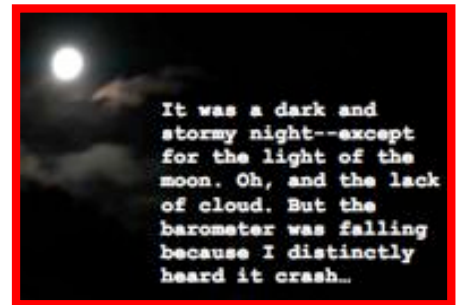


# HEART TO HEART

## Dynamite Beginnings

**Deborah Nemeth**, a developmental editor for Carina Press, tells us what piques an editor's interest when she opens a submission.



**E**very time I open a submission, I feel an exciting tingle of possibility, wondering whether it might be a treasure. Although I read widely and acquire fiction across a variety of genres, there are common elements in a submission that will entice me to keep reading. Because the honest truth is, if you don't grab an editor at the beginning, it's unlikely your full manuscript—no matter how wonderful—will ever be read. Give me a first paragraph that will make me want to read a second, a first page that will take me to page two, and so forth, turning pages until I've finished it—preferably without putting the ms down.

### What do I think constitutes a great beginning?

- I want an opening unlike any I've ever seen before.
- I want to fall into a story and forget that I'm reading. I want it to involve me, to engage my intellect and my emotions.
- I want vivid, memorable characters.
- I want intelligent writing, precise language and fresh imagery.
- I want a strong voice with a pleasing cadence.
- I want prose with good energy, prose that sparkles.

I'm not asking for much, am I? But it's certainly possible to do all this.

[www.romancewriters.co.nz](http://www.romancewriters.co.nz)

**Openings need to be tight.** Each word, each sentence should do double duty—setting the scene, establishing mood, developing characters, driving the plot, introducing conflict. You can hook a reader with description and strong writing, but that's harder than opening in action or dialogue, so newer authors might want to stick to the latter.

**Avoid a tired opening**, one that's been used so often it makes editors suspect the rest of the story will be as predictable. One such overdone opening is the "My name is...I was born in..." biographical opening. Another is the heroine waking up, even though I've seen it work when given a twist. Romantic suspense submissions often contain a prologue showing a murder, so it's refreshing when we see something different. In romances and women's fiction, I'm tired of the BFF telling the heroine/hero she/he needs to get laid, or the heroine catching her husband/lover in bed with another woman. Others include the heroine getting a makeover to win the hero's heart, and the jaded Regency hero making love to his mistress before dumping her. Editors won't always pass on a manuscript containing one of these openings, but it's a handicap that takes an awesome voice to overcome, and there's a chance the author will be asked to revise the first scene during edits.

**What should an author do instead?**  
**Tease me.** Make me curious about a compelling situation. Make me ask questions, about why someone's hiding

or lying or fleeing or being arrested. Surprise me with elements that don't usually go together. For instance, in Madeleine Wickham's 1998 novel *The Gatecrasher*, the heroine goes to funerals to pick up men, which is decidedly unusual. In Keri Stevens' *Stone Kissed*, stone statues talk to the heroine. As Jenny Schwartz's *Angel Thief* opens, the heroine is caught breaking into someone's house to steal an ancient book—unexpected since she's the angel in charge of the heavenly library.

**Make me want to get to know an intriguing character.** Does the hero have an outside aspect to his character, something specific or idiosyncratic that attracts my attention? Resist the temptation to make your protagonists too good or too perfect, too boring or too generic. Generally editors are going to be most interested in protagonists who are passionate about their goals. There's a reason obsessive characters can be riveting. Their goal might be to achieve something, or prevent something, or avoid something. But whatever the characters want or are concerned about, they need to be strongly motivated. A burning desire for revenge. Desperation to retain custody of one's children. A compulsion to prove oneself. What's at stake if the heroine doesn't achieve her goal? The higher the stakes, the more likely readers will want to keep reading to find out what happens next.

(continued on page 5)

## Inside This Issue

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- 17 **LESLIE WAINGER** describes ways to create emotional conflict.
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- 19 **REGIONAL UPDATES** on our monthly meetings around the country.
- 20 **WRITERS' CORNER** answers a question on writing Medical Romance.

### WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS:

Sophie Tayler from Hamilton  
Susan Hall from Karori  
Mary Robbins from Auckland  
Jayne Hartland from Auckland  
Cathy Shaw from Timaru  
Miriam Busby from Aro Valley  
Hanlie Botha from Ohaupo  
Christine Slater from Ponsonby

# Editors' Desk

*It's hard to believe this is our March edition and a sixth of the year has gone already!*

First of all, we're thrilled to welcome the newest member of our editorial team, Karen Browning, proofreader *extraordinaire*. Karen, we really appreciate your excellent work on our new look H2H.

**Huge** congratulations to all of you who have moved heaven, earth, grumpy partners, and half Cadbury's monthly output of *[insert chocolate of choice here]* to ensure you not only "finished the damn book" but also got it proofed, printed, packed and... something else beginning with "p" that means "to Shirley Megget before the cut-off date". It's an incredible achievement and you deserve that lovely glow you're currently feeling.

Now, before you lose impetus, look below and see what other contests are coming up. Your short stories should be chugging along happily (in your brain if not yet on computer). It's now time to turn your attention to Harlequin Mills & Boon's Great Beginnings Contest.

But whether or not you write Category (and in keeping with our theme of "Book in a Year") your intrepid editors have sourced all sorts of wonderful stuff on how to make the openings of your works the kind that will grab an editor by the tonsils and shake her till she rattles. So make that cup of coffee you've been promising yourself, snuggle up on the sofa, read on, and become inspired.

**And so that you remain inspired we (the editors) have a little surprise for you on page 9!**

*Gracie, Rachel, Bron, & Karen*

## RWNZ CONTEST SCHEDULE 2011

### CHAPTER SHORT STORY CONTEST

**Closes Friday, 25 March 2011**

Final Judge: Julie Redlich, Fiction Editor, Woman's Day  
(Entry information is available on RWNZ's website.)

### HMB GREAT BEGINNINGS CONTEST

**Closes Friday, 15 April 2011**

Final Judge: (An editor from HMB)  
(Entry information is available on RWNZ's website.)

### STRICTLY SINGLE CONTEST

**Closes Friday, 23 September 2011**

Final Judge: Alex Logan, Grand Central Publishing  
Agent Judge: Elaine Spencer, The Knight Agency  
(Entry information is available on RWNZ's website.)

If you have any questions, contact  
Viv Constable, Contests Coordinator:  
[vconstable@xtra.co.nz](mailto:vconstable@xtra.co.nz)

# From The Pres.

## All the latest buzz happening in RWNZ!

President **Abby Gaines** updates us on the news from the Exec and the 2011 Conference Committee.



Over the next few months, you'll see announcements coming through about RWNZ's 2011 conference, to be held August 19-21 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in central Auckland. This month, I'm thrilled to announce that our keynote speaker will be... drum roll... multi-bestselling romantic suspense and thriller author **Tess Gerritsen**!

More than 20 million copies of Tess Gerritsen's books have been sold around the world. Tess is a doctor by profession, and many of her books have been medical thrillers. She's been on the New York Times bestseller list, and she has won both the Nero Wolfe Award (for *Vanish*) and the Rita Award (for *The Surgeon*). Critics have praised her novels as "Pulse-pounding fun" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), "Scary and brilliant" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*), and "Polished, riveting prose" (*Chicago Tribune*). Publishers Weekly has dubbed her the "medical suspense queen".

Excitingly, her series of novels featuring homicide detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles inspired the TNT television series *Rizzoli & Isles*, currently showing in the USA and around the world. Best of all, Tess Gerritsen has a reputation as a smart woman who's generous with her advice to writers—as anyone who's read her own blog or her columns on the Murderati site will know.

### In other news...

**Angela James**, executive editor of Carina Press (Harlequin's digital-first imprint) will be speaking at our conference and taking pitches. Angela gives us the best of all worlds—she's actively acquiring as an editor, but she also has a high-level view on (and unusually deep knowledge of) digital publishing.

**Molly O'Keefe** is also joining our speaker lineup. Molly has published 18 books with Harlequin and currently writes for Harlequin Superromance. She won the 2010 RITA for Best Novella, and has her first single title novel

coming out from Bantam next year—according to Bantam the book is "a contemporary romance sure to delight fans of Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Jennifer Crusie, and Susan Mallery." What more could you want?

And just to update you about **Bob Mayer**, our Friday workshop speaker... Bob will be giving his acclaimed one-day Writing a Novel Workshop—see elsewhere in this newsletter for a provisional agenda. The great news is—conference delegates will be invited to submit material such as one-line pitches, query letters, a synopsis, character sketch etc to Bob ahead of time. He'll pick some and use them (anonymously) during the presentation to show how it all works. It's a fantastic opportunity to learn from a New York Times bestselling author (and ex-Special Forces agent, don't forget!)—I for one am really looking forward to his workshop. Bob will also be speaking during the weekend conference sessions.

We're still working to sign up editors and a literary agent for the conference—watch this space.

### Free Online Workshop

RWNZ is delighted to offer a free online workshop to RWNZ members. **Using Goal, Motivation and Conflict to Build Characters and Plot** will be taught by authors **Lori Devoti** and **Kathy Steffen**. The workshop will start Monday March 7 and will run for 10 days. Here's the blurb Lori has supplied to describe the workshop:

*"It's amazing what two little sentences can do for keeping your characters and plot on track. Learn this magic formula along with the specific elements every goal must have to work for your book, how to know if the motivation you choose fits your characters and how to test your conflict to make sure it won't fizzle out when the story is only halfway done."*

Sounds great! Huge thanks to Lori and Kathy for volunteering their time and skills to RWNZ. Thanks also to Bronwen Evans for unearthing this great opportunity for us.

We're looking for someone to act as registrar for this workshop—to record the names of "attendees" and to email out login details shortly before the start of the workshop. It's probably a couple of hours' work. If you can do this, please email me on [abby@abbygaines.com](mailto:abby@abbygaines.com)

### RWNZ Website

If you haven't already seen mention of it on the NZromance loop, RWNZ's website has been redesigned—check it out at [www.romancewriters.co.nz](http://www.romancewriters.co.nz). The new site is designed for us to do the maintenance ourselves, which makes it more flexible and more up-to-date. Big thanks to Sandra Hyatt for driving the development of the new site, and to Kamy Chetty for her ongoing involvement in maintaining the site.

