

# Hearts Talk

The official journal of Romance Writers of Australia

Edition #300 | May 2018



## A Right Royal Romance

As Buckingham Palace prepares for wedding bells on 19 May, Brisbane author **Ally Blake** delves into why we also have an enduring love affair with royal romances on the page. Her new *Royals of Vallemont* series is out now. Over to Ally...



Hands up who's excited about Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's upcoming nuptials? You? And you? Me too!

For how often do we get to glimpse such an adorable, real-life, royal romance? Dashing prince (the spare, tragically left without a mother so young, one-time bad boy grown into an astute young man) and beautiful, American actress—successful in her own right—set up by way of a mutual friend. Come on. It's straight out of the pages of a Mills & Boon!

And I write Mills & Boons. Books I consider fairy tales...for grown-ups. Which makes me wonder how I'd never written a royal romance.

Until now.

### Fairy Tales...for Grown-ups

My books have real women at the helm—bright yet faltering, capable but ill-starred, stubborn and hopeful. The men who catch their eyes and capture their hearts are the kinds found in the penthouse of your office building or having a drink at the pub (which is where Prince Frederik of Denmark met our Mary. Just saying). They too are real. Only hotter. For these books are romantic *fantasy*; love stories that *could* happen in real life, only with a dash of fairy dust. Of magic. Of wish fulfilment.

And at the heart of royal romances is the mother of all literary, wish-fulfilment tropes: Ordinary Girl, Extraordinary Man.

This dynamic is found between

some of the most popular romantic couples of all time such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*), Vivian and Edward (*Pretty Woman*), and Anastasia and Christian (*Fifty Shades of Grey*).

Bringing the language into the modern-day, exchange 'ordinary' for 'you or me', and 'extraordinary' for 'fascinating, hot, well-to-do, sophisticated, witty, clever man with eye crinkles, a crooked smile and real power to enact change for the better in the world' and such stories litter the current bestseller lists with series like the *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series by Sarah J Maas.

And all are retelling the same classic tale. That of *Cinderella*.

*Continued on page 4...*



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Deadline for *Hearts Talk* submissions is the 8th of the month before publication.

# From Your Editors

Hello and welcome to the 300th edition of *Hearts Talk*! Yup, 3-0-0. What an achievement.

Looking back at past issues, it's funny to see how much has changed, and how much has stayed the same.

In the very first issue, out February 1992, edited by Lynne Wilding (the namesake of RWA's Meritorious Service Award), there was talk of the (now defunct) Silhouette category romance imprint, RWA's aim to sponsor its first annual romance writers' competition (!), and how best to present a manuscript on a word processor.

There was also an interview with Miranda Lee, who had success with Mills & Boon after "a decade of trial and error". She made comments, which still ring true today, such as:

*"It takes a long time before one can see what's wrong with one's own writing, if ever. I thought each story [submitted] was publishable. Looking back, most probably weren't ... [but] keep knocking on that door."*

In the 100th issue, in July 2001, Lisa Chaplin (who recently released *Beneath the Skin*, under 'Melissa James', with an indigenous heroine), wrote about 'preparing for overnight success'. *"Don't accept the word 'hobby' about your writing. Don't be apologetic about the time it takes to write a book. Let hubby make the coffee now and then! You understand his work time, right? So he can understand yours—because this is an apprenticeship while you're working toward publication."* Hear, hear.

The 200th issue, in January 2010, celebrated then-debut authors

Helene Young, Nikki Logan and (editor) Rachel Bailey, while the organisation also grappled with the definition of what it was to be considered 'published' in the new indie age. The news section too lamented Borders UK entering administration, while celebrating a six-month boost of 400 per cent in ebook sales at Random House and marvelling at people now reading novels on their smartphones.

Wowee, we've come a long way, baby! *HT* is now online only, so there are no humorous reader tales about soggy pages after devouring it in the bath, like in the 100th issue. But we have our fingers crossed that there'll be many more editions to come...without any yarns of soggy iPads reported!

**Carla Caruso & Daniel de Lorne**



Issue 1



Issue 100



Issue 200

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# A Right Royal Romance

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## Rags to Royalty

There's a reason Cinders' story has endured. One of the original bright yet faltering, capable but ill-starred, stubborn and hopeful literary heroines, she is also dispossessed, penniless, a slave in her own home. Cinders is as *ordinary* as it comes. And who does she end up with? Prince Charming. Actual bona fide royalty. You go, girl!

And it does feel like a punch-the-air-in-solidarity moment. For if even poor Cinders can get the prince (make-over aside) it feels possible that we—reading while wearing our faded PJs, wrung-out after a hard day, saddled with the stressful minutiae of modern life—can still, *one day*, fulfil our wildest dreams too.

## A Right Royal Idea

This time last year I had an idea for a story. I pictured a runaway bride (our heroine) standing in the middle of a country lane, her high heel stuck in the mud, when from nowhere she is nearly run down by a knight in a shining sports car (our hero).

But then I had another thought—one of those magical, bonus thoughts that takes ideas from meet-cute to romance writing incandescence. I looked back over my heroine's shoulder to find that the well-built, stoic, and now tragically jilted groom was—\*gasp\*—a prince! I couldn't just leave him there. He had to have his own happy ending too!

My muse and my editor said 'yes please' and the *Royals of Vallemont*, a Mills & Boon Forever Romance duet, was born.

Both heroines in the series are *every girl*; Sadie (the runaway in *Rescuing the Royal Runaway Bride*) is a high school drama teacher, whose mother is a maid at the Palace of Vallemont. Amber (of *Amber and*

*the Rogue Prince*) is a barefoot, bee-keeping hippy the jilted prince stumbles upon while hiding in the middle of nowhere Australia.

Their heroes—Will and Prince Hugo—are *extraordinary* men. Successful, raffish, world-renowned in their fields, gorgeous beyond belief. The one area in which each bloke falls down is love. They need the heroines more than the heroines need them.

Fantasy plus.

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**"Imagine not flinching at the price of avocados."**

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## The Fantasy

One of my favourite authors, Kelly Hunter, also has a royal series out now, through Mills & Boon Modern. She blames Yul Brynner—and *The King and I*—for her fascination with royal romances. "The costumes, the setting, forbidden love, THAT dance! I loved the complexities of a man torn between duty to his country and the yearnings of his heart."

For sure, the pleasure in reading a royal romance isn't merely the familiar. It promises a cornucopia of allurements such as the push and pull of obligation versus desire, endless wealth, and beauty beyond compare. The clothes, the bling, the homes—you literally cannot go too grand. And the locations? Breathtaking! (Though if every principality in every romance novel actually existed in that hazy place between France and Italy, some kind of multi-dimensional voodoo would have to be in play for them all to fit.)

## The Actuality

On the flipside we know way too much about the public realities of

royal life to completely gloss over the negatives. Do you know of any real-life single princes for whom you'd 'swipe right'? These dudes come with baggage.

- ♥ Family. We all have wacky in-laws, but royals—and their dubious histories of 'keeping it in the family'—have wackier families than most.
- ♥ Money. While ostensibly a positive, wealth begets envy. The lack thereof engenders fear. Desperation. Murder. Wars.
- ♥ Rules. Meghan Markle dared leave the house without a handbag the other day—shock, horror! Could you live by such pedantic conventions?
- ♥ Fame. Paparazzi hiding by your front gate hoping to get a photo of your muffin top. The horror.
- ♥ Work. Meghan wasn't the first forced to give up her career in order to marry into royalty.

On that score, she also gave up her homeland—and a beloved rescue dog—in order to marry Harry. While he gives up nothing bar his singleness. On paper it sounds like enough to make a girl second-guess (and any sensible heroine should).

But then you see them together and all the royal trappings—the good and the bad—fade away. For there is love. New, fresh, earnest, quixotic love, to be sure, but it sparkles from them like diamond dust.

And ain't that just the kind of thing that leaves we romance readers in all kinds of bliss when we turn the last page?

## The Reality of the Fantasy

When it comes down to it—beyond the familiarity, and the pretty fantasy—the most basic appeal of royal romance is the promise of comfort, in every sense of the word.

Imagine not flinching at the price of avocados. Imagine sleeping in a thousand-count, Egyptian-cotton sheets that are changed—by someone else—every day. Imagine being able to see the doctor of your choice at a moment's notice. Now imagine it all with a man by your side who takes responsibility seriously, who values family, who—if forced to put his position, his fortune, his very name on the line—would always choose you.

For me, the clincher is a hero who is

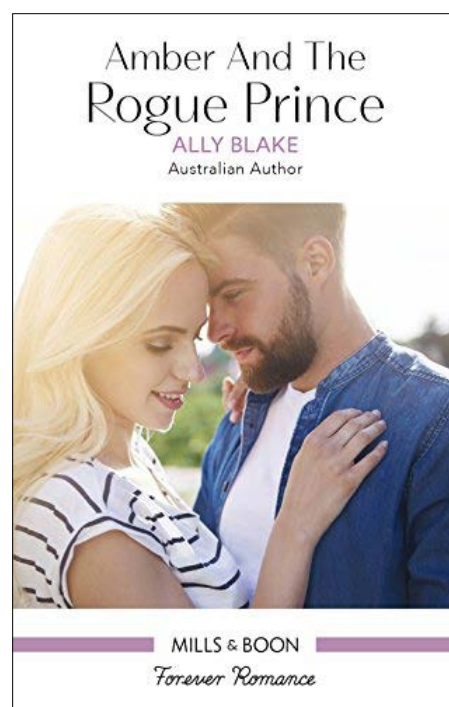
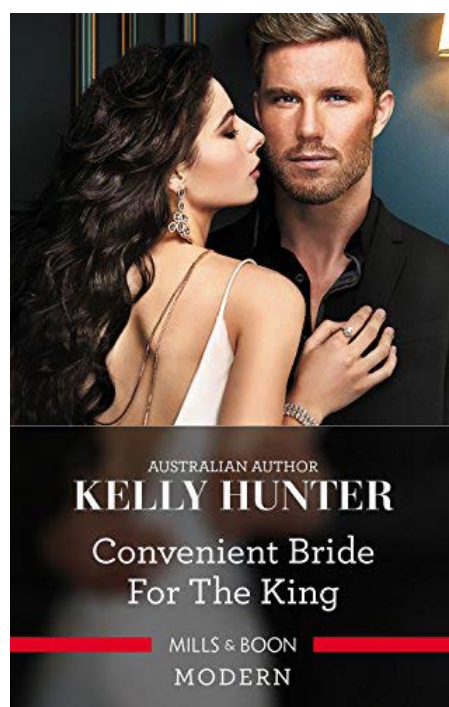
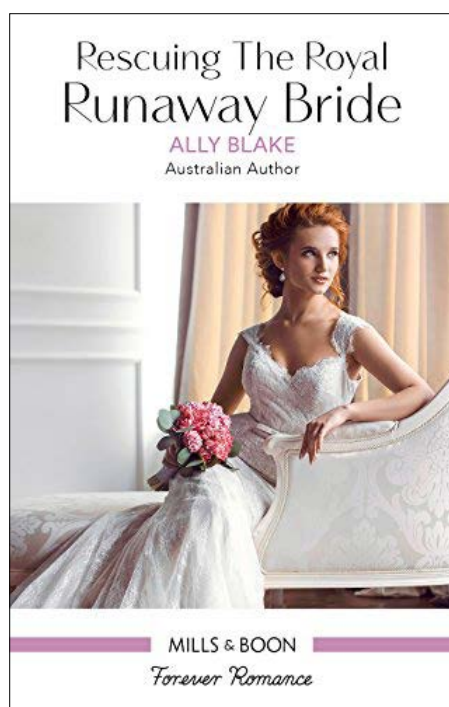
**“All are retelling the same classic tale. That of Cinderella.”**

