

Find Success Writing  
Romance

Rachael Herron



"The perfect book to curl up with, as warm and cozy as your favorite sweater."

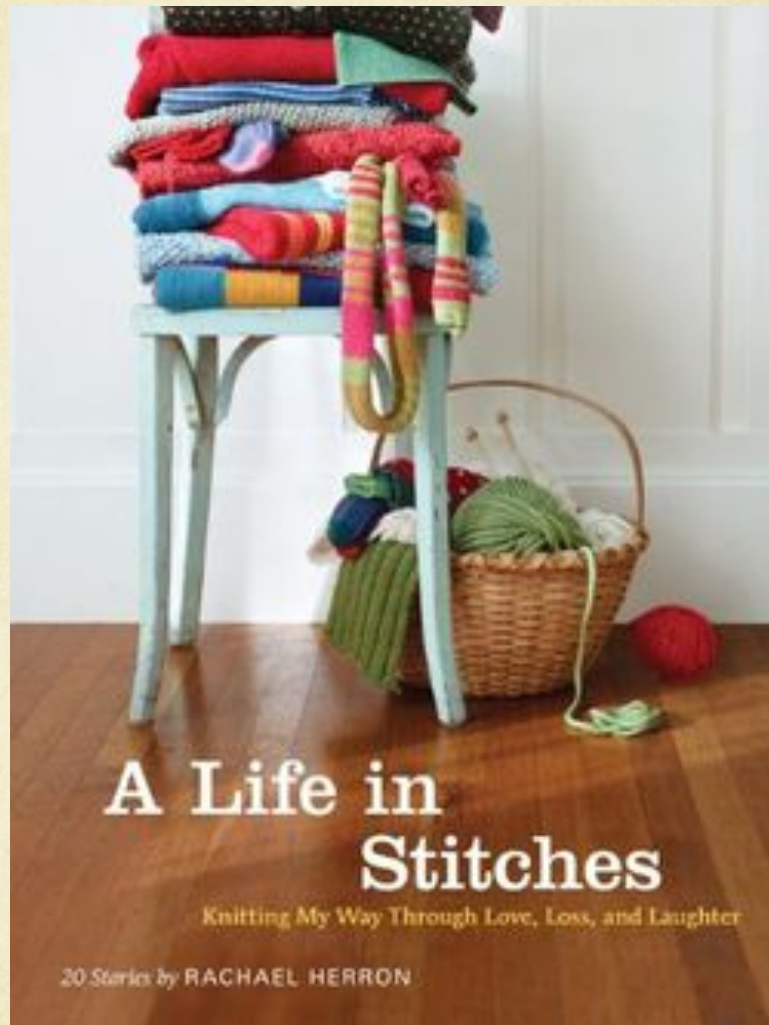
—SUSAN WIGGS,  
New York Times  
bestselling author

*a novel*

*How to Knit  
a Love Song*

A CYPRESS HOLLOW YARN

*Rachael Herron*



# A Life in Stitches

Knitting My Way Through Love, Loss, and Laughter

20 Stories by RACHAEL HERRON

"Herron is an inexhaustible champion of the healing power of love."

—National Bestselling Author Sophie Littlefield

RACHAEL HERRON

Author of *Pack Up the Moon*

# Splinters *of* Light

*Some bonds can never be broken.*



"A celebration of the power of love to  
heal even the most broken of hearts."