### Clendon Award last chance

Watch out, the February 25 closing date for the 2011 Clendon Award is looming! If you're planning to submit your completed romance novel manuscript to the contest, you'd better get moving. Remember, first-round judges are dedicated romance readers, not writers, and you'll receive comprehensive scoresheets from a minimum of three readers. If you're a finalist, your manuscript will be sent to **Mary-Theresa Hussey** at Harlequin in New York for final judging. Mary-Theresa reads both category romance (Harlequin Mills & Boon) and single title novels ("bigger books") across all romance genres—historical, contemporary, paranormal, suspense, etc. Shirley Megget is kindly acting as contest coordinator this year. Contact: [shirley.megget@gmail.com](mailto:shirley.megget@gmail.com) with any questions you have or for an entry form. The form is also on the RWNZ website. ■





# Woos, Hoos, and News

**Celebrating our members' achievements.**

**Tyree Connor** brings us up-to-the-minute info about our successes here and overseas.

## New and Upcoming Releases



**He's The One**  
Jane Beckenham  
Samhain  
Release in print



**Black Hawke Down**  
Serenity Woods  
Noble Romance



**Rossellini's Revenge Affair / Tycoon's Valentine Vendetta**  
Yvonne Lindsay  
HMB Bestseller Collection



**Invitation to Ruin**  
Bronwen Evans  
Kensington Brava

## Even more Upcoming Releases

<b>Surrender Your Heart</b>	Serenity Woods	Noble Romance	February 28th
<b>Bohemian Rhapsody</b>	Serenity Woods	My Weekly in the UK	
<b>Here Comes The Groom</b>	Karina Bliss	Special Moments imprint	Available in NZ bookstores in March
<b>The Wedding Charade</b>	Melanie Milburne	Sexy	March
<b>Walk on the Wild Side</b>	Natalie Anderson	Sexy	March

## Sales and Contracts

**Jean Drew** has signed her contract for *The Fires of Passion*, the companion to *Yesterday's Dreams*, to The Wild Rose Press.  
**Sue MacKay** has sold *Return of the Lone Wolf Doctor* to Harlequin M&B. Out in September/October.  
**Lyn Rasmussen** has sold her Regency novella, *The Duke's Blackmailed Bride* to The Wild Rose Press.  
**Abby Gaines** has been offered a two-book contract with Harlequin's Love Inspired Historical line.

## The Lists

**Bronwen Evans'** debut Regency Historical *Invitation to Ruin* received a 4.5 Star review from RT Book Reviews and a very positive review from Publishers Weekly.  
**Nalini Singh's** *Archangel's Consort* hit the New York Times, USA Today and Publisher's Weekly Bestseller lists!

## Overseas Competition Results

**Michelle de Rooy** has been one busy--and successful--little bee. Not only has she moved to the Second Round of the *Emerald Award Single Title* section with not one, but TWO manuscripts, but she's also moved to the Second Round of the *Emerald Award Category* section. But wait! There's more! She has also taken **Fifth** place in the *WHRWA Emily* contest! Go Michelle!

**Suzanne Webb** placed **First** in the *Stali* and received a **manuscript request**.

**Christine Taylor** also finalled the *Stali*.

**Susanna Rogers** came **First and Second** in the *Valley of the Sun Hot Prospects Contest* in the romantic suspense category with two different entries. She also came **First** in the *Florida Romance Writers Golden Palm Contest* and has had a **manuscript requested** by the agent judge.

**Barbara Jeffcott Geris** attained **First AND Second** place in the *Colorado Romance Writers 2010 Heart of the Rockies Contest Long Contemporary* category.

Finalists in the *North Texas RWA 2011*

*Great Expectations* contest are **Diana Holmes, Abby Gaines** and **Joanna Rix**. Good luck!

**Clare Scott** is the winner of 'Lucky In Love' competition in *Lucky Break* magazine with her real-life wedding disaster story, a two-page spread with photos and \$1000!!! (There is always a silver lining to life's mishaps.)

Email Tyree at [rocker.t@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rocker.t@xtra.co.nz) with your successes to be included on this page.

Of course, it's not enough to give your hero and heroine strong goals. You need to make it hard for them to achieve. You need conflict, something (or someone) that's preventing them from reaching their goal. The power of a story often rides on the strength and believability of a book's conflict. Don't choose conflict that's too easily overcome or can be perceived as unimportant. For instance, misunderstandings make for flimsy conflict. You want good strong roadblocks, obstacles that should grow as the story progresses.

**A great beginning opens when the story does.** This is typically when the status quo is shaken up, but it can be tricky to figure out how much of the status quo to show before things get shook up. Some stories need a little more setup than others, and this can work well if the character is pursuing an interesting goal before the inciting incident knocks her off course. But don't fall into the trap of stalling your action with info dumps. It's okay to set the scene in action, but you'll bore the reader if you provide too much backstory, geography and/or history. World-building needs to be layered in carefully, in small doses, not dumped on us in long passages of exposition. Give the reader the minimal amount of information needed to follow the action. Once we're sucked in by the character, goal, motivation and conflict, you can sketch in the rest of the details.

**Avoid the overpopulation trap.** Don't try to introduce too many characters in the first scene. Keep the focus on your protagonist(s) and perhaps your villain. Sure, you can have secondary characters in the early chapters, but if you throw six names at me on the first page, I'll probably be too busy trying to remember who's who to be engaged by the hero's goal.

**It's become rather a cliché in many romance novels for the hero to move when the hero and heroine first lay eyes on each other.** Pulses pound, hearts race, throats go dry while eyes drown in sky-blue /violet/ stormy/ chocolate gazes. The characters stumble, fumble and forget what they're doing. In steamier reads, sometimes their nether regions react too—nipples peak, blood rushes to groins, desire curls into wombs, and certain body parts either stiffen or dampen, depending on gender. And let's not forget the

obligatory sparks of electricity that race through entire bodies at the first skin-on-skin contact.

Yes, many published romances contain these types of reactions, but editors and readers grow weary of them. I prefer a less overwritten initial reaction, and more subtlety as the attraction grows. Perhaps a hero and heroine are so passionately caught up in pursuing his or her own goal—or so annoyed or mistrustful or disgusted or scornful or furious with the other—that they barely notice the other physically...at least, at first. When they do start taking notice, it's great if the features and aspects that attract them are less clichéd and include personality traits as well as physical ones.

It can be tempting to rush to submit a ms once you've typed the end, but take time to polish your opus more than once so you're putting your best foot forward. Get feedback from trusted critique

World-building needs  
to be layered in  
carefully, in small  
doses, not dumped on  
us in long passages of  
exposition.

partners and beta readers. I suggest you let it sit for a month or at least a few weeks so you can evaluate it with fresh eyes.

For your prose to shine, the writing needs to be tight. Cull repetition. Repetition can take several forms, including making the same point a few different ways or characters thinking something before uttering it in dialogue. Cut explanations—resist the urge to explain the obvious. Trust your reader to connect the dots, to figure out the relationship between action and reaction. Allow your dialogue to convey subtext.

**Take a look at your proportion of narration to action.** Are you showing instead of telling? If you are naming emotions, you are most likely telling instead of (or in addition to) showing. Have your angry heroine yank, stomp, pound or slam something instead of describing her as furious. Bring us into deep viewpoint. Describe an involuntary physical reaction or use direct thought to convey a reaction rather than telling the reader your character is shocked, upset, terrified or hurt.

Another way to write in deeper viewpoint, thereby engaging your readers more deeply into your story, is to eliminate filter words. Filter words are words such as felt, thought, decided, wondered, remembered, knew, realized, figured, assumed, worked out, saw, watched, looked, sensed, smelled and heard. These words tell, because they convey information to the reader through the filter of the character's experience, thus reminding them that they're being told about the scene. It's fine to use filter words on occasion—they can be an economical way of conveying information, and they're particularly useful when establishing point of view at the beginning of a scene. However, if used too much, they can distance the reader and slow the pace.

By cutting filters, an author can instead create the impression that the reader is experiencing the action themselves. Once a viewpoint has been established, it's not necessary to tell the reader the viewpoint character realizes /hears /smells /watches /knows anything. If you simply present the action as it unfolds, describing sounds and sights and thoughts and conclusions as they occur, readers will understand it's what the viewpoint character sees /smells /hears /thinks. Writing in deep viewpoint draws the reader closer to the characters, immersing them further into the story, giving him/her a richer, more emotionally engaging experience.

Before submitting your ms, read it out loud. Listen to the rhythms of your prose. Are there syntactical patterns that jump out, such as beginning too many sentences with She or a participle? Are you using a variety of sentence lengths? Is the dialogue natural? Are characters using contractions, and fragments when called for, or are they always speaking in overly formal complete sentences? Are they telling each other things they already know?

So are you ready to submit? Carina Press is looking for great stories in all genres of commercial fiction except YA, especially romance. Our acquiring editors are often asked what we're looking for in terms of subgenres, content and themes, or what we want to see more of. At the moment we're looking for more steampunk and historicals, but honestly we don't really know what we want until we see it. If you give your secret-baby, marriage-of-convenience or friends-to-lovers romance a unique slant, it'll pique our interest. And if you've penned a great

(continued on page 10)



# Contests and Markets

## Don't know where to place your work?

Here are a few suggestions for where you can get feedback on your writing and even make a sale.

### Overseas Contests

Compiled by Lisa Gardiner w/a Lisa Whitefern

#### Central Florida RWAmerica Touch Of Magic Contest

**Deadline:** March 20, 2011

**Eligibility:** Not published in book-length fiction in past 5 yrs

**Enter:** 1st 25 pgs plus unjudged synopsis (3 pp max)

**Fee:** \$25 US

[http://www.cfrwa.com/?page\\_id=28](http://www.cfrwa.com/?page_id=28)

#### Romantic Shorts New Year New Story 2011 Short Story Contest

**Deadline:** March 20, 2011

**Eligibility:** Unpublished adult writers

**Enter:** Complete story (4,500 wd min - 6,000 wd max)

**Fee:** \$10 Canadian

[http://www.romanticshorts.com/Romantic\\_Shots/Competition\\_Announcements.html](http://www.romanticshorts.com/Romantic_Shots/Competition_Announcements.html)

#### Virginia RWAmerica Fool for Love Contest

**Deadline:** midnight EST April 1, 2011

**Eligibility:** Anyone not published or contracted in book length in any form. Published author category is open to entrants not published or contracted in past 3 years.