capable. The kind of man who can fix a leaky tap. But a prince? Heck, a king? Even if he doesn't know one end of a tap from the other, at least he has enough servants at his beck and call to get that thing fixed the

very moment I asked.

Now that's my kind of romantic fantasy.

**Ally Blake adores writing love stories so much she'd do so even if nobody else read them. No wonder then, having sold over 4 million copies of her romance novels worldwide, Ally is living her bliss. Ally's *The Royals of Vallemont* royal romance duet is out worldwide this May via Mills & Boon Forever Romance. More at [www.allyblake.com](http://www.allyblake.com).**



## Collaboration Sensation

Authors often talk about the isolation of writing; just you, the keyboard and a cup of coffee. But two Brisbane-based RWA emerging authors—**MC D'Alton** and **Melanie Page**—have blown that one out of the water, discovering that writing with a partner is half the stress and twice the fun. Their collaborative project, a steampunk/medical/romance, is on the presses and will be released in June. The duo let us in on the unanticipated bonuses of collaboration.

**Mel:** MC was whinging about how she wanted to write a story about a monster. She had been watching *Penny Dreadful* (note to self...just no!) and had fallen in love with the dark monsters. So she had a brainwave. “We should write a story about a monster falling in love!”

**MC:** Mel, pedantic, difficult Mel said: “But you can't fall in love with

a monster.” So then, of course, we started batting ideas back and forth, by email...lots of emails.

She set up a planning document based on Michael Hauge's stages of story, which she learned about at the Adelaide RWA conference, and proceeded to outline a possible story.

**Mel:** I created an outline and MC, of course, went off on a tangent.

But, long story short...it was a great exercise and we did end up using a lot of the plan. It also raised a lot of questions, which formed the backstory. Then we worked out where the story would start and MC wrote the first draft chapter.

**MC:** Mmm, that was fun! I dashed down a sketch of the opening events at light speed and pressed



'send'. A couple of hours later, I got the detailed, polished version back. And I was blown away. Let me show you what I mean.

Here is what I wrote: *'Galena raised her arms in defence as she lost her balance and fell over onto the cobblestoned road, knocking the wind from her lungs.'*

And here is what Mel edited it to: *'Galena picked up her striped skirts and fled, pushing through the heavy oak doors that separated the enclave she had left forever from the rest of Edinburgh society. The cobbles were slick and putrid, but the tears swimming in her eyes made it hard for Galena to discern where she was going.'*

**Mel:** It wasn't just about rewriting. It was about giving depth and dimension to the characters.

Our hero has a medical condition, sure, but I wanted to know what he was doing with his life. He wasn't just a medical experiment waiting to happen.

And so we wound up with an interesting little subplot and a whole different side to his character.

In addition, we had a running conversation going on Messenger. Sometimes it was 'Please send something to write...I hate cricket.'

Or it was discussion of characters, structure, something like: 'So I will prob shift stuff, shorten the timeframe. Maybe have B go past, call out, J gloating, G gagged and unable to reply...I'm off to get a haircut. Talk later.'

**MC:** Of course it wasn't all tea and cakes. There were differences of creative opinion.

I would see the story and put it down on paper, then Mel would send it back looking very different. Which threw me.

But this is where we, as rational, enlightened, peace-loving friends, were able to sit back and reflect, and work out the best path forward.

At one point, I plateaued. I sent the next chapter and Mel sent it back with a dozen questions. That was not a good moment (understatement). But as we found answers to the questions, the story moved forward again.

**Mel:** One of the challenges of not having sole creative control over a story is the different perspectives that come into play. There were a couple of characters who we saw quite differently.

Example: MC wrote a detective to come in and investigate the assault. So I wrote him as I saw him, a sort of steampunky Murdoch from the *Murdoch Mysteries*. And then when I sent it back, MC was all... 'But I saw him as Benedict Cumberbatch.' Oops.

**MC:** For us, collaboration has been a godsend. And it has to do with balancing our different strengths.

Mel took my plot outline and breathed life into the characters and descriptions. When I read Mel's work, I can smell the soot in the air and hear the clip-clopping

of the unicarriage (a mechanical horse-led, steam-driven hansom cab, for the uninitiated). I can taste the port the characters sip from crystal glasses. That is her gift.

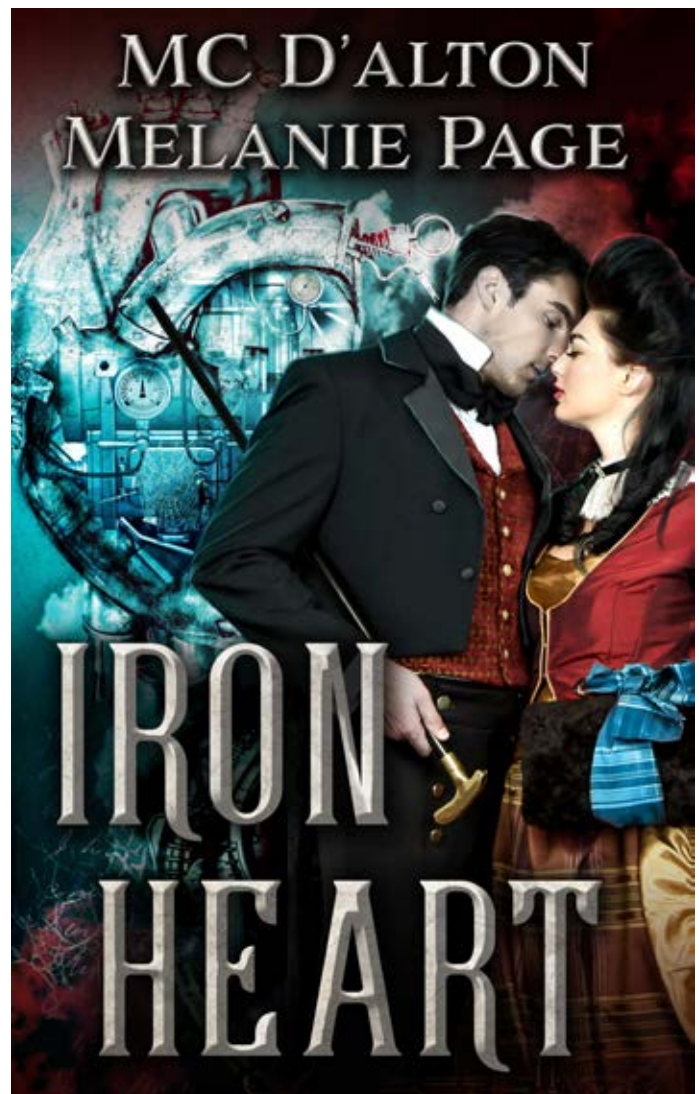
**Mel:** And, even though I plot out a story, it will never have the life and vibrancy that pours so spontaneously from MC's brain.

I shape it, colour it, polish it to a high gloss, but the core of the story is all her. And that is the issue. We are able to collaborate because our gifts complement one another.

So we believe that the keys to making collaboration work, if there is anyone out there wanting to try it, are threefold.

One, personalities will clash. But there has to be a willingness to discuss differences, without heat or ego, to do what is best for the story. Two, the two writers' gifts need to complement one another. Look for someone who has different abilities to your own, things you are conscious that you lack or find difficult. And three, a really good sense of humour is a must. It can be frustrating, but it can also be great fun.

Writing is lonely, or it can be, but with collaboration, there is someone else who loves your story and your characters as much as you do, who is committed to them, who 'gets you'. And the final product will be truly special.



# Indie World: Vibin'

by **KE Osborn**, [www.keosbornauthor.com](http://www.keosbornauthor.com)

Good vibes: people, places, ideas, and possibilities that evoke positive, safe, happy sensations.

I believe that having 'good vibes' when writing is essential to creating a productive environment. Now this doesn't mean just by having good people around you, things are going to be awesome. No, it's more about the space that surrounds you, the environment, the energy.

Do you write in an office? In a noisy café? In a park? In bed? On a laptop? Wherever you write can actually help or hinder your creative flow, and aid in getting that scene perfect. If you're trying to write an intensely steamy sex scene, you won't want to write it while at a kids' playland, for instance! You need to set the scene, be somewhere intimate, maybe light some candles with your favourite fragrance. If you can, write to music. Put on an emotional or sensual song, dependant upon the type of 'scene' you are going for.

If you're trying to write a particularly happy scene, try not to be in a dark, sombre room. The vibe won't be right. Try opening a window, letting the sunlight in, or even going out into the sun if it's a beautiful day. If you can't open a window, have the light in the room on bright, play some upbeat music, or have some happy, colourful objects surrounding you.

