heat of Singapore, the smell of spices in Little India, the scent of crushed chamomile underfoot in Athens. None of these things can, in my opinion, be replicated from my desk in Melbourne. I need to surround myself in an environment before I can write about it.

Location dictates how the characters will act... whether it is the energy-sapping heat of the tropics or the freezing mud-filled trenches of World War 1. I think I might have said it before; your characters are not actors on a bare, minimalist stage. They move and react within a world... a world which you as a writer has to build or recreate for them and feeling comfortable in that world is, for me as the writer, important.

I recognise I am fortunate in having the time and the means to travel and just because I do travel and visit interesting places, does not necessarily mean I will set a story in a place. I've visited America, for example, on many occasions but I

doubt you will ever see a story of mine set there because although I have been a tourist, I haven't absorbed the soul of a place as I have, for example, Singapore. I initially struggled with my Victorian goldfields books, based on a town in Gippsland I thought I knew well, because I didn't feel confident to write about it. In the end I rented a cottage and lived there for a week. For me it was the fundamental difference between visiting and fully experiencing a place. The time spent with my feet on those hills, breathing in the scent of the eucalypts, watching how the sun moved around the valley, etc. made all the difference to how I wrote about it.

That is me and that is the importance of location to me. It doesn't apply to everyone. As writers we are all different. Diana Gabaldon will freely tell you she never visited Scotland until long after the publication of her first book and it certainly didn't do her any harm!

If you can't visit a location but you are desperate to set a story there, what do you do? Think of your location as a character and plan it in the same way as you would one of your human characters.

Suggestions:

- YouTube videos... YouTube is a wonderful source of travel guides and food and history tours. They will give you a feel for the place and the ambience and weather... is it hot? Is it wet? Is the light harsh or soft?
- Research the current events of the time in the place you are setting your story. Contemporary newspapers are brilliant sources. Look at the advertisements in particular and accounts of social occasions – they may mention

the effect weather had on the event. Was it hot? Or was the ground muddy?

- And of course, a tip mentioned in my article on world building, contemporary maps and images are invaluable. Rivers change course, streets are renamed and rerouted, buildings have long disappeared. Maps and contemporary images tell you so much!
- Finally, don't be nervous about reaching out to the writerly community. There is always someone who might live in or know the place in which you are setting your story and will happily help you out.

Above all, don't try to wing it. Yes, I know we are writers and we make things up but if you don't do even the most basic research, you will make fundamental mistakes that readers will pick up on (viz my comments about Melbourne 1837 above).



♥ **Alison's latest book, a historical mystery set in the fictional gold mining town of Maiden's Creek, is *The Homecoming*. She is currently working on the fourth and final book in her historical mystery series set in Singapore, *Terror in Topaz*, which will be out in October.**

For more up to date information, she warmly invites you to sign up to her newsletter.
<https://sendfox.com/AlisonStuart>





RUBY

FOR PUBLISHED AUTHORS
WITH A PUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT

Photo by freestocks on Unsplash

Contests Update

BY CONTESTS MANAGER JACINTA PEACHEY

What has happened to the year?
I can't believe it's winter and all I want to do is curl up in bed with a good book. Luckily, I have the perfect list of books to read as it's time to announce the RuBY finalists.

RuBY

The RuBY is RWA's premier competition that seeks to find the best romance book across seven categories. This year the contest is sponsored by Better Reading who will produce live video content and blog a feature article with the RuBY award winners on the Better Reading website and social media channels.

Sarma Burdeu has worked hard for the last six months coordinating the seven RuBY categories and I have the thrill of announcing who the finalists are in alphabetical order of the titles.

Contemporary Long

Hampton Lane – Francis Cowie
Larapinta – Annie Seaton
The Opal Miner's Daughter – Fiona McArthur
Twice Baked – Katrina Coll

Contemporary Short

Hometown Cowboy – Dakota Harrison
Nurse's Outback Temptation – Amy Andrews
Reunited With the Millionaire – Rachael Armstrong

Historical Romance

How To Win a Wallflower – Samara Parish
The Bachelor Betrayal – Maddison Michaels
Under The Dark Moon – Susanne Bellamy

Novella

Denying The Duke – Bronwyn Stuart
The Captain and The Lady – Pamela Hart
The Portrait Sitting – Alivia Fleur

Romantic Elements

The Keeper of The Lighthouse – Kaye Dobbie
The Library at Wagtail Ridge – Janet Gover
Under The Covers Cop – LJ Perry

Romantic Suspense

Blake – Nyssa Kathryn
Hades – Anna Hackett
Jackson – Nyssa Kathryn
Rangers Blood – Caitlyn Lynch

Speculative Fiction

Emperor – Anna Hackett
Kingdom Of Chains – Tanya Bird
Undercover Mage – Kaaren Sutcliffe

How many have you read? My TBR pile just got huge with all these wonderful books and I may need a new book shelf.

The winners of each category will be announced during the Gala dinner at the RWA conference on 12 August in Sydney.

Recruitment

Have you ever benefited from an RWA contest? Do you want to return the favour to a budding writer?