**Enter:** 1st 50 pp plus optional synopsis (5 pp max)

**Fee:** \$35 US

<http://www.virginiaromancewriters.com/Contests/ffl.html>

#### Heart and Scroll RWAmerica Magic Moments

**Deadline:** midnight EST April 1, 2011

**Eligibility:** Unpublished in last 5 yrs

**Enter:** Romance

**Fee:** \$30 US

[http://www.heartandscroll.com/contest\\_MagicMoment\\_rules.htm](http://www.heartandscroll.com/contest_MagicMoment_rules.htm)

#### Faith, Hope & Love RWAmerica Touched By Love

**Deadline:** midnight EST April 1, 2011

**Eligibility:** Unpublished / not published in last 3 yrs

**Enter:** Inspirational Romance

**Fee:** \$25 US

<http://www.faithhopelove-rwa.org/tbl.html>

#### Alaska RWAmerica Breakup Contest

**Deadline:** midnight EST May 1, 2011

**Eligibility:** Unpublished

**Enter:** Best breakup in a romance novel, big fight, darkest moment or makeup scene (10 pp max), setup / synopsis (3 pp max) which will not be judged

**Fee:** \$30 US

<http://www.alaskawriters.com/membersites/akrwa/about.html>

### Potential Markets

Compiled by P. D. R. Lindsay-Salmon

#### Samhain Publishing

POD and epubliher. Seeks all types of romance. Currently seeking romance novella for a cyberpunk romance anthology.

**Details:** [www.samhainpublishing.com](http://www.samhainpublishing.com)

**email:** [editor@samhainpublishing.com](mailto:editor@samhainpublishing.com)

#### AddaBook

Swedish epubliher seeks very short stories for smart phones. Also accepts short stories and novel submissions. Romance accepted.

**Details:** [www.addabook.com](http://www.addabook.com)

**email:** [contact@addabook.com](mailto:contact@addabook.com)

#### Medallion Press

US epubliher, seeking subs of full length novels, romance accepted.

Check the guidelines carefully for formatting details. Query as directed.

**Details:** [www.medallionpress.com](http://www.medallionpress.com)

**email:** [submissions@medallionpress.com](mailto:submissions@medallionpress.com)

#### Mundania

US POD and epubliher.

Seeking paranormal romance and steam punk romance. Americanize your format and spellings! Read the guidelines carefully.

**Details:** [www.mundania.com](http://www.mundania.com)

**email:** [submissions@mundania.com](mailto:submissions@mundania.com)

#### FINALIST LOGO AVAILABLE

If you've finalled in one of our RWNZ contests and you'd like an RWNZ contest finalist logo for your website or blog contact Suzanne on

[Suzanne.perazzini@orcon.net.nz](mailto:Suzanne.perazzini@orcon.net.nz)

The Editors of Heart To Heart would like to thank Lisa Gardiner for her faithful work behind the scenes for the last few years, sourcing competitions for us. Lisa, we really appreciate your contribution, we're sorry to lose you, and we hope to see your career take off like crazy!



# Begin With A Bang!

**Should I start with action? Narrative? Dialogue? Backstory?**

Author **Sherry Lewis** shares her top six useful tips for writing an effective and interesting opening.



**Y**our first line sells the book. Your last line sells the next book." At least that's what crime writer Mickey Spillane once said. If that's true, then none of us can afford to take chances with that all-important opening. But what should that opening be? Action? Narrative? Dialogue? Backfill?

Beginnings are hard. Let's get that on the table right away. It's not easy to get everything you need into the first few sentences of your novel. After almost twenty years, beginnings are still hard work for me. Sometimes I get lucky and write a great opening paragraph on the first try. Usually, I write the real beginning after I've already written to the end. As with every aspect of craft, this article isn't designed to give you something more to worry about as you create. Think about these things when the creative work is done and your internal editor is on the job, cleaning up the mess.

With that in mind, here are the top six useful tips I've learned over the years about writing an effective opening for a novel.

## Useful Tip #1: Begin with Action.

Everyone reading this has probably heard this tip before. I certainly didn't make it up. It's one of the most common pieces of advice in the fiction-writing world, and it's true not only for every book you write, but for every scene within those books.

The opening of your scene—whether it's the first scene in your book or the last—will either draw in the reader and compel her to keep turning pages, or it will create a lull in the action, allowing the reader to put down your book and do the laundry instead.

For the first few years of my career, I began books with action. My main character took a walk, did the dishes, or sorted laundry. I began with "action," but the openings of my books weren't exactly sizzling with excitement.

Then one day I realized that "action" didn't just mean physical action. Even an action/adventure scene doesn't

guarantee a rip-snorting opening, especially if an action-packed shoot-'em-up scene doesn't fit the kind of book you're writing.

In my experience, what does work almost every time is to begin your book with emotional action. I'm not talking about the kind of emotional "action" you find in a scene where the heroine is driving down the road to grandma's house, reliving in detail what happened the last time she was here. That's backfill, and that's almost never interesting to readers who don't already have an emotional investment in your character and her life.

The action I'm talking about is what comes just after the pivotal moment of disaster in a scene that occurs off-stage. Before your story begins, your main character wanted something. She encountered conflict as she tried to achieve her goal, and then something

**Even an action/adventure scene doesn't guarantee a rip-snorting opening, especially if an action-packed shoot-'em-up scene doesn't fit the kind of book you're writing.**

happened to throw her off-balance and send her back to the drawing board. That's the moment of disaster, when she realizes that, at least for now, all is lost and she's left wondering, "what now?"

When you begin your story with the character's emotional reaction to that moment of disaster, your readers will be interested immediately in what's going on in the character's world.

Consider this opening from my book, **Let it Snow**.

*Marti Johansson lifted the last of the clean dishes from the dishwasher and stacked the plates in the cupboard. Behind her at the kitchen table, her son, Cameron, let out a heavy sigh. She could see him reflected in the window, the sour expression, the slumped shoulders, the blond hair*

*hanging into his face. He'd been surly all through dinner, and her own temper had almost reached the boiling point.*

*"Give me one good reason why I can't get a car," Cameron demanded.*

*"One?" Marti glared at him over her shoulder. "I can give you half a dozen. For one thing, you're only fifteen."*

Or this one from **Mr. Congeniality**.

*Disaster.*

*That was the only word to describe the scene that greeted Dean Sheffield when he walked into the main lodge of the Eagle's Nest Dude Ranch. He stared, open-mouthed, at scaffolding climbing one wall, boards for bookshelves stacked against another, and rocks for the fireplace heaped on a tarp near the chimney.*

*He turned slowly toward Gary Parker, his best friend and right-hand man. "Tell me I'm dreaming."*

In both examples the viewpoint character is reacting to a disaster that happened off-stage, and that's more effective to establish motivation and create a connection with the reader than any amount of backfill.

**Useful Tip #2: Introduce your main character and establish point-of-view immediately. While you're at it, give your main character a goal.**

Ground your reader immediately. Let her know whose head she's in from the very beginning. This is especially important in scenes where the reader is meeting more than one character. In both of the examples above, you know right away whose head you're in. The reader never wonders whether to root for Marti or Cameron, Dean or Gary.

Likewise, establishing the main character's goal as the scene begins is crucial. You may know why your character is doing what he's doing but the reader doesn't know if it's not on the page. A goal you haven't shared with your reader doesn't exist.

**(continued on page 8)**

## Begin With A Bang! (continued from Page 7)

Years ago I read a scene written by a woman in my then-critique group. Her viewpoint character had just spent the night in a compound run by white supremacists. The Hero woke up, walked around the compound, noticed people standing by the gate, noticed women making breakfast, noticed more people near the back of the compound, and so on.

There was nothing wrong with the writing. My friend writes very well. But as a reader, all I saw was a man noticing what a pretty day it was. I had no idea why I should care about any of it.

At the end of the scene, my friend wrote something like this:

*He had been hoping to find a way to escape, but now he could see that it would be impossible.*

Far from an easy-going walk, this was supposed to be a scene filled with tension. As a reader, I was supposed to feel growing anxiety and even a little fear. Had my friend shared the character's goal with me in the very beginning, my experience of the scene would have been vastly different. I would have known without being told that the men near the gate were a threat. I would have known that the women cooking breakfast were a danger.

Without changing one other thing about the scene, my friend could have turned it from a laid-back, easy-going, mildly interesting inventory of the setting to a scene packed with immediacy and tension. One filled with questions I wanted answers to.

We don't need a lot of backfill to grab the reader's attention and make them relate to our viewpoint character. We just need a character who's trying to do something, who needs something, or who longs for something. Then we pit that character against ongoing conflict strong enough to leave the outcome of the scene in doubt and keep the reader wondering. It's a sure-fire recipe for hooking a reader into your story.

### Useful Tip #3: Establish the time, place, and other pertinent details in the setting.

It's vitally important to ground your readers in the setting right away; otherwise, the reader will provide her own details. You may know the scene takes place in New York on a cool spring evening, but if you don't ground your reader in the setting, she may see a hot summer day in LA. Then, when you drop in details later, you'll jar the reader out of the story. Jolt her too many times and you'll lose her.

I'm not suggesting that you fill the first few lines of your book with a lengthy inventory of what your character sees, feels, smells, and hears. That would bore any reader to tears. But a few well-placed words can make all the difference. Take a look at a few examples:

From **Goody Goody Gunshots** (written as Sammi Carter)

*A chill November wind howled outside the windows of my car as I pulled into the drive outside my brother's old farm house. Lights spilled from the windows, making the house look warm and welcome, and I allowed myself a moment's regret that I wouldn't be going inside. In the distance, the Colorado Rockies formed a protective barrier around the valley and the town of Paradise. I could see their snow-covered spines arching upward in the moonlight to meet the night sky.*

Readers read to answer the five basic questions: who, what, when where, and why.

From a current work-in-progress tentatively titled **Dead on Arrival**.

*I heard the ominous chk-chk of the shotgun a split second before a blast ripped through the cheap hollow wood door in front of me. Instinctively, I ducked and covered to protect my face from the shower of splinters and smoke that flew into the frozen night. My heart kicked the walls of my chest as I pulled the radio from my shoulder.*

From **The Christmas Wife** (written as Sherry Lewis)

*"Has anybody seen another blue sock?" Beau Julander straightened from the basket filled with clean, unfolded clothes and closed the dryer with his hip. "Anybody?"*

*Late autumn sunlight streamed into the renovated kitchen of the old farmhouse he'd inherited from his grandparents, spotlighting last night's dishes stacked by the sink, still waiting to be washed. Leaves from the huge oak trees in the yard fluttered past the window, and the autumn colors on the foothills surrounding Serenity gleamed in the warm Wyoming sunlight.*

A few details about the physical surroundings mixed up with the current ongoing action goes a long way toward grounding your readers and making sure they're with you as you move the story forward.