Having your own personal space when writing can be a game changer. If you have a space in your home, where you can decorate it to suit you, this can be extremely beneficial. A 'writing cave', as we call it, brings a sense of worth and accomplishment to an avid writer. Having a home for your craft is like knowing you have a place for your words and for them to be at their best. So decorating your writing



cave the right way is essential to bring out your creative flow.

Some people have inspirational quotes, some have scented candles, some have pictures of their books, some have nothing. What I find helpful is to have things that motivate me. But it's best to have nothing that's distracting. So pictures that drag your eye all the time are generally a no-go (aka scantily clad men).

Another thing I find helps massively to maintain a good vibe is to keep a neat workspace. Having my desk neat and tidy always makes it easier to focus on writing, whereas if it's messy, it's distracting and you're continually fiddling with things rather than getting words down.

Having the right treats to help you along the way can aid with your good vibes too. The right mood-booster can assist in elevating you from drowning in a pit of despair to killing it in no time. Flavoured teas, almonds, strawberries and trail mix are great energy boosters without the added caffeine and sugar. High energy drinks will shoot into your

system and give you a high, but then you'll have the inevitable sugar drop, which is what you don't want. Keep hydrated as well. Have a water bottle on hand and sip regularly throughout your writing period. It's the best way to keep your mind active and focused. And with an active mind, the great words will continue flowing.

As with anything, take frequent rests. Get up and go for a short walk to release the tension in your muscles from sitting at a desk or table for too long. The last thing you want is a repetitive strain injury or neck and shoulder pain from slouching over the keyboard.

If you do all these things, and keep a smile on your face, then good vibes will emanate from you and flow through to the page. If you're in the right headspace, your manuscript will show that.

In my next column, I will discuss the importance of research. I look forward to bringing you some more helpful advice.

# What Your Committee Does

by **Claire Boston, RWA President**

The RWA committee works hard all year to keep the organisation running and to make decisions about its direction.

We always look at how we can make the most out of our membership funds and how to offer our members the best membership experience.

The committee has an official meeting every two months online, but also communicates regularly via an email group. Ideas are raised, discussed and voted on all through the year, and we track all of the actions coming out of our meetings on a spreadsheet to ensure the work is being completed. We've been working on a number of projects, aside from the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Last year when Shannon Stein resigned as our administrative assistant, we reviewed the role. We acknowledged that the tasks the admin is required to do depends largely on what skills the members of committee have—if a committee member has website skills, then the admin might do something else instead. As a result, we put our new admin on a 12-month contract, so we can review the tasks and role annually, and make any necessary adjustments.

We also realised that in order for us to make informed decisions about where we spend your money, we needed to involve an expert. As such, we hired a bookkeeper to do most of the tasks that used to be the role of the treasurer. We consolidated our accounting processes and set up new procedures so that payments of

invoices could be done in a much timelier manner. The treasurer role is now a much less time intensive position.

In addition, we have been reviewing the way we run conference. This year we are trialling a new registration system called Grenadine, which also provides an app where you can have your whole conference program on your phone. I used it recently at another conference and it was easy to use and notified me when my next workshop was due to start. Looking forward, we signed a contract for our Melbourne hotel and we're looking at options for both 2020 and 2021. We acknowledge that the cost of conference is a contributing factor as to why some of our members cannot attend, and we keep looking at ways we can improve this.

The committee has been approached by a number of media outlets including Channel 9, *Sunrise*, ABC and *Elle* magazine for information about romance for their articles and shows, and we have had some really positive media pieces on romance come out of them.

We continue to review the way we run our contests, trying to streamline both the entry and judging process, so that it is less time-consuming for the entrant, judge and contest coordinator. This year we trialled Google Form scoresheets, and we will review their success to see if we will continue this way.

We are also trying to address how we can better communicate with

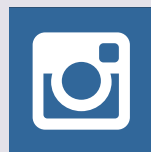
our members and find out what you want. Keep a look out for a membership survey later in the year, the results of which we will use to plan our path forward in the future. With so many members of differing skill levels and having different wants and needs, it is tricky to balance everything and keep everyone happy.

Part of the difficulty of being on committee in the past has been that sometimes the handover of roles has been non-existent, which means the new committee is reinventing the wheel or doesn't know about issues which may have been raised with a previous committee.

To address this, we have started using G Suite—a Google product which keeps all our records in the cloud. We've gathered up as many records as we could and they now live in one location. This will enable new committee members to review their predecessor's work and to have easy access to all the necessary procedures which tells them how to do the role. Our current committee is busy updating all of their portfolio procedures in anticipation of the AGM this year.

**Many of our committee members, including our entire executive, will be stepping down this year and so there is a great opportunity for new people to take the reins of the organisation.**

If you've got any questions about the committee or what we're working on, or have any suggestions, please email me at [president@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:president@romanceaustralia.com).



**Follow RWA.**  
Click an icon now.





ROMANCE  
WRITERS  
*of Australia*

# Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Romance Writers of Australia will be held during the 27th Annual Romance Writers of Australia Conference.

## Where

Sofitel Sydney Wentworth  
61-101 Phillip St  
Sydney NSW 2000

## When

Sunday, 19 August 2018, at 2pm

You do not need to have paid for the conference to attend the AGM. Simply go to the conference floor at that time and you will be let in.

The AGM will include the following business:

- ♥ confirmation of the last AGM minutes
- ♥ receipt of committee reports
- ♥ election of office-bearers and ordinary committee members
- ♥ receipt of financial statement.

If voting is required, and you are unable to attend, you may nominate a proxy to vote on your behalf. If you would like to appoint a proxy, please download and complete a form from the Members

Section of the RWA website or via this link:

**[romanceaustralia.com/downloads/Form%20of%20Appointment%20of%20Proxy.docx](http://romanceaustralia.com/downloads/Form%20of%20Appointment%20of%20Proxy.docx)**

\*You must be logged in to access this form.

At the time of printing, no voting is required, however, if this changes, you will be notified via email.

Please check your email address is up to date.

# Nominations for RWA Committee 2018-19

Romance Writers of Australia is calling for nominations for members to join the RWA committee.

If you are interested in taking your volunteer status to the committee level, or know of someone you believe would be a great asset and advocate for the members, please download a form from the Members Section of the RWA website or via this link:

**[www.romanceaustralia.com/downloads/Romance%20Writers%20of%20Australia%20Inc%20Committee%20Nomination%20Form.dotx](http://www.romanceaustralia.com/downloads/Romance%20Writers%20of%20Australia%20Inc%20Committee%20Nomination%20Form.dotx)**

\*You must be logged in to access the form.

All nominations MUST be completed as indicated, and sent to the RWA Secretary, [secretary@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:secretary@romanceaustralia.com), by 10 August 2018.

If you have any queries regarding the nature of the available portfolios, please feel free to contact the RWA Secretary. Please note: RWA will require incoming members to step into one or more

vacant portfolio positions. You do not need to specify a portfolio when you nominate, but you can specify your interests, skills and expertise on the form.

If more than one nomination is received for each of the vacating committee positions, a ballot vote will be conducted at the RWA Annual General Meeting at the conference at the Sofitel Wentworth in Sydney on Sunday, 19 August, 2018, at 2pm.

# WHAT GOES INTO TICKET COSTS FOR THE RWA CONFERENCE



## ACCOMMODATION

6% of your ticket cost goes to paying for special guest and essential committee & volunteer accommodation costs

## AUDIO VISUAL

10% of your ticket cost goes towards hiring the audio visual requirements for the conference presentations



## FOOD & BEVERAGE

54% of ticket costs go toward paying for your included food and beverage costs for the conference

## GOODIE BAG

3% of your ticket cost goes to providing all delegates with a special gift bag on arrival to the core conference



## TRAVEL

3% of your ticket cost goes towards getting your special presenters to the RWA conference

## SPEAKERS

2% of your cost goes towards paying a fee to special workshop presenters.



## FACILITY HIRE

20% of your ticket cost goes to paying the hotel for room hire in which to host your workshops and presentations.

## CONTINGENCY

1.5% of your cost goes as a contingency reserve to account for unexpected conference costs



## GIFT, DECO, STATIONERY



0.5% of your ticket cost goes to paying for themed decorations, presenter & volunteer gifts and conference stationery



## 2018 RWA Sydney Conference Update

by Bronwyn Stuart, RWA Conference Manager

Our annual conferences are amazing and are getting better each year. But we are also getting bigger each year and we thought this infographic might help in explaining how you (and RWA as an organisation) pay for our conferences.

People often ask: where does the money for my conference ticket price go?

As an expanding organisation, we've simply outgrown some of the smaller venues in each city. For instance, in Adelaide in 2016, the Stamford Grand was the only hotel that could accommodate us and provide the rooms we needed to sleep most of our conference participants.

So, we have to source bigger venues, which tend to be more expensive to hire (and this includes convention centres). For instance, in Sydney we're hiring a separate pitching room, which is going to cost \$7500 for three days. We have the ballroom (split into three rooms during workshops) and then two rooms on the same floor. (If we don't hire every room on the conference floor, we run the risk of sharing space with another event, which means no trade tables for our sponsors, no bookstore, and moving the registration desk every night and pulling it back out every morning.)

Food and beverage continues to be our highest cost. The day rate for morning and afternoon tea, lunch and tea and coffee can be anywhere between \$70 and \$105 per delegate per day depending on the city and venue we're in. Anyone who's ever organised a wedding will know this to be true!

AV hire comes at an extra cost, with the price for Brisbane at around \$25,000 from Friday to Sunday. (Big kudos to the Brisbane team who fought a hard fight there to keep this down.)

With all this to consider we expect our Sydney conference to come in at over \$200,000 to stage.

Yes, we have sponsors, and we so appreciate their partnerships, and so much effort is subsidised by all our wonderful volunteers, but there are unavoidable costs. We also pay our workshop presenters, which we strongly believe in, and there is the cost of interstate or overseas guest presenters, publishers and agents.

And we want to make some profit, which we can invest in RWA for all the things we do for members. We understand that even though we

Conference expenses estimated from the 2017 conference

work hard to keep the prices down, a conference ticket will be beyond some people's reach.