The contest team needs a new Anthology Production Coordinator for 2024. If you are good with spreadsheets and want to give back, please contact me for more details at contests@romanceaustralia.com

RWA is almost solely run by volunteers. Over the years, the number of people assisting the running of the organisation has dwindled. If we are to run programs to benefit everyone, we need more people to help.

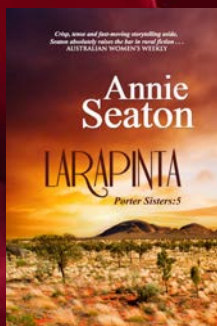
If you have any contest questions, please contact me at contests@romanceaustralia.com



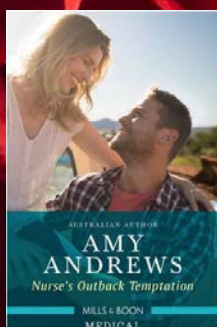
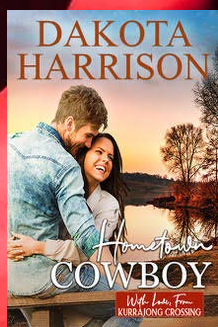
Jacinta Peachey is the RWA Treasurer and RWA Contests Manager. She writes contemporary and rural romance and her stories focus on strong, independent, yet mixed-up women as they navigate life's unexpected turns. Writing gives her the opportunity to explore the witty lines she wished she'd used at the demise of some woeful relationships.

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

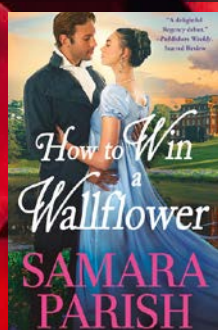
CONTEMPORARY LONG



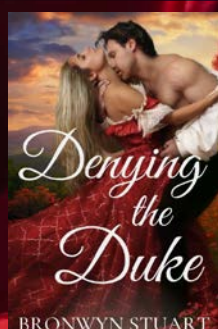
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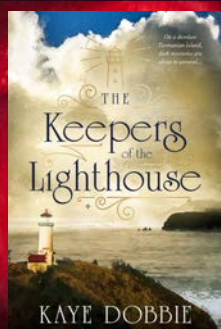
HISTORICAL ROMANCE



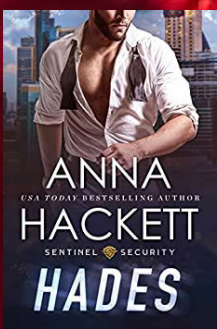
NOVELLA



ROMANTIC ELEMENTS



ROMANTIC SUSPENSE



SPECULATIVE FICTION



*Congratulations and good luck
to the finalists*

Keywords

Inspiration jumpstart

Runaway

Road Trip

Girl Nextdoor

Just Chill

Small Town Blues

BY NICOLE
HURLEY-MOORE

Hello everyone and welcome back to another Writing Prompt. I hope that you've been able to tap into your inspiration over the last few weeks and follow your muse. However, that doesn't always work as life can get in the way. From time to time, writing can be hard and we can feel like we've lost the spark that ignites and encourages us to push on and write our stories.

Sometimes, if we've written ourselves into a corner or the ideas just aren't coming, it's okay take a tiny break from your work in progress and try and refocus. When this happens, you can try and fill up the well by going for a walk, sitting in a forest, talking over the stumbling

block in your story with a friend, read a book or binge watch your favourite drama.

Another thing you can do is muck around with a writing prompt; even if you never add it to any of your stories, it can help get the creative juices flowing once again. Stepping back from your manuscript for a moment and giving yourself a little time can do wonders. Coming back to the story you'll be able to see it with fresh eyes and realise that what you thought was insurmountable was nothing but a bump in the road.

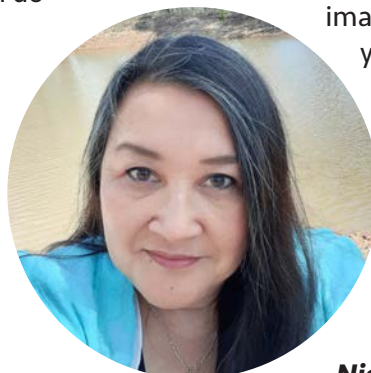
So, I hope that you'll give this month's writing prompt a whirl and

see where it takes you. 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.

Until next time, happy writing!

Nicole x



♥ **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.

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.



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Introducing the RWA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee

In its third year, the RWA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee will continue to identify ways to represent diverse authors and authors of diverse romance within the RWA membership community, and to nurture an inclusive environment within RWA. We are focusing on building on the supportive culture of RWA to create safer spaces both in-person and digitally for all members of our community. We will focus on creating opportunities for visibility, for sharing and holding our stories up to the same light, and to update/enhance our member experience to reflect DEI guidelines/practices.

Sub-committee members

Jack Bridges: I'm the chair of the DEI sub-committee. I'm a queer transgender man and have transitioned gender during my time as an RWA member. As chair, my goal is to help each sub-committee member contribute as much as they want, and as well as they can. I'm most interested in delivering RWA infrastructure solutions to the issues and barriers facing RWA members with marginalised identities.