### Useful Tip #4: Keep Secrets from the Reader:

Readers read to answer the five basic questions—who, what, when, where,

and why. Those questions could be answered very quickly; i.e., John and Mary fall in love in August 2010 in San Francisco because John gives Mary the emotional support she's always wanted, and Mary's enthusiasm for life has chased away the shadows that have haunted John since his parents were killed when he was a child.

Fortunately, readers want more detail than that and they're ready, willing, and eager to take a ride with us to get it.

We could simply pour all the characters' background and motivation into a big blob on the page and let the reader carry it with them as they read, but there's no joy in that. Our readers want the ride. Our job is to figure out how to feed the answers to those five basic questions to the reader throughout the course of the book and make the ride we're offering one worth taking.

As authors of genre fiction, we automatically lose at least one of those questions—most often, what? Romance readers know they're getting a story about two characters that fall in love and make a life commitment at the story's end. There is rarely any question about the eventual outcome.

That means that the only real unknowns are (1) who John and Mary are; (2) why they do what they do; and, (3) how they overcome the obstacles in their paths to reach the pre-determined destination: true love forever.

This is true for any other genre fiction. Pick up an inspirational book and you know one or more character will experience a crisis of faith and return to God. Mystery readers know there will be a crime and the protagonist will solve that crime by the story's end. Though we may occasionally believe the protagonist is in danger, we always know that he will live to ultimately prevail.

The *what* is a given in most genre fiction, but this only makes the remaining questions more important. With this in mind, the first thing the author must decide is how much information to reveal at each stage of the book to keep the reader hooked. This is never more important than in the beginning of your novel.

Which secrets can you keep without losing the reader? Which secrets must you reveal to propel the story along?

It is said that there are no new plots. That's probably true, but that doesn't mean all books are boring reproductions of each other. It's the artist's individual touch and her distinctive view of life that makes each story unique, as well as when, where, and how she reveals her characters' secrets.

(continued on page 9)



**Begin With A Bang!**  
(continued from Page 8)

Motivation is often tightly wrapped in those secrets—whether it's the character's desire to discover a secret or his need to keep a secret.

Let's consider a story—a romance—in which the hero has doubts about his oldest son's paternity. The author of such a book would have a number of options open to her, each of which would make the book different.

The author could reveal the hero's doubts about his oldest son's paternity in the book's opening scene. She could have him think about his doubts, confess those doubts to someone, or argue with his ex-wife about his concerns. But that leaves her with little room to maneuver as the book progresses. Once that information is in the hands of the reader, it becomes repetitious every time the character thinks about it or talks to someone else about it, and that can be dangerous.

Alternatively, the author may choose not to reveal the hero's concerns until later in the book. She may decide that the hero should be mysterious and refuse to discuss his former marriage, his divorce, or his children with the Heroine until some turning point—say halfway into the book.

The heroine will be curious (as will the reader) as she tries to find out what happened in the hero's past. The hero could reveal the truth in a deeply emotional moment, before or after a lovemaking session, during an argument, right after the heroine confesses her love, or some other moment crucial to the plot.

How, when, and where you reveal the characters' secrets will either build tension or cut it, fuel conflict or lessen it, teach us something intriguing about a person's moral character or leave us thoroughly bored.

Whatever you choose to do with the secrets held by the people in your stories, remember all characters have them.

**Useful Tip #5: Make promises you intend to keep and keep the promises you make.**

Don't let your need for an opening hook lead you into another problem—lack of follow-through. Whatever you promise your reader in your opening, make sure you deliver. Don't write a "hook" filled with action or witty dialogue just for the sake of creating a hook. If you follow a hook with page after page of slow-moving set-up your readers may feel cheated.

Case in point: Years ago, while judging a contest for published authors, I was sent a book that began with a real bang. The story began with a car plunging off a cliff and the first chapter ended with the Hero, a police officer, on an emotional hook. I read each page of that opening chapter eagerly, actively wondering what was going to happen until the author left that poor character tied up in knots and moved on.

I read the next chapter with just as much enthusiasm, even though it dealt with an entirely different story line and the pacing of the scene was significantly slower. At that stage, I trusted the author to tie the two together after she established the second viewpoint character's normal world and introduced her conflict and motivation.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen. The story stretched on, with each subsequent scene advancing the second storyline but ignoring the first for over 100 pages.

Eventually, the author did reintroduce the first story again, but she waited so long, I felt manipulated. She'd hooked me unfairly. Readers have long memories. Play fair.

**Useful Tip #6: Establish what's at stake and make it urgent.**

My #1 rule in writing fiction is that the story must contain a problem that must be solved. Not **can** be solved. Not **may** be. Not **ought** to be. The problem **must** be solved.

Once you've found your problem, ask why it must be solved right now. If the problem could have been solved last week, or can wait until next week, next month, or next year, you probably need to head back to the drawing board.

Remodeling the second floor of a building isn't an urgent project ... unless the job must be completed by the end of the month to keep the ground-floor restaurant from closing for health code violations. Pitting your characters against a problem and a ticking clock at the same time can help to create strong external conflict and urgency that will pull readers through the book. Then make sure you introduce the problem early enough to engage the reader. If the problem is urgent, make it feel urgent.

Once you've established the urgency, ask why your character is the only person around who can solve it. If someone else could solve the problem, readers will wonder why your character doesn't just walk away when things get tough. There must be something significant enough at stake—whether it's the character's future happiness, the health of a loved one, or the fate of the world—to keep the character plowing forward even though he'd rather quit and walk away.

Draw your readers into your fictional world and make them want to stay, and your openings will catch the attention of editors and readers alike. ■

Sherry Lewis is the author of over 30 books in several genres. She has taught writing classes since 1993, and can be found on Twitter, Facebook and her websites:

<http://www.sherrylewisbooks.com> and <http://www.dancingoncoals.com> The first book in her new mystery series, *A Sheetcake Named Desire* (w/a Jacklyn Brady) will be available from Berkley Prime Crime August 2011.

**I write to give myself strength.  
I write to be the characters  
that I am not.  
I write to explore  
all the things I'm afraid of.**

**JOSS WHEDON**

**To help you practise for the Great Beginnings contest, your Editors are offering a  
Grab Me (in Two Hundred and Fifty Words) Email Contest**

The contest will open on **4th March** and the **first thirty** emails Bron receives at [romance@bronwenevans.com](mailto:romance@bronwenevans.com) will be entered into the competition.

Entries sent **prior** to March 4th will be **disqualified**.

**One** entry per person. Only Bron will know the author and she'll keep you anonymous.

Two hundred and fifty words **maximum**. It can be less, but any more will mean disqualification.

Gracie and Rachel will do the first round judging of the anonymous entries and whittle them down to the best five.

The final winner will be selected by our guest judge **Trish Morey**.

The winning entry will be published in the April Issue of Heart To Heart and the winner will receive a signed copy of Bron's debut book *Invitation to Ruin*.

**Dynamite Beginnings**  
(continued from Page 5)

beginning, one with nuanced characters and carefully crafted prose, your ms is more likely to grab an editor's attention and not let her go until the last page. ■

Since she became an avid reader at age four and stops only when she absolutely has to, it was probably inevitable that Deborah Nemeth would major in English literature and eventually become a freelance editor. She currently does developmental editing for Carina Press,

Harlequin Enterprise's digital-first imprint. Before joining Carina in late 2009, she edited for Samhain Publishing. Over the years she's lived in various Midwestern states and Puerto Rico, although she spends most of her time in places such as nineteenth-century Bath or Middle-Earth. She now lives in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. with her husband (a candidate for sainthood) and their two practically perfect daughters. She's proud to have worked with many talented authors such as Megan Hart, Shelley Munro, Cathryn Brunet, Jenny Schwartz, Carrie Lofty, Shirley Wells, Amy Atwell, Julia Knight, Dee Tenorio, Inez Kelley, Bonnie Dee, Kim

Knox and Josh Lanyon. She acquires projects in all heat levels and enjoys both dark and lighthearted romances and women's fiction. She's especially interested in steampunk, historicals in both traditional and unusual periods and settings, contemporaries, mysteries, epic fantasy and space opera. She enjoys interacting with authors on Twitter, where you may find her at @DebNemeth.

More information about submitting to Carina Press can be found at [www.CarinaPress.com](http://www.CarinaPress.com).

Write a bedroom scene from the heroine's POV using language and jargon from the motor industry. (HINT: RANDOM HOUSE WORD MENU, CHPT 6)

## RWNZ Annual Conference August 19-21, 2011 Crowne Plaza Hotel, Auckland

### STOP PRESS

Fantasy YA author Maria Snyder and Mills & Boon editor Lucy Gilmour confirmed to attend RWNZ conference! Details soon!!

### Friday August 19—Bob Mayer—One-Day Novel Writing Seminar

Join New York Times best-selling writer Bob Mayer for an all-day workshop on writing the novel, beginning with the original idea and core conflict, developing plot and character, working with point of view, pulling everything together, selling your book, and the business of writing.

#### Schedule (times subject to change):



9:00-9:50	The Original Idea—The Heart of Your Story and Key to Selling Your Book
10:00-10:50	Plot and Outline: The Events of Your Story
11:00-11:50	Point of View: The Voice of Your Story
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-1:50	Characters: The People of Your Story
2:00-2:50	Setting, Dialogue, Writer's Block and Re-Writing:
3:00-3:50	Selling and Marketing Your Book
4:00-4:50	The Current State and Future of the Publishing Business for the Writer

Bob will supply the handout for the workshop about a month before the event, inviting delegates to send him material, such as one line pitches, query letters, a synopsis, character sketch etc. He will choose some and use them (anonymously) during the presentation to show how it all works.

**Friday night:** Cocktail Party and First-Timers' Reception

### Saturday August 20—Sunday August 21

Two full days of workshops and talks, early morning editor and agent "cold reads", opportunities to pitch your novel to editors and a literary agent, Saturday night Awards Dinner, networking galore.



#### Keynote Speaker:

Multi-bestselling romantic suspense and thriller author

**Tess Gerritsen**

#### Other weekend speakers:

**Angela James**—executive editor of Carina Press (Harlequin's digital-first imprint)

**Molly O'Keefe**—author for Harlequin Mills & Boon Superromance, RITA winner, and single-title author for Bantam

**Bob Mayer**—New York Times bestselling author and former Special Forces agent

More author, editor and agent speakers to be announced soon!