That's why any profits we make can be invested in our OWLs program,

our Members' Assistance Fund or our Group Grants program.

We fight for every dollar on your behalf. If you want to know more about how the committee decides

on where your membership fees are spent, a copy of RWA's financial report will be available at the AGM in Sydney.

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## Registrations for Sydney 2018 Are Open

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This year we're excited to bring you a new registration system. The best news is that it comes with a conference app so you can track your sessions in real time. You can also quickly check presenters, their pictures and bios. It's going to be great!

We will still have a printed program but due to the rising costs of printing and the amazingness of evolving technology, the printed program will be shorter this year and only contain the essentials.

Ticket prices include GST here but will display excluding GST on the Grenadine site until you go through to the checkout.

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### Friday Workshop

Early Bird Member – \$199

General Member – \$249

EB Non-Member – \$299

General Non-Member – \$349

### Core Conference

(includes one cocktail party ticket)

Early Bird Member – \$529

General Member – \$579

EB Non-Member – \$629

General Non-Member – \$679

### Gala Dinner Ticket

(not included in core, must be purchased separately)

All delegates – \$125

### Extra cocktail party tickets

(for guests/friends/spouses or not attending core)

All delegates – \$80

(Early Bird ticket sales end 31 May and all ticket sales end 1 August 2018)

Like every year, there are a few standards.

- ♥ A cocktail party ticket is included in the core conference ticket price so you do not need to purchase one separately unless you are bringing a friend/partner or not attending core.
- ♥ When you let us know about food allergies, these are genuine I-will-die or I-will-get-very-sick if I ingest allergies. These are not the foods you don't like to eat or drink. We always include vegetarian and vegan as lifestyle choices but if you simply don't like something, there will be other choices. We do try to work with the hotel to provide a great range of simple foods

but if you have a real concern, please contact the registrar. If you have religious exclusions, please contact the registrar.

- ♥ Pitch appointments will be released in the very near future, but you must be registered for core conference to take up one of these great opportunities.
- ♥ You may change your mind about the sessions you have chosen without notifying the registrar but bear in mind this affects seating arrangements and you may find yourself standing.
- ♥ Sunday morning will kick off by going straight into sessions rather than beginning with a plenary or keynote. This is a

trial. If attendance to these first sessions isn't great, this may be reverted back.

- ♥ All rooms will have some tables set up at the back. This is for mobility impaired members, not people waiting to pitch. If you have a pitch appointment during the session, just sit close to the aisle or near the back. No one will question you getting up quietly to leave.
- ♥ You will need to wear your lanyard at all times.
- ♥ Only first time attendees will receive a complimentary lanyard. If you have lost yours, they will be available to buy at the registration desk.



- ♥ You will need your membership number to apply the member discount. Your membership must remain up-to-date from the time you register to the date of the conference. You can find your member number if you login to the RWA website.
- ♥ Any changes to your ticket after purchase will attract an admin fee to change.
- ♥ ALL refunds will attract an admin fee.
- ♥ You must read the terms and

conditions carefully before final purchase of conference tickets.

\*Please note Kristine Swartz from Penguin Random House New York has had to cancel her appearance. We're working hard to fill her spot and will update the info as soon as possible with a replacement. As is usual we will use our RWA website, *Hearts Talk* and the Grenadine App to notify you of any major changes.

Downloading the Grenadine conference app will keep you up to date with all changes as you can

subscribe to get notifications.

To access the app:

- ♥ go to Google Play Store or Apple App Store
- ♥ search for and download the "Grenadine Event Guide"
- ♥ enter the code RWA2018.

If you still have any questions, please contact the registrar (Lucy) on [conference\\_registrar@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:conference_registrar@romanceaustralia.com)

See you in Sydney!

**Book your conference online now at**  
<https://sites.grenadine.co/sites/romanceaustralia/en/sydney2018>



by **Michelle Diener**,  
[volunteers@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:volunteers@romanceaustralia.com)

This month, our volunteer of the month is Joanne Dannon. Joanne Dannon has just stepped down from her volunteer role with the Critique Partner Scheme but we wanted to thank her and acknowledge her amazing contribution to RWA. After nine years of helping authors find critique partners—holding hands when things didn't work out or it took a while to find a match—Joanne has well and truly earned a pat on the back and a huge thanks for her work.

Joanne has been half of a two-person team who have dealt with the challenges of Yahoo uncomplainingly, doing their best to make an unwieldy system work. She has always been there for authors trying to use the CP scheme, and for this, she deserves all our thanks. Joanne has also been a volunteer judge. RWA literally couldn't function without amazing members like her who give up their valuable time to help the organisation and its members.

## RWA Notices

### Brisbane Critique Members Wanted

*Toowong Writers' Group, every second Thursday of each month, from 10:45am–1:00pm.*

This diverse group has a variety of interests and works in progress.

It is primarily a critique group and members take turns in submitting work for review.

The group is very friendly and has a lot of fun as they discuss works in progress and the often difficult but rewarding craft of writing.

New members are welcome.

Please contact Michelle Wood at [mjbw65@hotmail.com](mailto:mjbw65@hotmail.com) for details.

### Aussies in the RITA Finals

Huge congrats to our local authors whose books have finalled in the RITA awards, run by the Romance Writers of America, including:

**Contemporary Romance—Long**  
*The Dating Game* by Avril Tremayne

**Contemporary Romance—Short**  
*The Billionaire's Christmas Baby* by Marion Lennox  
*A Christmas Miracle* by Amy Andrews  
*Troy* by Amy Andrews

The winners will be announced at the US conference in July. Find the full finalist list at [www.rwa.org/ritaghfinalists](http://www.rwa.org/ritaghfinalists).

# Diversity Celebrated

Writing about racial diversity has been much-talked about in recent times and Sydneysider **Suzanne Salem**'s debut novel, *Fava Beans for Breakfast* (Harlequin Mira), embodies exactly this spirit. The title tackles Australian life in the seventies, racism, magical realism, and Egyptian cooking. It's a veritable feast.

**Hi, Suzanne. How long had you been writing fiction, and how many manuscripts, before you got *The Call to be published*?**

I have been writing short stories for as long as I can remember but always on the side. I was lucky to take a break from my usual life and spend a few years living in London, and in that period, I realised I wanted my side-racket to be my main racket!

When I started writing *Fava Beans*, I had no idea where the story would take me and I took many wrong turns that took the narrative nowhere. But I kept coming back to this story because my characters wouldn't leave me and believed that this was a story worth telling. I redrafted the manuscript probably 25 times before I felt that I could show it to publishers. *Fava Beans* is my first novel and I'm so thrilled that it has been published!

**Would you consider *Fava Beans for Breakfast* a multicultural twist on the rural romance genre?**

I see *Fava Beans* as a multicultural twist on a strongly Australian story in a uniquely Australian setting. There is the linking of ancient mythology from another country into an Australian landscape, which is important in linking two of the characters, Nayeema and Tom. I wanted to write a narrative with a strong immigrant voice and a strong Australian voice.

But the underlying themes are universal—on finding your place in the world, on our human need for connection and belonging, not just to people but also to place. That in finding a connection with people and place, you may actually find home.

I don't consider *Fava Beans* to be rural romance; it is oriented more towards the growing independence of my heroine and how she reinvents her life. If anything, it is the journey towards the ending of a marriage, to that

delicate point of awareness where it's possible to feel love for someone but you know you are better apart.

Tom, as the main male character, is a bit of an anti-hero. He is recognisably an Australian 'blokey-bloke' but he is also aware of his emotional fragility. I wanted to show Australian masculinity in an alternate way, with strength and power as well vulnerability.

**Would you like to see more diverse faces in Australian women's fiction or fiction in general?**

Absolutely, yes! I had a voracious appetite for reading when I was a child and I was always a little disappointed and confused that there were no stories that described me, or my cultural otherness, or the sense that I was on the periphery of the mainstream, or that I lived in-between worlds and languages and cultures. Where was I in fiction, or movies? I simply wasn't represented.

Diversity in every human endeavour is important because diversity represents life and our amazing, fabulous world. In fiction, diversity is especially important, now more than ever—as the movement of people across the world has never been higher—because stories have the power to humanise the stranger, the interloper.

**Why was it also important to tackle the topic of racism?**

I wanted to write an Australian story with a strong immigrant voice to draw out some of the subtle and overt racism that immigrants experience as well as cultural struggles with Australian idioms and language. Through Nayeema, we become sympathetic to her cultural struggles. She struggles with the language, the idioms, the jokes. Through Tom's point of view, I also wanted to show Nayeema's experience thru a different lens—as he thoughtlessly keeps referring to

her as 'Neema.'

I think it would be disingenuous to write about the immigrant or multicultural experience without tackling racism and I wanted to challenge the idea that everyone gets a fair go. Fawzy has strong ideas about what it means to be a good New Australian. He is hungry to assimilate and be accepted in his new home. Only after he is humiliated and socially outcast does he find that the idea of a fair go is nothing but a myth and he reverts to the familiarity of his heritage and culture.

**We were intrigued by the mention of your heroine having a mysterious birthmark on her chest and an impetuous jinn at her side, plus there being a hint of magical realism to the tale. Can you divulge any more?**

I was inspired by stories of ancient Egyptian mythology, myth, folklore and superstition. As a child, I was raised on that rich vein of storytelling. The recurrent motif of the mysterious birthmark on Nayeema's chest links back to superstition and folklore and brings faint strains of magical realism. My heroine has been troubled her entire life by this strange birthmark and only at the end of the novel is she able to make sense of it.

Her acceptance of superstition as the ordinary heightens the otherness in which we see her while she grapples with the strangeness of life in the country town. But culturally for Nayeema, references to the jinn, aka genie, are common enough.

The magical realism I reference is subtle and ambiguous and helped me to link the superstitions and mythology from another country into an Australian landscape. Through the mythology, the main characters express the universality of our human need for connection and belonging.

# Show, Don't Tell is a Layer Cake

by **Sandy Vaile**



Hi everyone, I'm Sandy Vaile, and I'm here to demystify the old "show, don't tell" adage.