Sandra Damevski (writing as Sandra Carmel): I'm a somewhat new-ish addition to the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee. I am passionate about giving a voice to those with

a range of health conditions and disabilities. This theme has followed me across my life: I work part-time as an occupational therapist in the community; my husband has a spinal cord injury and mobilises with a wheelchair; and I love writing lead characters with physical and/or mental health challenges. I strongly believe that everyone has the right to experience pleasure and love. My stories are on the steamy side and I find that the larger publishers in particular struggle with publishing erotic romance, let alone erotic romance featuring characters with chronic health concerns and/or disabilities. And I want to change that, broaden people's perspectives.

Stephanie Ashton: 'You can't be what you can't see'. I write FF romance to recreate the positive impact other lesbians' life stories and novels had on me. I'm a member of RWA for more than a decade. I've been contributing to the DEI committee since its inception because as a guest speaker said at our Brisbane conference "there's room for everyone".

Alexandra Almond: I'm an aspiring author, living and working on Bunerong land in Naarm (Melbourne). I genuinely believe we'd all be better off if there were more opportunities for people with different experiences, backgrounds,

beliefs, and ways of existing in the world. I've joined the DEI subcommittee to help make that happen.

Dani McLean: I'm a contemporary romance author who identifies as bisexual and non-binary. My pronouns are she/they. I joined the DEI committee because I believe that compassion and empathy come from understanding and that is what I hope this committee can achieve – to help each and every RWA member gain an understanding of the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds and communities. To provide the opportunity to view the infinite and beautiful ways we present diversely and how we can relate to each other.

Jacinta Goodsell: I'm an aspiring fantasy romance writer. My pronouns are she/her, I identify as pansexual, and I live with a learning disability called dyslexia. I've been a part of RWA since July 2022, and joined the DEI committee shortly thereafter. Being a creator can be incredibly isolating, and often feel hopeless, but it is my hope that through the DEI committee we're able to help create a safe and inclusive space within RWA for everyone, where we can achieve our goals and support one another through the highs and lows of our creative journey.

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Please note that RWA is run by volunteers. The best way to make an enquiry is via email to:
connect@romanceaustralia.com or
admin@romanceaustralia.com or
admin1@romanceaustralia.com

WEBSITE

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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

MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER

Dannielle Line

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jem McCusker (Sponsorship)
Miranda Harvey, Dani McLean

RWA CONTACTS

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Jacinta Goodsell
admin@romanceaustralia.com

Contact admin for:

- Member Services
- Contest Judging
- Volunteers

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, Nicole Hurley-Moore, Sandy Vaile, Pam Eldridge, Cassie Laelyn, Leisl Leighton, Helen Lucy Howe, Samantha Marshall, SE Welsh, Jer'tarme, Lucy Lever

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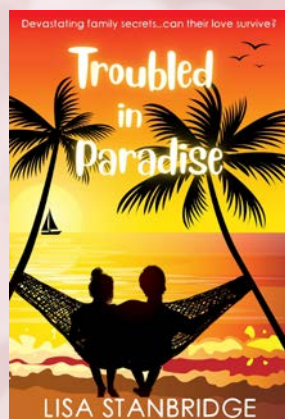
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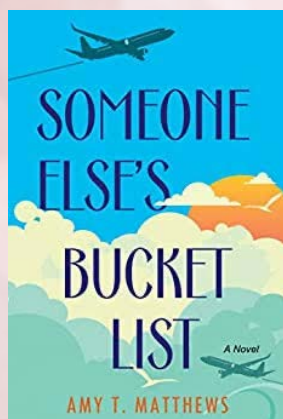
The deadline for *Hearts Talk* submissions is the **8th of the month** before publication. Send submissions to:
hteditor@romanceaustralia.com

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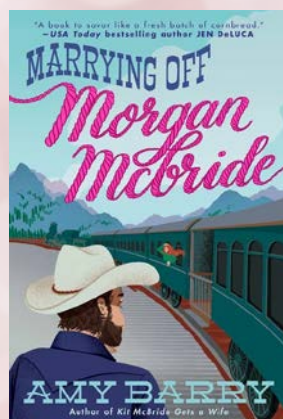
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Troubled in Paradise
Lisa Stanbridge
Crystal Brook Publishing



Someone Else's Bucket List
Amy T. Matthews
Kensington Books



Marrying Off Morgan McBride
Amy Barry
Berkley/Penguin Random House



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Richard Evans
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Lucy Leve
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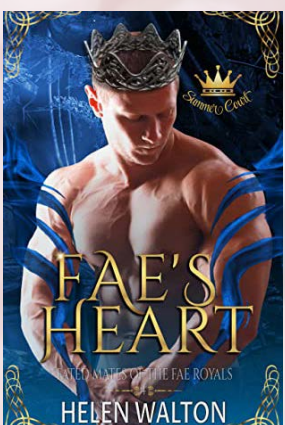
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