## Hotel Accommodation and Parking Information

**Delegate accommodation rate:** \$128 per night, including GST.

**Book online** at <http://bit.ly/fUJPCvW> (that'll take you directly to our group booking)

**or call** Crowne Plaza on 0800 801 111 and quote the group name ROMANCE WRITERS

**or email** [res1@crowneplazaaukland.co.nz](mailto:res1@crowneplazaaukland.co.nz) again quoting the group name



**Car parking:** car parking is always a challenge when we hold our conference in town. If you can arrange a ride, or a car-pool, or take public transport, fantastic!

However, the price of parking doesn't have to be prohibitive, and you have lots of options.

The most convenient are our conference rates in the Atrium car park, right beneath the hotel—you can just take the lift straight up to hotel reception!

If you're looking for **day parking** (i.e. not staying in the hotel) the rate on Friday will be \$15, which covers you until 6pm. Over the weekend, day parking costs

maximum of \$12 (up to 12 hours). Evening parking is \$8.

**If you're staying in the hotel**, the parking charge is \$24 per night on Thursday and Friday, and \$10 per night on Saturday and Sunday.

**Other options:** Try one of the council-owned carparks, which have great earlybird rates—the following are within a 5-10 minute walk of the hotel:

**Downtown Carpark:** Mon-Fri: \$12 Earlybird—enter and pay cashier before 9.30am; exit by 12.00 midnight; one entry, one exit. Sat-Sun \$8 per day. Weekend special—Friday 3.30pm to Monday 8.30am—\$22 (one entry, one exit).

**Victoria St Car Park:** Mon-Fri: \$12 Earlybird (limited spaces, level 15 upwards until full)—enter and pay cashier before 9.30am; one entry, one exit. Sat-Sun \$8 per day.

**Civic Car Park:** Mon-Fri: \$12 Earlybird—enter and pay cashier before 9.30am; exit by 7pm. Sat-Sun \$8 per day.

**Note:** these prices were correct when we checked, but it's your responsibility to figure out how much you'll be paying when Conference comes around.

# The First Five Pages

## Need a handy cheat-sheet?

Best-selling author and teacher **Patricia Kay** gives us her checklist to maximize the punch of our openings.



1. Do I have an intriguing opening hook?
2. Does my hook give the reader the right idea about what kind of story I am telling?
3. Does my protagonist (or antagonist, as the case may be) show up within the first couple of paragraphs? Do I introduce him or her with a full name? NOTE: The only exception should be when you want to keep the identity of the character a secret until later in the book, e.g. a murderer or other type of villain.
4. Do I go easy on the physical description of the character or characters in the opening scene? Remember, you don't want an information dump. You want to thread the descriptive information into your narrative slowly (ideally through the eyes of another character).
5. Do I orient the reader as quickly as possible by establishing the five W's? Who, What, When, Where, and Why?
6. Have I given the reader a glimpse of my protagonist's ordinary world?
7. How long does it take for the inciting incident to happen? In most cases, the inciting incident should occur within the first few pages, although a perfectly acceptable technique is to have it come at the end of the opening scene—especially if it qualifies as a disaster.
8. Have I given my protagonist a goal? Is his motivation clear? Will my readers root for him as a result?
9. Is conflict established—something that will keep my protagonist from reaching this goal? If the conflict is not spelled out, is it at least hinted at?
10. If the inciting incident is not used as the disaster at the end of the scene, do I have a disaster or cliffhanger there?
11. Have I gone easy on the backstory? Kept the majority of the action in the present?
12. Have I stayed in one point of view and one point of view ONLY? Remember, in most cases, head-hopping is the mark of an amateur.
13. Have I followed through on the promise implied by my opening hook and the tone established in the beginning of the opening?
14. Have I checked all my facts? Done careful research?
15. Is every word in my opening necessary? Have I omitted needless words? Made sure the words I have included are the best they can be? ■

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*Patricia Kay is the USA Today bestselling author of 51 novels of romance and women's fiction. Her first mainstream romance for Berkley was nominated for a Rita by the Romance Writers of America. She is also an acclaimed teacher who formerly taught for the University of Houston but now limits her teaching to online classes. She currently writes for Silhouette Special Edition. You can read about her, her books, and her classes at [www.patrickay.com](http://www.patrickay.com)*

**IN YOUR NEXT SCENE**  
include the following words:  
Imbrication, Circulate and Elegy



# Make That Beginning Great!

## Entering the 'Great Beginnings Competition'?

USA best-selling author, **Trish Morey** takes some examples of beginnings and explains why they do or do not work.



**T**he sex was good.  
Surprisingly good.  
With a growl Rafe gave himself up to the inevitable and..."

With any luck those short opening lines from **Forced Wife, Royal Love-Child** were enough to grab your attention. Hopefully the rest of this article will interest you enough to hold it.

And that's exactly what should be your intention when you start your novel. You don't have to start in the midst of a love scene and a lot of times you won't want to or it won't be appropriate for your story, but your opening should still unashamedly drag that reader into the story and aim to keep them there, whether that reader is a judge in a contest you're hoping will give you a high score, an editor you're hoping will buy your manuscript, or someone in a book store scanning the shelves with a spare few dollars in their pocket.

So we all need a great beginning. How do we make it happen?

When I started out in this writing gig, many, many moons ago, and was eager to pick up every bit of how-to advice I could, I heard a lot about needing to establish the who, what, where, why and hows of a story as soon as possible. Contest score sheets at that time specifically sought these out and you were marked down if any of the elements were missing. Now, it's true your reader needs to be able to recognise the world in which this story is set—who the players are, where they are, and what's at stake—but I believe the risk of planning your openings in such purely mechanical terms is that you can, in turn, reduce the opening to something that looks like one big information dump. As a result, you'll

suck any spontaneity right out of those first few opening paragraphs. For example, here's how those opening lines of **Forced Wife** could have read, if I'd been worried about checking off those five w's as quickly as possible.

*In his Paris apartment, Rafe Lombardi, bastard son to the late King of Montvelatte and who had no chance of becoming king because there were two legitimate sons in line before him, was relaxing in the midst of having great sex with helicopter pilot, Sienna Wainwright. In fact, it was so good, he was about to have great sex with her all over again...*

A great opening? No way. And yet that's what was happening between whom and where.

So how do we get from a bland, detailed story start that reads like a checklist, to one that will hopefully keep your reader turning the pages long into the night when she's promised herself she'll only check out a few pages? It's not rocket science. It's probably not even science. And these ideas are hardly original but, for what it's worth, here are the three critical ingredients I think go into a great beginning in a category romance (or any romance, for that matter).

For the first ingredient, we need go no further than ask what it is that readers are looking for when they pick up that book from the shelves (or when that editor picks up a manuscript from slush). It's not a difficult question to answer. They're looking for a reason to keep on reading; a reason to part with their hard-earned cash, whether it's a favourite premise, a dilemma, intriguing dialogue, a confrontation between past lovers, the hint of danger or suspense or something else entirely that wants them wanting more. As writers, we call these reasons *hooks*.

So that's the first thing your opening needs: **A Hook. A Dynamic and Intriguing Start.**

This is your story. This is your baby, and nobody knows your story better than you. And it's not only your job, but your responsibility to launch this baby on the world with as much impact as you can. Nobody can write this for you—that's purely down to you and your talents—but you can give yourself the very best chance by taking your story's premise and making the most of it. Let's check out a few examples of some of the different ways you can start and try to draw that reader in.

*Revenge was sweet.*

**His Mistress for a Million** kicks off with the theme of the book in one short sentence. We're in the hero's point of view and it's payback time and a reader who likes revenge-type stories might wonder—what happened?—and hopefully read on.

*It was much too late for a social call.*

*Briar Davenport crossed the entrance hall uneasily, the click of her heels on the dusty terrazzo tiles echoing in the lofty space while a premonition that all was not right in the world played havoc with her nerves.*

*Late night visitors rarely meant good news.*

**The Spaniard's Blackmailed Bride** begins on a note of suspense. It's late at night, the sound of Briar's heels echoing on those tiles and she has a feeling of uneasiness... So who has come calling? A reader also might wonder why those tiles are dusty in a house with lofty spaces—clearly this is no slum.

*(continued on page 13)*

**Make That Beginning Great!**  
(continued from Page 12)

There are hints of trouble, there is atmosphere, and your reader should be right there looking over the heroine's shoulder when she opens that door, ready for the surprise of her life.

Something else to notice is that we're in the female POV here. Play with that POV—find out which POV has the greatest impact for your own great beginning.

*"Over my dead body!"*

Dialogue is a wonderfully effective way to throw the reader into the action and this opening sentence from **His Prisoner in Paradise** lets us know that someone is pretty upset about whatever's planned. Dialogue is immediate. It's powerful and it throws us straight into the emotions at play and therefore straight into the story.

However, the best line in the world doesn't make a great first page or first chapter and that great opening or wonderful first line is wasted if the author hasn't started the book in the right place. Start the story in the wrong place and despite the best opening paragraph in the world, interest will soon be lost. So what's the very best place to start your story? Of course, it's at the point of change.

And that's our second thing you must ensure you do: **Set Your Hook at the Point of Change.**

We've no doubt all heard that expression—set your hook, or your book, at the point of change. We've probably all got it inscribed on our writerly brains. We know we should do this. What we've also probably all experienced is exactly how hard that is. And even when we think we've nailed it, someone else reads our work and says our story really gets underway in chapter two, or maybe even in chapter three and that everything up to then is really backstory.

Great. So how do you identify that point of change? What if you think you already have your perfect first line? In

an extended workshop I do on this topic, I get people to do an exercise at this point, with a given premise, asking for a suggested first paragraphs.

As I can't ask you to do that here, I'll relate a bit of my own experience, with my first published book, **The Greek Boss's Demand**.

I thought I'd started this story in the right place. The heroine's boss, Aristos Xenophon, had been killed, she was waiting for a new boss to arrive from Greece – some relative of Aristos. And I had a fantastic first line – "Aristos Xenophon was dead." I loved that first line! I knew it would grab the editor's attention! But clearly I hadn't nailed the point of change.

I spent the next five-and-a-half pages after that line while my heroine drank coffee with her sister and telling her about Aristos's history in Australia, how he'd started out penniless selling tomatoes only to become a property billionaire, how he'd been the most arrogant boss in history but how he'd been taken out by a bullet from a disgruntled tenant. And hey, wasn't it lucky she wasn't there at the time. Imagine if her seven-year-old son had been left motherless!