We've all heard it, but it's often confusing, and therefore, difficult to apply to our own work. Telling has long been associated with bad writing, and showing with good writing. In my opinion, all the techniques in your writing craft toolbox are dependent on one another, and it's not possible to just learn them all and instantly be a good writer.

Most of us learn one new skill at a time, and once mastered, it comes naturally to us. Showing and telling are just extra skills for your toolbox, and when broken down into bite-sized pieces, will become integral to your writing style.

*Both* showing and telling are valuable, and there are degrees of each. It's not an all-in or all-out kind of thing.

**One creates drama and movement, and the other conveys information succinctly and poetically.**

The trick is to find the right balance between action and brevity, and a lot of that is done by feel. (Exactly why participants of my *Show, Don't Tell is Like a Layer Cake* workshop get plenty of opportunities to practice the techniques on their own work.)

I've given this a lot of thought over the years, and believe the focus is usually on showing, because telling comes naturally (we *are* story-tellers after all), but showing is layered with components, and so takes time to master.

So, if you agree that you are telling a story, then all you have to do is learn how to spot opportunities to *tell better, tell with more emotion, or show the action*. That doesn't sound too scary, right?

Personally, I think it's time to update the old adage to something like: **Show and Tell Effectively.**

## What's the Point?

The purpose of showing and telling

effectively is to totally immerse the reader in the story. It's about creating the ideal pace, diffusion of information, and making the most of dramatisation, in order to let the reader feel the emotional ups and downs of the character.

## The Differences

The appeal of **SHOWING** is that it lets the reader draw their own conclusions from the story and connect more deeply with the characters. The reader gets to experience events through the characters' actions, emotions, senses, thoughts and words.

Showing can add layers to characters and scenes, adding a vibrancy that makes the reader feel like they're actually there. It has a particularly powerful effect when there is an emotional upheaval for your point-of-view character.

The drawbacks are that it can be exhausting to be shown the minutiae of life for 300 pages, and it takes more words to get the same point across. In some cases, telling is more efficient.

Telling is a valuable tool to get necessary information across, to move quickly through time, or to move your characters from one location to another without showing the whole journey.

The reader has no interest in seeing everything your character does, from brushing her teeth to eating every spoonful of breakfast. Use 'telling' to move the story forwards in a succinct way and inform the reader of information they need to know.

The drawbacks are that being told information is never as exciting as discovering it for yourself.

Telling tends to distance the reader, rather than making them feel part of the story, because there's a tendency to see the world through the narrator's eyes rather than the character's. Instead let them experience the characters' struggles and success, and discover information in an organic way.



## When to Show and Tell

Remember, you don't have to choose between showing or telling; they exist in harmony.

Make the most of showing:

- ♥ during dramatic scenes, like when your character is undergoing emotional drama, conflict or decision-making.
- ♥ when you want to make a scene more vivid or dramatic.
- ♥ during action scenes.
- ♥ when your character interacts with their environment.
- ♥ through the subtext of character interactions and dialogue.

Utilise telling:

- ♥ when you transition between times or places.
- ♥ to state or condense information the reader must know, but which doesn't have a dramatic effect.
- ♥ to give the reader a quick reminder about critical information they already have.
- ♥ when releasing small snippets of backstory.
- ♥ to describe things/places succinctly and eloquently.

## Effective Showing and Telling Techniques

One of the easiest ways to make sure you are writing actively, is to *just show what's happening*. Pre-empting the action is a clue that you *aren't* doing this, e.g. she started to...

Labelling emotions can be a sign that you're missing an opportunity to engage the reader with how the character is feeling, e.g. instead of saying 'she was mad', show her punching the wall or glaring at the offender.

Avoid information dumps, which occur when the story material is poorly integrated with the action. It's one of the main reasons telling gets a bad rap, because it slows the forward movement of the story.

Instead make sure the information is necessary, and not just to the story as a whole, but right at that moment. Then integrate it in small amounts at appropriate times.

Description isn't about simply listing adjectives but about adding meaningful and specific details that layer your scene/character development. Also, make sure that you use words that support the tone of the story.

Employ all the senses to create

atmosphere in a scene—not necessarily all at once though.

Create fresh metaphors and similes to compare what's going on in the story with concepts readers are familiar with. This is a great way to build on the tone of a scene.

Dialogue is an active way for your characters to interact with one another and keeps things interesting. The best part about it is that it reveals so much more about the characters than what they are saying e.g. their attitudes and beliefs, upbringing, culture and personality.

Once you master the art of showing and telling effectively, you'll be amazed at how it lifts your storytelling, and becomes part of your writing style. You'll see opportunities to infuse it everywhere!

I hope you feel more relaxed about showing and telling now.

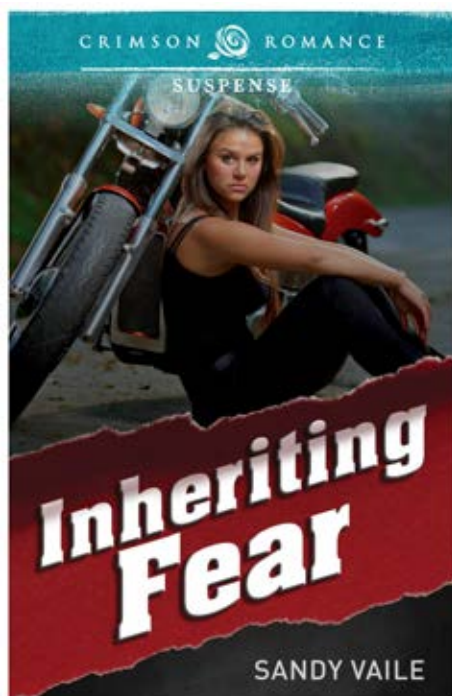
If you'd like to get some personalised feedback about how to improve showing and telling in your story, or a list of watch words, then grab a place in my popular *Bring Your Story into Focus* online workshop with RWA, starting on 4 June ([www.trybooking.com/348141](http://www.trybooking.com/348141)).

**Sandy Vaile is a motorbike-riding daredevil who isn't content with a story unless there's a courageous heroine and a dead body.**

**She writes romantic-suspense for Simon & Schuster US, and lives among the picturesque South Australian vineyards.**

**When she's not writing fiction, Sandy composes procedures for high-risk industrial processes, judges competitions for Romance Writers of Australia and Romance Writers of America, and runs the Novelist's Circle writers' groups.**

**For a fearless adventure into Aussie-flavoured prose, check out [www.sandyvaile.com](http://www.sandyvaile.com).**



# Hoot, Hoot! June OWLs



**Course Dates:** 4 June–1 July 2018

**Cost:** RWA Member—\$55. Non-RWA Member—\$88. \*Please note, there is a \$0.30 Trybooking fee at checkout.

## ***Grit for Writers* presented by Tamar Sloan**

**Booking:** [trybooking.com/348134](http://trybooking.com/348134)

*Grit for Writers* is premised on the knowledge that success in the writing industry is dependent on our passion and perseverance. The road to writing success, whether it be publication or bestseller status, is littered with unfinished manuscripts, dejected hearts, and writers wondering if they should turn around and head home. The reality is that success in the writing game is more of a marathon than a sprint, and to succeed we need grit.

Writing can be hard. It involves long hours to create something deeply personal, then putting it up for public consumption (translation: judgement). The rejection from agents and publishers, the negative reviews, and the most insidious under-miner, self-doubt, are all hurdles every writer will face. Despite what some of the loudest voices out there say, it's not always

an easy industry to succeed in. In a flooded, competitive market, how do you fulfil your passion and keep reaching for your dream?

Grit.

Grit is the ability to stick with things that are important to you, through hell and high water, thick and thin, and this course will teach you the mindset and behaviours necessary to pave the road to your writing success. You will learn how to recalibrate your mindset and how to motivate your actions with proven psychological strategies. Before you realise it, you'll be the writer you're proud of, the one others look up to, the one that lives their passion.

### **About the Presenter**

As a practicing psychologist and an award-winning author, Tamar is the creator of *PsychWriter: Where Psychology Meets Writing*. *PsychWriter* is a fun, engaging hub of information on character

development, the science of story and how to engage readers, and has gained hundreds of subscribers in its first 12 months. She is also a resident writing coach with the popular *Writers Helping Writers* website and a freelance developmental editor. Tamar is a hybrid young adult romance author, with several titles published traditionally and independently. The book, *Grit for Writers*, will be published in 2018.



## ***Pitch Like a Professional—a Conference Primer* presented by Anita Joy**

**Booking:** [trybooking.com/348155](http://trybooking.com/348155)

Gearing up for the RWAust conference in just a couple of months?

Excited but silently terrified about the opportunity to pitch your book to an editor or agent?

*Pitch Like a Professional* is a four-week conference primer, designed to get your synopsis, query letter, in-person pitch—and you!—glinting with readiness.

Each week will focus on one aspect of the pitching and submission skillset. As well as learning the secrets to successful submission, you will work on your own synopsis,

query letter and pitch, and then have an (optional) private session with your trainer to practice your pitch in a safe, one-on-one, face-to-face environment and get some feedback.

### **About the Presenter**

AJ Blythe (Anita Joy) is an experienced TAFE trainer and educator who has done her fiction-writing apprenticeship over many years in the close company of some of her favourite published authors.

She is that rarest of author-creatures: an author who loves to pitch. Anita thrives in short-form pitching and thinking on her feet. Since joining RWA in 2008, she has

been a finalist in the *High 5*, *Ripping Start* and *Valerie Parv* competitions and won the *Selling Synopsis* contest in 2013. Find her at [www.ajblythe.com](http://www.ajblythe.com) and @AussieCozy on Twitter.



# Hoot, Hoot! June OWLs



**Course Dates:** 4 June–1 July 2018

**Cost:** RWA Member—\$55. Non-RWA Member—\$88. \*Please note, there is a \$0.30 Trybooking fee at checkout.

## ***Bring Your Story into Focus* presented by Sandy Vaile**

**Booking:** [trybooking.com/348141](http://trybooking.com/348141)

*'Show, don't tell' is like a layer cake...*

We've all heard the old adage, 'show don't tell', but applying it often causes confusion, because it's riddled with contradictions. Both showing and telling are valuable techniques. One creates drama and movement, and the other conveys information succinctly and poetically.