—SUSAN WIGGS

P A C K U P T H E  
*M* O O N



RACHAEL HERRON

AUTHOR OF *WISHES & STITCHES*

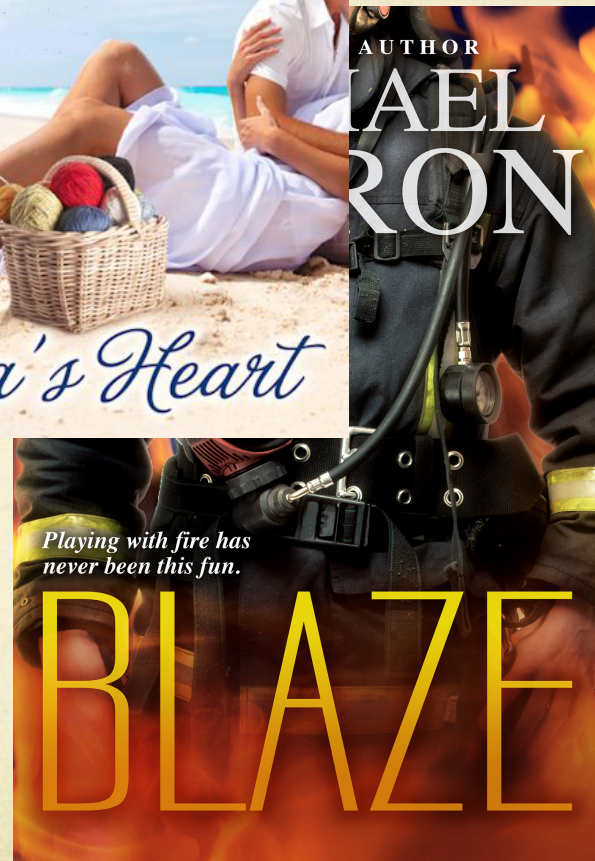
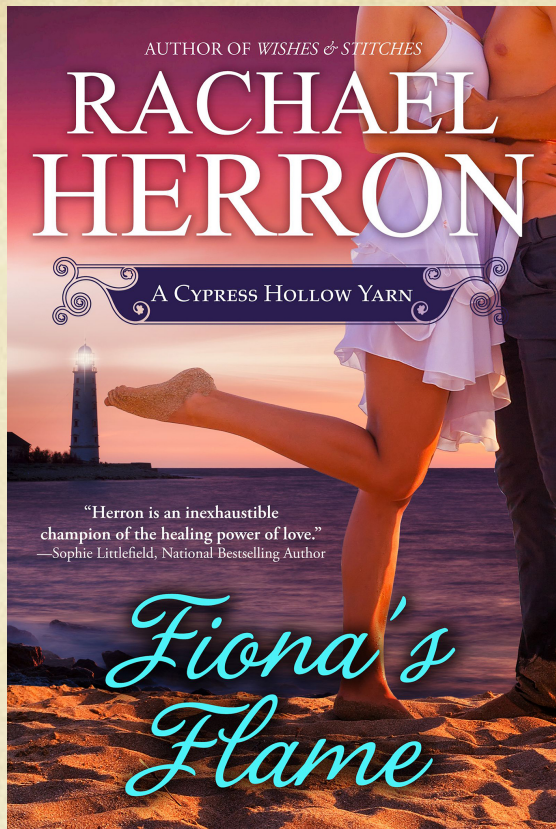


the ones  
*who* matter  
most

"A poignant, profound ode to the  
enduring and redemptive power of love."  
—*Library Journal on Splinters of Light*

**RACHAEL HERRON**

AUTHOR OF *SPLINTERS OF LIGHT*



○ Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else.