I got the editor's attention all right. They said, "We really like your story but can you do something about the opening? It's kind of static." Surprisingly enough, they didn't want chats over cups of coffee, not even if it was to tell my brilliant backstory. And so eventually I started the book on page six. I cut straight to a scene where we met the hero, reluctantly flying into Sydney and how all he wants to do is be done with this strange bequest and go home as soon as possible.

So that's why I'm saying, a brilliant first line or first paragraph isn't enough, and a hook by itself is good but it isn't enough. It has to be a brilliant opening set at exactly the right time of the story. No cups of tea, no mentors, no kindly sisters offering advice. Don't waste a great opening with a first chapter filled with backstory! Go for the punch. Go for action and the crux of the issue!

Which leads perfectly into the third ingredient all great category romances have. I think the best beginnings pinpoint that point of change and tell it in an intriguing and interesting way, **plus** they get your hero and your heroine together as quickly as possible.

And that's something that everyone should already know but is definitely worth repeating: **Get your hero and heroine together as soon as possible.**

If you send an editor a manuscript that has a great opening hook, starts at that point of change for the characters and introduces her to them both without delay, then she is going to know that you've studied your craft and are serious about getting published. And she will read on. Forget the backstory, forget the cups of coffee. Get that hero and heroine together on the page.

Clearly, if you're anything like me, getting that opening right is a skill you're going to have to keep on practising. It's not just a matter of getting down a start, it's not just a matter of settling for something that seems to work okay, it's crafting it to work the right way. Each of my books has been like that—a case of constantly reworking that opening from that first awkward attempt to break into my story to the final draft that an editor approves.

It's a matter of working and reworking and it counts for so much at the beginning of your story, so don't just accept your first "great" opening and think that'll do. Keep improving it, making it tighter, giving it more impact and don't settle, until you have your own great beginning! ■

*"You don't know me, but I'm having your baby."*

*Thus begins Trish Morey's upcoming novel, **The Heir from Nowhere (HM&B Sexy - April Downunder)**. A two times RuBY winner and USA Bestselling author, Trish loves the thrill and chase of nailing that great beginning, almost as much as she loves the alpha heroes her line celebrates.*

*Watch out too for Trish's novella, **The Storm Within in A Royal Wedding** this May.*

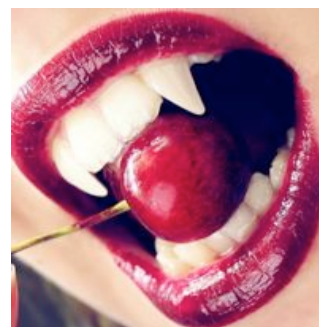
**Why should you enter RWA's Golden Heart® contest?**

The purpose of the RWA Golden Heart® contest is to promote excellence in the romance genre by recognizing outstanding romance manuscripts. It is a full book contest for unpublished authors. It is run at the end of each year – so get writing. You've got a few months to polish the book and enter.

1,200 romance manuscripts are entered in the Golden Heart each year by writers who have not accepted a publishing offer for a work of original fictional narrative prose of 20,000 words or more (by the contest entry deadline).

**For a very personal view on the Golden Heart contest go to page 18 and read Karina Bliss's take on it.**

# The Book's Hook and the Vampire's Bite



**Get your teeth into that story right from the start.**

**Rebecca Zanetti**, author of sexy Paranormal Romances, tells us how to make our beginnings bite, not suck.

**A** vampire strikes fast and hard... with everlasting consequences. The beginning of a book should do the same thing. The beginning is where an author hooks a reader, introduces the characters and hints at the overall theme. Writers are often obsessed with creating just the right hook for their novel in order to keep that reader turning the page.

In a fiction book, more specifically in a paranormal romance, there are three main goals to be met, and three main pitfalls to be avoided. Otherwise, there most often isn't a chance for the author to get a second chance, no matter how exciting the events are in the second chapter.

## **1. In a successful hook, the author intrigues the reader.**

Finding the hook, finding the theme, is often easier than many of us believe. Look at your beginning. What's the most interesting aspect of it? Is the hook buried in there somewhere?

Say your story is about a vampire assassin hired to kill the one woman who could destroy his people, because she found an ancient text explaining how. You could start the story with:

*Max eyed the woman, surprised by her smile. Kind, thoughtful...intelligent. No wonder she'd been intrigued by the old journal.*

Okay. Well, it does mention the journal. But wouldn't a better hook be:

*The knife handle warmed in his hand as Max eyed the smiling woman. Intelligence shone out of her eyes. 'Twas truly a pity he had to kill her today.*

The second example raises some questions. Who is Max and why in the world does he have to kill the intelligent smiling woman? This beginning would hopefully make a reader curious and

want to keep on reading the book in order to be entertained.

## **2. In a successful beginning, the author immediately entertains the reader.**

People read books to be swept away for a short period of time, and in paranormal romances, they want entertainment. Happy, exciting, even sexy entertainment.

Kate Douglas is a master at entertaining her readers, as evidenced by the wildly successful **Wolf Tales** series from Kensington Aphrodesia. Her twelfth and final book in the series will be released in July. Kate spends time getting a visual on her hero, and then sits down to write that beginning from his (or sometimes the heroine's) view point. "Once that first chapter is set, I can almost always go on and finish the rest of the book. It's like a foundation for a building—if the foundation is strong, the rest of the structure will stand," Kate says.

If the foundation is weak or has cracks, the rest of the story will halt and fall. Sad but true. Agents and Editors see hundreds, if not thousands of first chapters every year. These chapters need to grab the industry professionals and not let go in order to get the sale...and when the book hits the shelves, it needs to grab the reader and hold on tight.

## **3. A reader wants to be involved right away.**

The third and final goal to meet is to get your reader involved in the story right off the bat. Make her part of the story; make her care about the characters. Make her not only wonder but truly care about what happens next for them.

Cynthia Eden writes both romantic suspense and paranormal romances. Her next paranormal, **Never Cry Wolf**, will be released in July from Kensington Brava. She finds there's definitely a

different approach with the two genres. In a paranormal, she spends time showing the new world as well as how normal her characters are within that world. "Just because my heroine is a vampire, it doesn't mean that my readers can't identify with her," Cynthia says. So in a paranormal romance, Cynthia incorporates as much of the paranormal elements as she can up front, with still showing how the reader can relate to her characters. "Vampires can still have normal personality traits and characteristics that will allow readers to understand them." And, of course, identify with them and thus get involved in the story.

## **So, what pitfalls can a writer at least try to avoid in grabbing that reader?**

### **1. Avoid information dumps that overwhelm the reader.**

So often an author has built an amazing imaginary world with fantastic, third-dimensional characters. This is wonderful. But a problem arises when that author wants to share every single detail with the reader right at the beginning. This is fondly termed an 'info dump.'

The last thing any reader wants is a huge influx of information to assimilate. "I want the reader curious about my world but not lost, so I try and include the details in dialogue or references characters make," says Kate Douglas. "A bit here, another tidbit there—eventually the world makes sense without the reader feeling as if there's going to be a test later."

There are many ways to let your reader into your world. First, by describing the scene, with just enough detail for them to see it. There's no reason to describe everything from the wall colors to the carpet fibers to the type of wood on the door... unless it's your character would

*(continued on page 15)*



## ***The Book's Hook and the Vampire's Bite (continued from Page 14)***

notice. If it's your character's job to notice such things, of course include them.

Another way to show your new world is through the dialogue or even the actions of the characters. If you're writing a scene where people fly... well, describe them flying. Your reader will instantly know that this is not the world we live in.

Cynthia Eden finds that in a paranormal novel, it's important to establish the world rules early. However, "I don't think authors should do a giant info dump of rules; instead the rules should be sprinkled through the action and the dialogue so that readers see the world as the tale progresses." She adds that the basic rule is: facts need to be shown in the first chapter so the reader gets the chance to understand and "develop an expectation as to what will come next."

So the key here is sprinkling. Throw in tidbits about your world via quick descriptions, dialogue and, of course, action. And do so in a way that engages the reader.

### **2. Don't tell about your world, show it.**

Some authors go into great narrative detail about the world, how vampires exist and rule, and how the bad guys own special guns. Instead of **describing** this in an introductory paragraph (or a prologue), **show** the reader your world.

In **Fated**, my heroine is a scientist who has no idea vampires exist. She gets kidnapped by one, and he could've told her all about the vampire world and his role in it. I doubt many scientists would believe him. So instead, I have him yanking out his contacts, showing his otherworldly golden eyes and then dropping his fangs low. The reader discovers the truth at the same time as the heroine.

Shifters also exist in the **Fated** world. If someone came up to me on the street and told me that people could turn into mountain lions, I'd call the cops. I'm assuming my heroine is as smart, if not smarter than I am. So, instead of having someone tell her about lions, a fully grown lion jumps in front of her and turns into a man. The reader discovers this truth along with the heroine, thus staying involved.

### **3. Don't ignore the market.**

I don't know how many editor and agents have blogged lately about the queries they receive where the author claims her book is a paranormal, contemporary, romantic suspense with fantasy and thriller elements. Agents and editors don't like this. Find a genre, claim it and make sure your book fits in that genre. Industry professionals need to know how to market your book, and booksellers need to know what shelf to place it on.

Kensington's Associate Editor Megan Records has seen her fair share of such queries. Her best recommendation is to

know what books are already out there. "Read. Read. Read. If you don't know what's out in the marketplace, how are you going to make your book stand out?"

In other words, once you know what's out there, you'll know where your book fits, and how you can provide a new twist to the paranormal worlds.

Vampires have been around in literature for eons. Yet vampire books are still being published and they're still selling to the public. Why? Well, they each have a new angle, a new twist on the old vampire legend.

Find yours and run with it. ■

*Rebecca Zanetti has completed several manuscripts, winning awards throughout the writing industry for her work. Recently she finished **Fated**, the first book of a vampire series, "The Dark Protectors," which will be available February 22, 2011 from Kensington Publishing's Brava's line.*

*You can visit her website at:*

*<http://rebeccazanetti.com/>*

*Her Blog at:*

*<http://rebeccazanetti.com/blog-2/>*

*Her book is available through Book Depository*

*<http://www.bookdepository.com/book/9780758259233/Fated>*

**We are a species  
that needs and wants to  
understand who we are.  
Sheep lice do not share this  
longing, which is one reason  
why they write so little.**

**ANN LAMOTT**

## **Entering HMB's Great Beginnings Contest**

### **Are you aiming for the Category market?**

Once again Harlequin Mills & Boon have generously agreed to sponsor the Great Beginnings Contest with excellent prizes and a judge to read the final entries. Contest Co-ordinator **Viv Constable** gives us the skinny on past judges' comments.