Bring your story into focus by finding a balance between action and brevity that will captivate readers.

Participants will:

- ♥ discover when to show, and when it's okay to tell.
- ♥ identify and banish info dumps.
- ♥ practice infusing the story with relevant details.
- ♥ learn how to build a story in layers and create purposeful

scenes.

- ♥ explore how action can tell the story and engage the reader emotionally.

This popular workshop combines colourful handouts, tailored feedback, videos and live chats to engage participants. There will be plenty of opportunities to apply the learnings to individual work.

Sandy is a strong believer that learning outcomes are increased through collaboration and sharing, so she encourages this in a safe and nurturing environment. However, those who aren't comfortable with sharing are welcome to email their homework.

### **About the Presenter**

Sandy Vaile is a motorbike-riding daredevil who isn't content with a story unless there's a courageous heroine and a dead body. She writes romantic-suspense with attitude and is published by Simon &

Schuster US.

When she's not writing fiction, Sandy composes procedures for high-risk industrial processes, judges competitions for Romance Writers of Australia and Romance Writers of America, and runs the Novelist's Circle critiquing group. She lives among the South Australian vineyards and was a chef in a past life, hence the food analogies.

Visit [www.sandyvaile.com](http://www.sandyvaile.com).



## **Are you looking for a critique partner?**

Then join RWA's **critique partner scheme**. It provides a self-selection critique partner register where applicants can be appropriately matched with the view to forming ongoing critique partner relationships.

Full details and how to apply at [romanceaustralia.com](http://romanceaustralia.com).

## **Contests**

### **Lynne Wilding Meritorious Service Award**

Nominations for the Lynne Wilding award are open.

Established in 1996, this award recognises and honours an individual's outstanding voluntary contribution to RWA in the past 12 months.

As well as remembering a very special founding member and president of RWA, nominating for the annual Lynne Wilding Award is a wonderful way of acknowledging a member who has gone above-and-beyond and really contributed

to your (or another's) experiences *in the past year*.

Please let us know if the member you are nominating has a long history of volunteering but also focus firmly on what they have done in the past 12 months to enrich and add value to your RWA experience.

Nomination forms can be downloaded from the RWA website at [romanceaustralia.com/my-rwa/our-rwa/lynne-wilding-award](http://romanceaustralia.com/my-rwa/our-rwa/lynne-wilding-award).



# What's it Like to be a Writer's Partner and Share in a Writer's Life?

*A Writer's Life* with **Barbara Hannay**

I don't know the statistics regarding how many romance writers have long-term, live-in partners, but I'm guessing there's a fair swag of us. And there are possibly many, who, like me, realise we aren't always easy to live with.

We spend hours and hours locked away in imaginary worlds and even when we emerge and are 'present' in a conversation, part of our mind might still be 'away', tussling with a knotty story issue. At some time or other during the incubation of a book baby, we are usually plagued by doubts that the story won't work. It's a disaster! Our partners might remind us that we go through these pits of despair with every book, but we still wail that this time the book really could be hopeless.

It can't be easy for those looking on, poor loves.

I'm lucky that my partner, Elliot Hannay, is not only patient and understanding when these fits of gloom take over, but he actively encourages and helps me with my writing and has done, right from the start, long before I was published. So this month I asked him if he had any advice for other long-suffering partners of writers.

This is what he had to say...

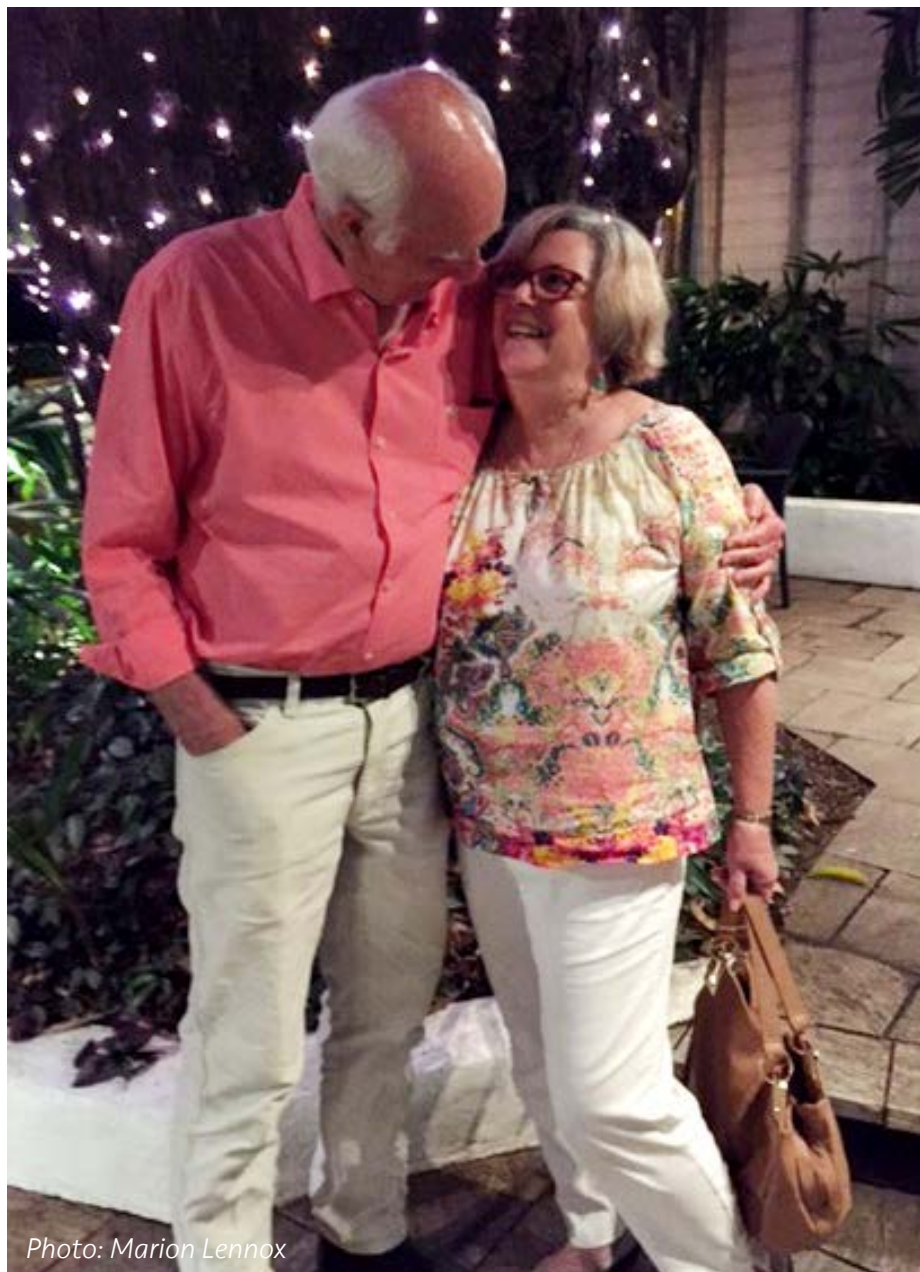
For my part, I do have a professional writing background, but in journalism, not fiction. While this helps me to understand the needs of my writer partner and the challenges she faces, I also run the risk of sticking my own writer's nose too deeply into her literary affairs.

I joke that I'm very well-read. I have read every book Barbara has ever written...over 50 of them in

the past 20 years, from pitches and submissions, through draft manuscripts to published electronic and hard copies that have found readers across the world. But during this process I have always deferred to her as the creator of these works and that's the best advice I can give any partner of a writer, or indeed to any 'first reader'.

Creative people, like all of us, need support and encouragement, but they most certainly don't need intrusion. By intrusion I mean unsolicited offers of help with storylines, characters or dialogue. The inspiration for these important elements should be left to 'the girls in the basement', those mystical creatures who give all romance writers their unique voices.

If a writer does ask a partner for help, particularly if the partner is a bloke, please note that the writer is not asking for the problem to be solved...they just want to share it. We blokes tend to see this as a cry for help, and we usually dive into the troubled waters to effect a heroic rescue, sure that we can come up with a definitive answer



*Photo: Marion Lennox*

that will blast through any writer's block and help create a bestseller.

It is much better, and a lot safer, to listen carefully and engage in an exchange of options, even a bit of brainstorming, which I've heard described as 'throwing spaghetti at the wall'. You have to be prepared for your bright ideas to be waved aside. Your writer is probably on the right track anyway and is just seeking some partner endorsement...or possibly just contact with a fellow human being who is not a frustrating character on the computer screen, who has just wandered off in the wrong direction. And, occasionally, your offering, coming from left field, really could be exactly what's needed, LOL.

Reading books by other writers or watching movies in your writer's chosen genre can be helpful. This not only deepens your understanding of what they're aiming for in terms of storyline and characters, it gives you a chance to discuss and pull a story apart without stepping on your author's sensitivities regarding their own work in progress.

If you're offered a part or full manuscript to read, possibly to check for typos or even to pass comment on, please give it your total attention...this is a much

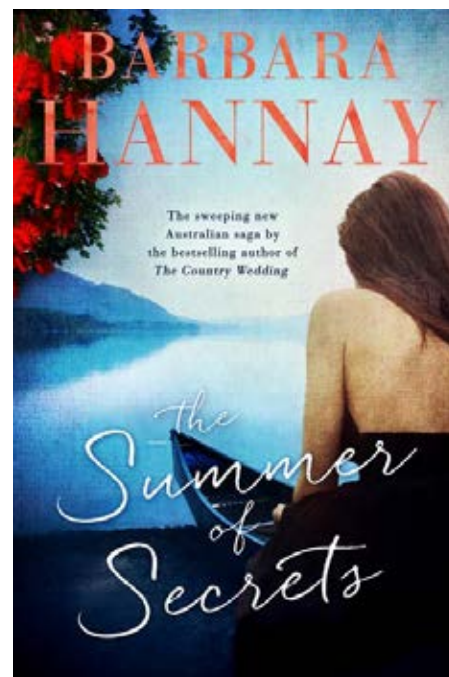
bigger deal than you realise. And I strongly recommend negotiating a time with the writer, during this, when it would be acceptable for you to take a tea/coffee or toilet break.