○ GLORIA STEINEM

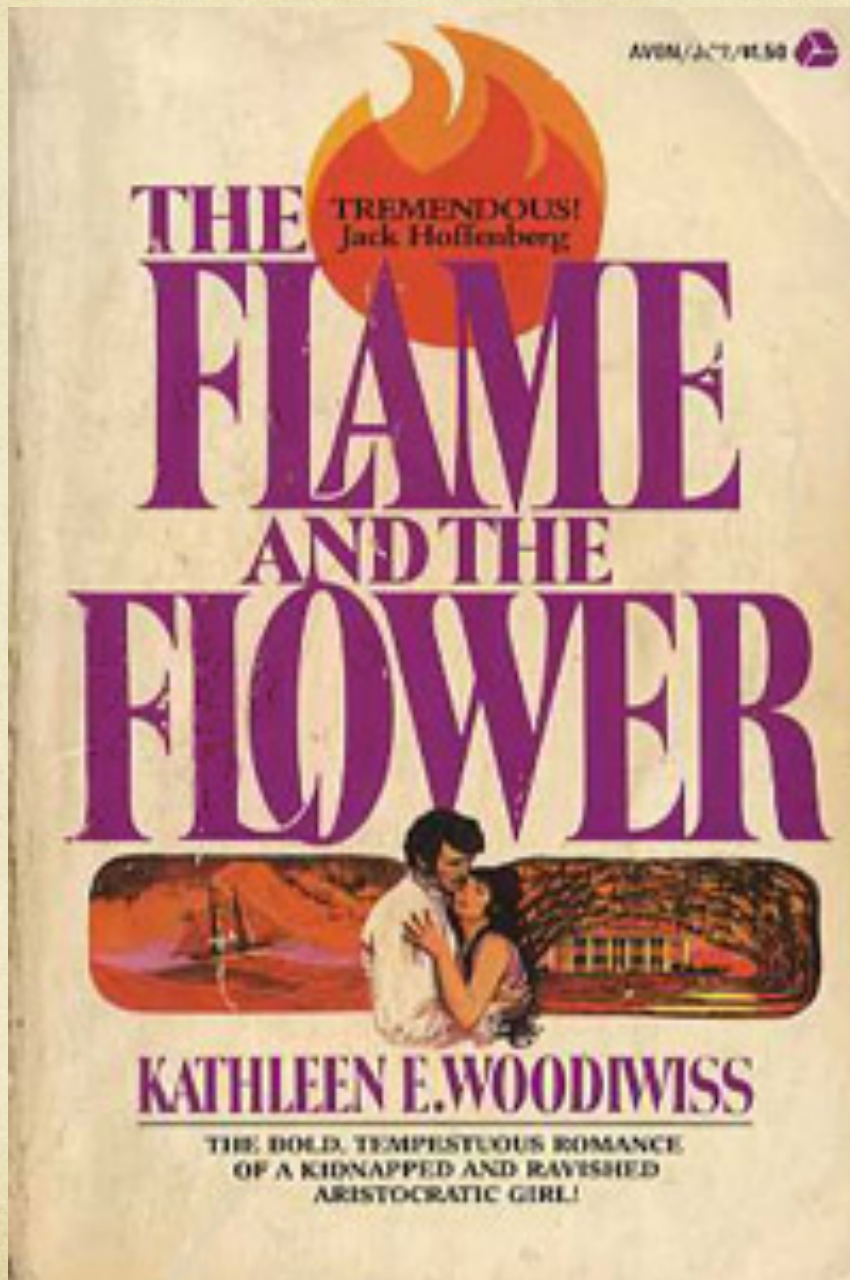


# What IS Romance?

- General definition, as embraced by the RWA and publishers, includes only the focus on a developing romantic relationship and an optimistic ending.
- HEA - Happily Ever After (or at least, happy for now).

# History

- 1740 – *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson
- 1811 – Jane Austen – pubbed anonymously
- 1847 - Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*
- 1921 – Georgette Heyer, *The Black Moth*
- 1930s – Mills&Boon, HQN – 2-penny libraries
- 1950s – Sold at newsagents



1972 -

The birth of  
the modern  
romance  
novel.

# To Today

- 1980 - S&S forms Silhouette to compete with HQN
- 1980 - Dell waives Virgin rule.
- Mid-80s - Stretching the genre's rules
- 1990 - Becomes rare to see rape as plot point. Whew!
  - “Bottom line, if you want to truly escape into an old-fashioned world with traditional gender roles, don't read a historical romance written after about 1990.”
  - From a self-described Pro-Patriarchy/Traditional Women's Roles blog

# STATS

- Impervious to economic recession, lipstick luxury
- Estimated annual total sales value of romance in 2015: **\$1.4 billion** (source: BookStats)
- **46%** of all mass market sales, more than science fiction and mystery *put together*.
- **Romance is the bestselling genre.**

# The Romance Book Buyer

- Women make up **84 percent** of romance book buyers.
- The U.S. romance book buyer is most likely to be aged between **30 and 54 years**.
- Romance book buyers are highly represented in the South.
- Romance book buyers have an average income of **\$55,000**.

*Source: Nielsen Books and Consumer Tracker*

- Top 10 popular romance tropes: (1) **friends to lovers**; (2) soul mate/fate; (3) second chance at love; (4) secret romance; (5) first love; (6) strong hero/heroine; (7) reunited lovers; (8) love triangle; (9) sexy billionaire/millionaire; (10) sassy heroine
- What else romance buyers read: generally, romance buyers also read mystery, general fiction, cooking/food books, young adult, and erotic fiction. When broken down by age, a majority of older readers buy mysteries, and younger readers buy YA and erotic fiction.

- Readers as mirror: A survey of 600 regular romance readers the same year "found that they mirror the general population in age, education, and marital and socioeconomic status."
- Readers are voracious: 60% of the readers surveyed read at least one romance every two days.



# Common Misconceptions About Romance

- Writing romance is easy.
- Formulaic writing is boring.
- Romances are written for not-smart people by non-smart people.
- I'm a feminist. Feminists don't read romance.

# What's a feminist?



“So, here is the quick way of working out  
if you're a feminist.

Put your hands in your pants.

- a) Do you have a vagina? and
- b) Do you want to be in charge of it?

If you said 'yes' to both,  
then congratulations!

You're a feminist.”