**C**ategory romance comprises a large part of the romance book market. With millions of books sold every year Harlequin Mills and Boon are actively seeking new authors. How can you resist the chance to get your work in front of an acquiring editor, especially when two previous entrants have sold to Harlequin Mills and Boon as a result of being a finalist!

The Great Beginnings Contest is open only to category entries targeted at any

one of the Harlequin, Silhouette or Mills and Boon lines - from sweet romance to hot and sexy, medical drama to historical stories, to crime and thrillers. There is a wide variety to choose from. However, manuscripts aimed at imprints such as LUNA, HQN, Nocturne, SPICE (includes SPICE Briefs), or Harlequin Teen are not eligible to enter this contest.

Last year there were 54 entries. Following the contest, Ellie Huse pored over the valuable feedback from the first round judges, gathering together notes

on the strengths and areas that the judges felt needed more work. This is what Ellie compiled:

A compelling setup combined with excellent characterisation and clear conflict featured strongly in the highest-scoring entries, both in the manuscript and in the synopsis. Many entries, however, lost marks for a failure to show

*(continued on page 16)*

## Entering HMB's Great Beginnings (continued from Page 15)

an emerging internal conflict and sufficient motivation for characters' actions and reactions. While your hero and heroine need flaws to make them believable, take care not to make them unlikeable. A lack of attraction between the h/h was also a problem in some entries.

Other points of concern for judges, and which are common to most contests, are summarised below:

**Drawn-out beginnings, excessive backstory, over-description, too much narrative/introspection:** they all slow the pace of your story.

**Point of view:** make it clear and don't head-hop.

**Secondary characters:** don't allow them to take the focus off your hero and heroine.

**Dialogue:** several judges noted unnatural or stilted dialogue. Keep dialogue true to the era in which you're writing and to the age and personality of your characters. Ensure dialogue moves the story forward and avoid writing too many pages without it.

**Setting:** readers like to know where your story is set.

**Conflict:** what's at stake for your hero and heroine and why is it important to them?

**The emotional journey, not the plot, should drive the story.**

**The Synopsis:** Unclear, or a lack of, internal conflict was a weak point in many synopses. It is essential to show the emotional journey of your main characters, what motivates them, and the obstacles that are keeping them apart. Judges wanted to know **how** the hero and heroine fell in love, not simply that they did.

Strive for clarity, cut out irrelevant details and limit the use of names other than those of the two main characters. If your manuscript is unfinished, make sure your plot has enough depth for a full-length novel. It is pointless, and a waste of valuable space, to pose questions in your synopsis—especially if you don't answer them! It's your job to tie up all loose ends and show how your hero and heroine achieve their happy-ever-after!

Finally: please remember to read the entry conditions and submission instructions carefully and don't exceed the word count. If you are in doubt about anything ask the contest manager.

I hope these words of wisdom help to strengthen your writing and make your entries sparkle. The ultimate objective of being published could be closer than you think. ■

## Jem's Gems For Computer Conquest

### Control-C is for Copy (convenient keyboard shortcuts)

*Jem Stanners continues with his tips to help us create a relationship with our PCs where we are the Masters and not the servants.*



**Y**our great beginning could be even greater, but it needs rearranging! Now all you have to do is find your mouse so you can move things around.

However, since you taught yourself to touch type your mouse spends its life somewhere under your research notes. Eventually you find it and drag it out. Then it's keyboard / mouse / keyboard / mouse / keyboard / mouse / keyboard / mouse until your hand falls off.

Is there a better way? You knew there would be!

This month is about using keyboard shortcuts. Once you get used to them and learn to trust them—you'll find they are way faster than using the mouse. In fact you already know some of them.

What are you used to using the mouse for? Probably the following:

- Moving the cursor
- Marking a block of text
- Copying a block of text to the "paste buffer"

- Pasting a block of text from the "paste buffer"
- Cutting a block of text to the "paste buffer"
- Undoing recent changes

You can also do all of this with your keyboard alone, and often much more quickly and accurately.

In what follows, the Control key is either of the two labeled **Ctrl** to the left or the right of the space bar.

On a Mac, use the **Command** key instead.

When I say to press **Ctrl-C** I mean to press/hold the **Ctrl** key (like a **shift** key) and *briefly* press the **C** key. You must then let them both go, or they will "repeat" on you.

Open a new document to practise these. Type in some play text.

#### To Move the Cursor:

The **Left Arrow** and **Right Arrow** keys move the cursor (the flashing | or

\_ ) either left or right by **one character**.

The **Up Arrow** and **Down Arrow** keys move the cursor **up or down one line** to a similar position.

The **Ctrl-Left Arrow** and **Ctrl-Right Arrow** keys move the cursor left or right by a **whole word**.

The **Home** and **End** keys move the cursor to the beginning or end **of the current line**.

**To Mark a Block of text:** (A block is just one or more letters, words, lines...)

Move the cursor to either end of the block you want to highlight.

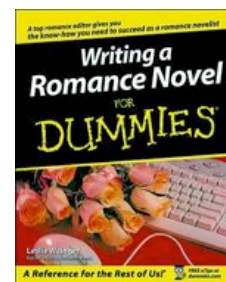
While holding down the **shift** key, move the cursor to the other end of the desired block by any means above, and the "block" will become highlighted, or marked.

(continued on Page 19)

# Bringing The Inside Out

## Creating Emotional Conflict

**Leslie Wainger's** experience as an author, book doctor, and editor-at-large for the Single Title Division of Harlequin Enterprises gives her a unique perspective on setting up emotional conflict in a romance.



No romance is a romance without a hero and heroine, or without the physical attraction that's key to their relationship, but without emotional tension—even if you've got the most exciting plot any writer's ever thought of since our earliest ancestors sat around a campfire telling stories—all you have are a series of dates culminating in marriage or the expectation thereof. It's the emotional tension between the characters that creates the internal conflict between them and leads to the “two steps forward, one step back” dance that makes the relationship—and the entire book—truly interesting, exciting and page-turningly compelling. So what is emotional tension? Where does it come from? And how do you bring it out and use it to your advantage?

I used two key words in the above paragraph: internal and emotional. And those are the two ingredients that both need to be present in order to create emotional tension and conflict. Internal means it comes not from what the characters think but who they are and the things that most deeply motivate them as human beings. And emotional means it can't be logicked away, because how people feel often has little or nothing to do with what they think. An adult can know an antibiotic injection will make everything better and, from experience, that the pain is only a brief pinprick, yet still be so terrified that she screams and fights to get away, and has to be held down. That's a real-life example (not me, someone I know—really), and it shows the power our gut-level fears and feelings have to override any- and everything the brain knows.

The opposite of internal tension and conflict is external, i.e. situational, not a function of who the characters are but what their positions are *vis a vis* each

other. As an example, there's the old (and boring) developer versus environmentalist pairing. On an emotional level the two of them might be totally compatible—similar backgrounds, similar strengths and weaknesses, similar hopes and dreams—so it's only their jobs creating problems for them. If they were both teachers... no tension, no conflict—and no story, or at least not one that's going to capture any reader's interest.

The opposite of emotional is intellectual, and intellectual issues often put people at odds. The difference is that they can be talked about and solved. The developer agrees to cluster housing and protected green space. The end. It's not that people can't get emotional about intellectual issues, because they can. Politics, anyone? But intellectual issues create emotion because people are passionate about them; they aren't themselves created and driven by emotion.

Situational and intellectual tension can play a role in your story, because every book needs a plot, a context in which the characters' emotional conflict can play out. Otherwise, nothing happens, because the hero and heroine avoid each other as they cope with their own problems, or—just as bad—they have nothing to do but sit around and talk about their feeeeeeeelings, nothing more than feeeeeeeelings, for the whole book. Either way, boring. But situational and intellectual tension are essentially part of your plot: the cop and the PI forced to work together on a case, with opposing strategies for bringing it to a successful close. In the context of that plot, their external and intellectual issues become the text for working out the subtext: their internal emotional issues.

So, still using the cop (him) and the PI (her), let's look inside and see what

drives them. Maybe he's a by-the-books guy, a third generation cop with family traditions as well as the law to uphold. His family's big and close, loud and argumentative, but they would do anything for each other—and family is a closed unit that always comes first. Letting someone else in? That's a big deal. She's a loner and likes being a one-woman show when it comes to finding the truth. She grew up on her own, whether that means she had emotionally distant or abusive parents, spent years in foster care, or even had to grow up quickly and take care of her younger siblings after her mother died. No one's ever had her back, and she'll do whatever it takes to get the job done, because it's the only way she knows how to live. And if you want to give one or both of them a disappointing romantic past—preferably a past that in some way reflects on who the other one is—go for it.

That's a pretty simplistic set-up (in other words, you're a writer and I'm counting on you to do better \*g\*), but it makes the point. The two of them have to work together, they're totally physically attracted to each other—and they both think there's no way they can trust each other or possibly make a relationship succeed, because of all the preconceptions and basic beliefs they bring to their working relationship. Every time they seem to be getting closer, things blow up. She trusts him when he says he'll let her pursue a lead her way, and that he'll come along but not interfere. Working with him that way is a huge step for her, and only possible because of her growing romantic connection and attraction to him. So imagine how betrayed she'll feel when he immediately calls a fellow cop to claim the evidence she's found.

*(continued on Page 18)*



## ***Bringing the Inside Out*** **(continued from Page 17)**

Because of her feelings for him, she's not just furious about the case, she feels confirmed in her belief that the only way to get through life is alone, because you can't count on anybody—and she's confirmed in her belief that she's been an idiot to dream of a romantic relationship with him. And yet they still have to work together, so she can't just take off and end the story. In the next big development, he may feel he's been let down by her when he trusts her with confidential information he was given through official channels, and she takes off and acts on it by herself. Family doesn't do that to family... and, oh my God, he realizes he's just thought of her as family, and where does that leave things? Two steps forward, one step back, with the plot as the context for working through their emotional issues.