Okay, this comment might be a tad tongue-in-cheek, but it will avoid a problem which I understand is common to most writers and their first readers. The writer is actually waiting for you to lose interest, to hit a road-bump or become bored with the story. They assume this hidden problem with the text will be identified as soon as you physically put the manuscript down or leave the computer screen. For them, it will be the only reason you could have possibly stopped reading!

Your explanations about the overwhelming desire to drink tea or coffee at that point in the story, or a bladder at the point of bursting, just won't wash. Be warned.

Also a little flexibility regarding working hours can be needed too. If the creative spark is firing and your writer wants to stay up all night or start work in the early hours of the morning or some other equally annoying time, it's probably best to accept it.

Oh, and never ever worry too much about your partner-writer's sex scenes...be they in the dark and dank bedroom of a stately English mansion, on the cold hard



battlements of a Scottish castle, or in the comfort of a shared swag in the red dust of the Australian Outback...just accept that it's the creative thought process of our wonderful partners in full flight, with more than a little help from those cheeky girls in the basement.

**Barbara Hannay is a longstanding member and supporter of RWA. She is the author of over 50 novels, published by HMB category romance and Penguin single-title. Her latest release is *The Country Wedding*, and *The Summer of Secrets* will be out in July.**

## Committee Corner: Pauline Johnston

Hi, I'm the person on Committee who wears the Professional Development hat. I work as part of a team interested in the positive future of the association and the benefit of its members.

The OWL program is the mainstay of the portfolio, and I have served in several roles since its inception. It is an online learning platform, offering sometimes up to three workshops every month. The workshops cover a range of topics from basic craft to publishing, promotion and advertising. At the

end of the current year, we call for proposals for workshops for the following year. Every proposal is considered and a final calendar for the upcoming year is approved by the full committee. We aim to offer members the best, and this is not hard as our presenters are highly qualified.

For the first time this year we had a call-out for proposals for alternative delivery of workshops, etc. The response was fantastic, and the committee is working on how we can further develop the online

learning program—standby.

As well as being your Professional Development Coordinator, I am a writer and mother. I've played lots of roles in my life; most I've enjoyed. I love to travel, and one day I hope to own a dog, a German Shepherd would be my preference.

I'd love to hear more from members about their ideas for further developing our programs. You can email me at [owlsinfo@romanceaustralia.com](mailto:owlsinfo@romanceaustralia.com). Don't be shy. I don't bite—promise.



# The Power of Detail

The Write Stuff with **Anne Gracie**

Your job, as a writer of fiction, is to create a world into which readers are drawn, and are swept away. Key to achieving this is the compelling use of detail—*faithful, evocative detail*—bringing the world and people in the story to life. Detail is what makes a story feel real. Detail is show don't tell.

I'm not talking about inserting chunks of description; I don't mean exhaustively describing every thing about a character or place. The skill is in choosing the most pertinent, most evocative detail.

## Generic or Particular?

The first step in mastering the power of detail is to move from the generic to the particular. So, instead of:

*The boy was shabbily dressed and wore a peaked cap low over his eyes.*

You might write:—

*The boy's jeans were worn and grimy, his jacket too thin for the weather. He pulled his cap low over his eyes, as if he could hide behind it.*



Okay, it's twice as long—and you don't want to slow the story with chunks of description—but the picture is a little more vivid, and gives you some insight into the character of the boy.

Another approach would be to weave this description into a dialogue exchange, or to have the point-of-view character interpret what she sees. Good use of detail should be “not just description but *interpreted description*”. (Caro Clarke)

e.g. *He was on the run, escaped from a home maybe, in those cheap institutional jeans, worn now and grimy, and that jacket, too thin for the season. He saw her watching and tugged the peak of his cap lower. Hiding, definitely.*

So now we have a story, a question that the details evoke.

Detail is also language, and action. Look at the difference in the effect of these sentences:

- ♥ *She dropped the rose he'd given her and walked away.*
- ♥ *She dropped the rose he'd given her and trod on it.*
- ♥ *She dropped the rose he'd given her and ground it under her heel.*
- ♥ *She dropped the rose he'd given her, ground it under her heel, then scraped it off like a dog turd stuck to her shoe.*

## Don't include detail for the sake of it.

Too much detail can smother a story and slow the pace. What you want is the kind of detail that resonates, that's significant, that throws a shadow.

Look at the effect of these 'before and after' examples:

1a) *He was balding, with a tanned head and a fringe of grey curly hair.*

Pretty generic. Now see the same description from the main character's point of view—interpreted description.

1b) *Hair like steel wool grew far back on his head and gave him a domed brown forehead that might, at careless glance, have seemed a dwelling place for brains.* (Raymond Chandler)

*“Find the details, the exact details, the pertinent details, the details that reveal more than the one aspect of what you are describing, and you will have seized the secret heart of creating reality.”*

—Caro Clarke

The first description could be of any balding man. With the second, we get a more vivid image (hair like steel wool), and a glimpse of character—not just of the subject but of the POV character as well.

Here's another example of generic vs particular, interpreted detail:

2a) *When I first brought my baby home I just stared at him, learning him. I touched him and smelled his baby smell. And my life changed.*

2b) *I gazed at my baby son and I touched his tiny fingernails on his long, graceful hands. I stroked his peach-coloured cheek and bent my head into his neck to smell him. Not baby powder or soap, but him. I breathed it in like a lynx or a bear, with ferocity, so that even if I were blinded, I would know him.*

*The world shifted. Entirely.* (Barbara Samuel)

Good use of detail:



- ♥ can give insights into character (not just physical description, but mentality, mood, situation, etc.)

*“Write out of the reader’s imagination as well as your own. Supply the significant details and let the reader’s imagination do the rest. Make the reader a co-author of the story.”*

—Patrick F. McManus

- ♥ can evoke not just setting, but atmosphere
- ♥ can evoke emotion
- ♥ should give insight
- ♥ can heighten atmosphere
- ♥ can evoke a mood, evoke a moment
- ♥ can be a metaphor as well as description.

### How to Find the Most Compelling Detail

Brainstorm a list of possible details, then choose the most effective.

#### To harness the power of detail:

- 1) use vivid, realistic, nitty-gritty details to make the scene come alive for the reader.
- 2) try to avoid abstract and general language. Be concrete, particular, definite, specific.
- 3) use the senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing—but not all at once.
- 4) choose what to describe—what’s significant. Don’t swamp the story with details; one or two vivid and arresting details will make much more of an impact than a welter of information.
- 5) choose when to describe. Description can smother the impact or slow down a scene. Try to make yours earn its place and do more than one job.

6) be specific, but not too specific. Don’t box in the reader’s imagination.

7) try for the ‘aha’ factor—the part that makes the reader think: “I know what that’s like” or “This is so true!”

Finally, there are times when it is justified and effective to swamp the reader with detail. Here’s another ‘before and after’, in which our hero brings the governess heroine and her youthful charge a midnight feast purloined from an elegant and sophisticated party going on downstairs.

3a) *There were sandwiches, dips, pastries filled with various meats, bowls of mousse, and several kinds of fruit.*

All generic. Now try this version.

3b) *There were thin curls of brown-bread with cool, butter-dripping asparagus; scallop-shells filled with some delicious concoction of creamed crab; crisp pastries bulging with mushroom and chicken and lobster; petits fours bland with almonds, small glasses misty with frost and full of some creamy stuff tangy with strawberries and wine; peaches furry and glowing in a nest of glossy leaves; grapes frosted with sugar that sparkled in the firelight like a crust of diamonds...* (Mary Stewart, *Nine Coaches Waiting*)

*“Write a lot of detail, then cut back and cut back and cut back until you have the spare bones of a Truth.”*

—Barbara Samuel

#### Why this level of detail works in this case:

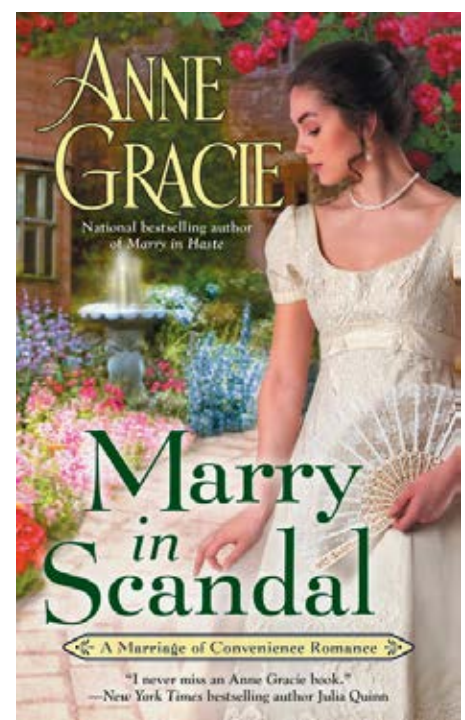
- ♥ It’s part of a pivotal scene where the hero demonstrates to the heroine that he can bridge their two very different worlds, that he will go to some trouble to bring a feast to a small boy and his governess.

- ♥ It shows the hero as heroic in that he’s brought them not just food from the party, but has taken a good deal of trouble with it. (Character)
- ♥ It gives a real sense of the luxury and sophistication of the party downstairs. (Setting, atmosphere)
- ♥ It’s so specific and particular you can almost see and smell and taste the food. (Evoking the senses)
- ♥ The description of the food is so poetic and gorgeously particular that it’s a feast for the senses in more ways than one.
- ♥ It evokes the atmosphere of a secret, almost magical midnight feast. (Mood)
- ♥ It’s a metaphor showing care and luxury and provision. (Metaphor)
- ♥ It’s a kind of love-making. (Metaphor)

Chekov famously said: “Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

That’s the power of detail.

**Anne Gracie is a multi-published author, a five-time RITA finalist, and a lifetime member of RWA. Find her at [www.annegracie.com](http://www.annegracie.com) or on FB or Twitter.**



# Chemistry–Snap, Crackle, Pop!

For the Love of Craft with **Samantha Bond**, [samanthastaceybond.com](http://samanthastaceybond.com)

At this year's Adelaide Writers' Week, I heard an academic say: "*Chemistry is biological; who you spend your time with and love is a choice.*" Perhaps something we romance writers have known for a while now?