By itself, the plot would give you a mystery with a romantic thread, and two bickering — maybe bantering — characters. With the internal and emotional tensions underlying that plot, creating tension on a level the characters not only can't talk about overtly but, for a while, may not even be aware of in themselves, you have

something more. The plot still needs to be logical and interesting, their approach to it driven by the differing ways life and their jobs have trained them to think, but on another and far more important level, the plot is also the framework that lets them work through their issues, grow closer as people and finally as lovers. Every conversation about what's going on is informed and deepened by everything they're not saying about how they feel and what they're hoping to find in their relationship, a relationship they both hope—but can't say—outlasts their temporary working partnership.

Forget this at your peril: Romance readers are drawn to the genre because, more than anything, they're interested in people. And people aren't defined only by what they do and what they think, but by what they feel and why, by their emotions. And romance is based on love, probably the strongest emotion there is, because love can conquer hate.

So, in short, if you create internal and emotional tension, then you create a truly interesting conflict, an emotional conflict that plays out in tandem with your plot. That makes everything on the page more than just words and story. It focuses every interaction between the

hero and heroine—and even their thoughts and their dealings with others—on their emotional relationship with each other, it makes that relationship matter to the reader because she empathizes with what they're going through emotionally, and it makes your book exactly what you set out to write: not just a story but a romance. ■

*Leslie Wainger's career in publishing began almost thirty years ago, when she joined Silhouette Books, then a division of Simon & Schuster, as an editorial assistant. Since then, she has expanded her expertise into single-title fiction and now has extensive experience not only in series and single-title romance, but in general women's fiction, historicals, paranormal, horror, thriller, romantic suspense, fantasy and mystery. She has won awards for her editing, including the Romance Writers of America Industry Award; numerous books she's edited have been featured on noted bestseller lists, including the New York Times, USA Today and Publishers Weekly; and many of the books she's edited are award winners.*

*Leslie is also the author of WRITING A ROMANCE NOVEL FOR DUMMIES (Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2004), which serves not only as a guide to writing romance but to writing strong, saleable popular fiction, no matter what the genre. Click here to view it on Amazon <http://amzn.to/hSvzT5> Or*

*<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/book/9780764525544/Writing-a-Romance-Novel-for-Dummies>*

Karina was once told that with a name like Bliss she'd have to be a romance writer. She's a former journalist and a New Zealander. She sold her first book, **Mr Imperfect**, to Harlequin Superromance in 2006 and she is currently working on book number nine! This is her Golden Heart story.

## **RWAmerica Full Book Contests**

### ***The Golden Heart for unpublished authors***

*A view on the Golden Heart from **Karina Bliss**, RWNZ's (and RWAustralia's) first ever Golden Heart winner.*

In 2005 I entered the Golden Heart. Venus Rising was my third full manuscript and in pretty good shape after a gentle but thorough critiquing at the Kara School of Writing with Daphne Clair and Robyn Donald.

I entered with my usual 'hope for the best but prepare for the worst' attitude and finaling was beyond wonderful. I was booked for the RWAmerica conference anyway and adding that finalist ribbon to my name badge was a proud moment.

Being a finalist in the GH is like participating in a beauty pageant. You get to meet the other talent, you practise walking onto the podium and saying your name into the microphone while your picture flashes up on the screen.

You attend a finalist party where you're presented with your certificate. And for the awards ceremony you get a seat up front with a guest. I knew I wouldn't win because I'd been told that the award never went outside the US. Thanks to that myth, I was completely relaxed.

One by one the winners of each category ascended the podium, pulling speeches out of evening bags. Fellow finalist Sandra Hyde/Hyatt and I looked at each other and shrugged. So when my name was announced for best short contemporary I had nothing prepared. Fortunately the shock was so great that I managed to *ad lib* thanks before my knees gave way and I stumbled offstage. My now editor Victoria Curran came up to offer congratulations. She

had my fourth ms on her desk and wanted to say hello. An editor approaching me? Hallelujah, the world had reversed on its axis. Only it hadn't.

Venus was never published. It went through two revisions in London and was rejected. Years later I talked to one of the London editors who said they'd loved the story but it didn't quite work. It had the spark but not the craft...I wasn't ready. Six months later Victoria bought the ms on her desk.

Winning the Golden Heart is one of my treasured memories. In hindsight it was a microcosm of the publishing business. My hopes were raised, then crushed, then raised again with an eventual sale. It was excellent training for the ongoing challenges of being published. ■

# RWNZ News Around the Regions

## AUCKLAND

Last month we had a very good turn-out of around 25 members and the discussion on goals and how to achieve them was well received. Next month's meeting will take place on the 5th of March. Jane Beckenham will be giving us the benefit of her knowledge on eBook Publishing. As usual we will meet at 12.30p.m. in the Three Kings Tennis Pavilion, situated on the corner of Mt Albert and Mt Eden Roads. Please bring a SMALL plate for a shared lunch and come prepared to buy tickets in our monthly book raffle.

## CENTRAL NORTH

Our next meeting is on Saturday 19th March, at Lyn Rasmussen's home, 1130 Paradise Valley Road, Rotorua. Ph: 07 357 5292. Please meet for a shared lunch at 12:00 midday after which Lyn will be giving an overview of her experiences as a first-time e-published author. And then there will be a guest speaker (who is an expert) coming in to talk about what to look for when setting up a website or blog. Lyn also has an interactive workshop exercise planned (please bring pen and paper). A round-robin meeting reminder and directions will be sent out prior to the meeting date.

## WELLINGTON

Wellington/Kapiti branch had an excellent start to 2011. Diana Holmes and Joanna Rix both finalised in the North Texas RWA Great Expectations Contest, Bronwen Evans' debut novel is out 1<sup>st</sup> of March, and new members Miriam, Angela, Sue and Tracey attended our first meeting of the year.

Giovanna collected our 2011 writing aims and sealed them up so we can see in June how we're progressing. Bron cleared out her bookcase and we fell upon the books like hungry dogs.

Next meeting is 1pm, Saturday March 5th at Meryl's. Please create and bring a two-page synopsis for your current book.

## CHRISTCHURCH

For those who feel confident please bring your writing to read or discuss. Otherwise just bring yourselves.

Look forward to seeing you at 7.00pm on Monday 7 March at 283 Memorial Ave, Christchurch.

Make everybody fall out of the plane first  
and then explain who they were  
and why they were in the plane to begin with.

NANCY ANN DIBBLE

### Jem's Gems

(continued from Page 16)

#### To Copy and Paste the text:

To Copy the marked block of text (to the "paste buffer"), press **Ctrl-C**

To Paste a copy of the text from the paste buffer, press **Ctrl-V** (a.k.a. Inserting the text)

If you are Moving the text to a new place, you can "Cut and Paste" to save having to delete the original block later.

#### To Cut the marked block:

Press **Ctrl-X**

Whoa! It just disappeared. Did it delete? No. (*Trust the paste buffer, Luke!*) Put the cursor where you want it and press **Ctrl-V**.

Phew! It's only scary the first hundred or so times you do it. After that using Ctrl-X and Ctrl-V will become second nature.

**Remember**, if you have any text highlighted at the time, and you start typing (or press enter, or space, or backspace, or delete) what you type in **replaces** the highlighted text. Yes it *is* a feature, though it has caught us all unawares time and time again.

Here's where the Ctrl-Z key is your friend.

#### To Undo recent changes: (the "oops" key)

Press **Ctrl-Z**.

This is the same as "Edit Undo" and heaps quicker.

The result? Copy and Paste Perfection. Editing Enthralment.

Keyboard Coolness. ■

There's no such thing as writer's block.  
That was invented by people in California  
who couldn't write.

TERRY PRATCHETT



## REGIONAL CONVENORS

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## Writers' Corner

**Sadly, not every question can be answered with chocolate.**



While we can't tackle all aspects of your life Writers Corner is the section of the magazine where we will find the answers to your writing questions. Any topic you like, we will guarantee to find the answer. No question is too hard, too boring or too silly. Email us at: [gracieoneil@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gracieoneil@xtra.co.nz)

**Question:** Do you consider you need a medical background to write a Harlequin Mills & Boon Medical Romance?

**Fiona Lowe answers:** The key to a great medical romance is the romance. Creating vivid characters, showing their journey, providing them with opportunities so they can learn how to heal their hearts, and giving them a 'happy ever after' are what medical romances are all about. The focus is the romance and the medical content/setting is the background. If the medical content overtakes the romance then the book is not a romance and writers will find their book will be put down by readers and rejected by the publisher. A good rule of thumb is to use the medical scenes to move the romance forward or to challenge one of the characters on their core beliefs. Make the scene a vital part of the story rather than an "add-on", which will pull your reader out of the story and have her skipping the scene you worked so hard on!

Yes, there are doctors, nurses and physiotherapists who are published in the medical romance line but, and this is a big but, many of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Medical Romance authors do not have a medical background and they write fantastic books. They do have an interest in all things medical and I think that's a vital component when writing these books. One thing all

medical romance authors have in common is their love of TV medical dramas and medical reality/documentary shows such as RPH.

So how do non-medical authors deal with the medical components of the book? I interviewed them and the following points came out.

**Research.** Some use books, all use the internet but are careful to visit more than one site so they know the information is accurate. Accuracy is important.

**Use friends or relatives who are in the medical field.** Most doctors, nurses and paramedics are more than happy to answer questions and many love to share a story about an interesting case...no names, no pack drill, of course!

**Don't try and write complicated medical scenes you aren't familiar with.** Better to stick with what you know.

One of the best ways to get a handle on the elements of a medical romance is to read the books! There is such a broad range of settings, from high-powered intensive care units to general practice, from community health centres to the flying doctors and everything else in between. In general there needs to be one character who is a doctor, although Amy Andrews wrote about two

paramedics and Sharon Archer's debut novel was a doctor and a vet. That is one of the fantastic things about the line. Its broadness!

The Harlequin Mills & Boon Medical Romance line is incredibly popular in France and across all of Europe as well as being well established in the UK and Australia. The books are not sold on-shelf in the USA but are available to be purchased in both ebook and paperback form through eharlequin.

I hope this has gone some way toward answering your question!

For more information on the line, and how to submit a manuscript, head to <http://www.eharlequin.com/articlepage.html?articleId=552&chapter=0>

**Fiona Lowe is multi-published with Harlequin Mills and Boon in the medical romance line and this year has a debut single title romance to be published by Carina Press in August 2011. Single Dad's Triple Trouble will be on-shelf in New Zealand in March. For more information visit Fiona at her website, <http://www.fionalowe.com>**

**If your hero was writing a Personal Ad what would he say?**

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