Anyhoo, it got me thinking about love and that biological reaction we have to certain people that can only be described as 'chemistry'.

Romance writers know the importance of chemistry, but it's a tricky, tricky thing to break down at craft level. One may argue chemistry is either there or it's not.

But that's not particularly useful advice to improve your craft, is it?

So in an effort to write some craft advice about how to create and sustain chemistry on the page, I spoke to two of my favourite writers who are each releasing romance books in very different styles.

Carla Caruso's *The Right Place* (Harlequin HQ) is a dual timeline story featuring an Italian couple settling in Australia in the 1950s, and a contemporary Italian-Australian couple grappling with finding a sense of home.

And in Rebecca Freeborn's mystery romance debut, *Hot Pursuit* (Pantera Press), her heroine and hero race around the world to get a salacious scoop and find themselves in deadly danger.

I put Carla in the hot-seat and grilled her about how she used chemistry in *The Right Place*.

Carla: "To ensure enough 'snap, crackle and pop' between your hero and heroine, it could be useful to think back to a past love and the emotions they once stirred. Remember how your knees would shake and your pulse would race when you saw them, from across the room, enter a crowded party? How hyper-aware you were of their

presence even when you were too afraid to directly look at them yet? How, when your paths eventually crossed, you'd get so caught up in a conversation with them that friends and time would fade away and you wouldn't even notice? How your hero could see through any façade you 'wore' and cut to the heart of what you were really thinking, in a way no one else could?

"Meanwhile the focus on my 1950s heroine wasn't so much the love story but the female friendships. And there is also that chemistry simply between people who gel. When you find people you click with, whose souls sing the same tune as yours. My modern-day heroine has that sort of chemistry with her Italian grandmother, or nonna. There is a warmth and understanding between this pair, which is as much about the unspoken words as the spoken. My protagonist shares traits and values with her nonna, which she doesn't with her own mother."

This is a great reminder to us all that 'chemistry' exists between characters other than your love interests.

Think of the friends and even family members in your life. Who do you have the most chemistry with, and why?

Personally, I think as we get older, the opportunity to make new friends diminishes and those we do connect with are usually pretty special.

To assist your craft, perhaps make a dot-point list of all the reasons you 'click' with those people in your life.

For me, all the friends I've made in the last decade are writers. They think like me, they get excited about books and writing like I do—we have stuff in common!

And for Rebecca, who uses the

romance trope of friends-to-lovers so well, I asked her how the chemistry/tension builds between her heroine and hero in *Hot Pursuit*.

What is it that they like (and hate) about each other, and how does that develop into a mutual attraction?

Rebecca: "Sarah and Nick have a history together, so the attraction is already there, but he humiliated her afterwards and she's never forgiven him."

This is a great platform from which to launch a believable frenemy situation.

The biological attraction is there, but so is the distrust and hurt that must be overcome during the course of the story.

Can you think of other stories that use this sort of trope (an existing wound between your lovers) that keeps them apart?

Off the top of my head is *Bridget Jones's Diary*—Mark Darcy insults Bridget at her mother's Christmas party, and despite her attraction to him, this wound to her ego keeps them apart for most of the story.

From there, Rebecca goes on to explain how she creates chemistry in *Hot Pursuit*:

♥ Nick constantly antagonises Sarah. They lash out at one another over misunderstandings. She is emotionally vulnerable after a recent break-up and they clash over her ex-boyfriend, who is also Nick's best friend.

♥ As they spend more time together, she realises that some of the assumptions she'd made about Nick were wrong. For example, she thought he was a sexist pig, but he gradually shows that he's actually kind of a feminist and he's remembered

the things that are important to her.

- ♥ They are working together, and as their professional partnership becomes stronger, they develop mutual respect and friendship.
- ♥ Danger! Having their own lives under threat draws them closer together and heightens the tension between them. The increasing risk of the job also serves to make them realise they care for one another, and they both take risks to help each other.

Rebecca's general advice for creating chemistry on the page is to:

- ♥ Keep your characters apart for as long as you can. Bring them so tantalisingly close the reader can almost taste it, then throw something else at them to push them apart, for example:

- ♥ past behaviour/mistakes
- ♥ misconceptions or misunderstandings
- ♥ an ex-partner coming back on the scene
- ♥ someone trying to kill them.

- ♥ Continue to raise the stakes to increase the emotional tension until one or both need to make a change to themselves that helps them realise the way they feel about each other.

- ♥ Far and away the biggest thing is respect—even if the characters start out hating one another, they need to have at least a grudging respect for each other. Physical chemistry is awesome, but it should always go hand in hand with respect, and the respect should grow as the attraction does.

So after all that great advice, here's a list for you to consider when creating chemistry on the page:

- ♥ How do you create 'snap, crackle, pop' in your story? Think to past love experiences you've had or would like to have. Remember those feelings and write about them.



- ♥ What is keeping your characters apart in the first place? Is it believable and strong enough to keep them apart for most of the story?

- ♥ What do they like and hate about each other? How will that change over the course of your story?

- ♥ What do your characters have in common? It's fine to have seemingly opposites attract, but at their core, there must be some commonality or their pairing is unbelievable. How will you give them things to connect over at the heart level?

- ♥ Think about the other people in your life who are not romantic relationships but with whom you have chemistry. Bet you love them as much but differently to your partner or past partners. Why do these relationships work? Try making a list.

- ♥ Banter. Never dismiss the sizzle that a good bit of banter can bring.

- ♥ Can you put your lovers in danger? How will they react to that? Does it raise the heat level so they must act on their feelings?

- ♥ Finally, think about the difference between the biological pull of chemistry, and that more mature decision that often comes at the end of a story—the *decision* to love.

**Samantha Bond is a reformed lawyer and unreformed bibliophile. Her first short story was published in *Girlfriend* magazine when she was 15 and she has since been published in various anthologies and magazines, and online. Sam teaches professional writing at TAFE, runs face-to-face and online workshops, and provides private writing tuition. If you'd like her assistance, she offers a 10 per cent discount to RWA members for editing and mentoring services.**



# NEW RELEASES MAY 2018

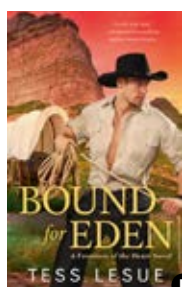
**E** Title available as ebook. **P** Title available as print and ebook.



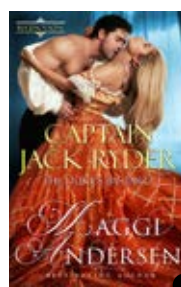
**Rebecca Raine**  
*All the Broken Pieces*  
Indie Published



**Ally Blake**  
*Amber and the Rogue Prince*  
Mills & Boon  
Forever Romance



**Tess LeSue**  
*Bound for Eden*  
Berkley/Penguin  
Random House



**Maggi Andersen**  
*Captain Jack Ryder*  
Indie Published



**Annie Seaton**  
*Deadly Secrets*  
Emerald Romance



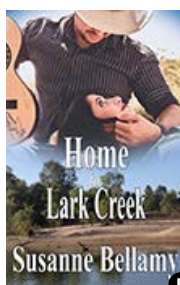
**Ann B. Harrison**  
*Doctor's Orders*  
Tule Publishing



**Lena West**  
*Finding Mr Wright*  
Gymea Publishing



**Susanne Bellamy**  
*High Stakes*  
Indie Published



**Susanne Bellamy**  
*Home to Lark Creek*  
Indie Published



**Jane Hinchey**  
*Immortal Ties*  
Baywolf



**Isabella Hargreaves**  
*Lord Muck & Lady Alice*  
Indie Published



**Janet Gover**  
*Marrying the Rebel Prince*  
HQ Digital



**Leisl Leighton**  
*Moon Bound*  
Escape Publishing



**Ainslie Paton**  
*One Night Wife*  
Entangled



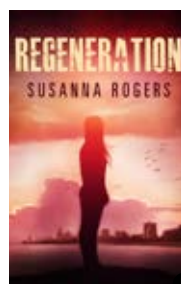
**Robert LJ Borg**  
*Out of the Darkness*  
Luminosity Publishing



**Leisl Leighton**  
*Pack Bound*  
Escape Publishing



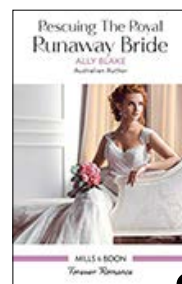
**Louise Forster**  
*Promises in Tumble Creek*  
Escape Publishing



**Susanna Rogers**  
*Regeneration*  
Indie Published



**Jill Staunton**  
*Reiver's Moon*  
Boolarong Press



**Ally Blake**  
*Rescuing the Royal Runaway Bride*  
Mills and Boon  
Forever Romance



**TJ Nichols**  
*Rogue in the Making*  
DSP Publications



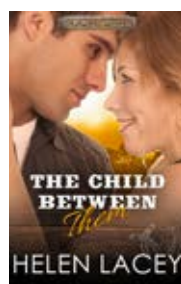
**Leisl Leighton**  
*Shifter Bound*  
Escape Publishing



**Narelle Atkins**  
*Solo Tu: Only You*  
Indie Published



**Tracy Brenton**  
*Spark*  
Indie Published



**Helen Lacey**  
*The Child Between Them*  
HJL Imprints



**Alyssa J Montgomery**  
*The Irresistible Royal*  
Escape Publishing



**Bernadette Rowley**  
*The Master and the Sorceress*  
Smashwords



**Heidi Catherine**  
*The Shadowmaker*  
Crooked Cat Books



**Kate Loveday**  
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Scribes Ink Publishing



**Keri Arthur**  
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*Unlocking the Millionaire's Heart*  
Mills & Boon  
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**Shannon Curtis**  
*Wolf Undaunted*  
Harlequin Nocturne

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You will need to login to the website first. You can also include a URL to link to a book page or author website.

Covers and information must be received by the 15th of the month prior to publication.