Caitlin Moran

*Men: Do you support women in being in charge of their bodies? Yes? You're a feminist, too!*

# Why Feminists Read Romance

- It's a 50-plus-year-old industry comprised mostly of women writers operating their own businesses and producing a genre about women's self-actualization, pursuit of autonomy, and acquisition of sexual agency for an audience made mostly of women, who buy over \$1.4 billion dollars worth of books a year. No, no, nothing feminist or even subversive about that.
- Sarah Wendell, *Smart Bitches*.

# Romance fiction

Romance fiction challenges traditional patriarchal beliefs by saying that women are equal to men and that they should be as sexually knowledgeable as men.

- Jenny Crusie

# There's something very upsetting...

...about a book viewed as existing only to titillate women.  
I'm surprised by the letters I get saying these books raise  
unfair expectations among women about sexuality.

- Mary Bly
- *Shakespearean scholar at Fordham University*
- *Degrees from Oxford, Harvard and Yale*
- *Daughter of Robert Bly, the American poet laureate*
- *Eloisa James*
  - *#1 NYT Bestselling Author*

# Compelling Characters

- The foundation of your novel.
- More important than plot! Fully-rounded characters DRIVE plot.
- I learned this the hard way!

# Magic Formula

- What happens to your main character? What is her immediate problem?
- What choice does she face?
- What terrible thing will happen because of that choice?
- [Repeat]

# Your Character Should

- Take great risk and make CHOICES.
- Choices move the plot. Plot does not happen to characters.
- Choices are interesting when the character is between a rock and a hard place.
  - Wrong decision for the right reason
    - Or
  - Right decision for the wrong reason



# Building a Character (who works for you)

- Figure out your character's biggest inner need. This is *more important to understand* than their external conflict (and if external conflict is based upon this need, the book will be richer and deeper).
- *I'm terrified of \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.*
- Your character should be torn by greatest desire and greatest fear.
  - By the end (black moment, climax), in order to win the object of their desire, they must lose the thing they hold most dear *by making a choice*.

# How to Build a Character

- Name
- Wound - gained early in life, as child or adolescent
- False Belief - Who she believes she is because of wound
- Exterior Identity - How she protects herself.
- True Essence - Who she *actually* is, revealed by journey

*Adapted from Michael Hague*

# Extras

- Exterior Goal/Outer Journey - Visible goal
- Interior Goal/Inner Journey - Becoming true self
- Flaw - Give them REAL flaws.
- Biggest Fear - Based on Wound
- Ally/Mirror - a beloved voice of reason
- Theme - Pithy, short, might not know till end of book

# Flaws

- Real! Not interview flaws.

# ProTip

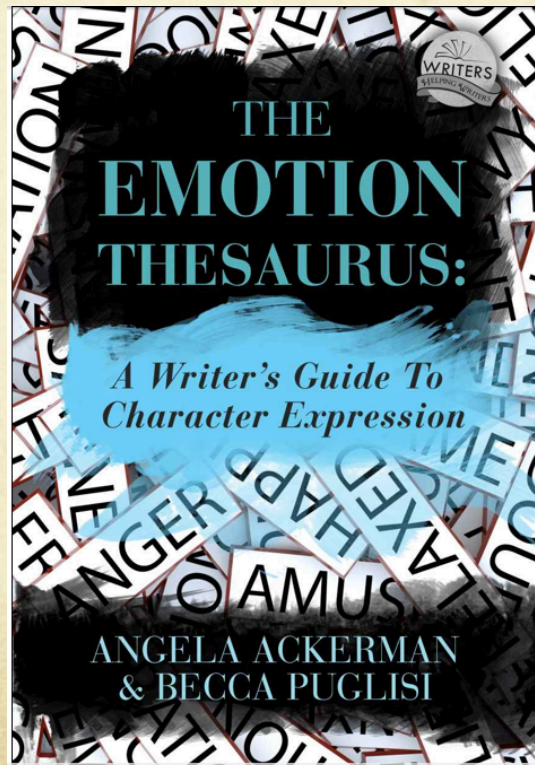
- START with characters with opposite needs! (Safety vs Unpredictability)
- Build exterior goal from these.
- END with those characters doing the one thing they thought they couldn't for the sake of love, and for the sake of becoming their true selves.

# TIC TACK TALK

	TIC	TACK	TALK
Molly	Pushes non-existent glasses up on nose (wears contacts)	The Sorry! piece her sister bit the top off	Health food word cloud
Colin	Touches hand to pocket to feel badge	Dad's badge, the star's edges worn	Legal/Police jargon, word cloud

# The Emotion Thesaurus

- What do they FEEL? Show emotion through PHYSICAL FEELING/MOTION.



### Table of Contents

- INDIFFERENCE
- INSECURITY
- IRRITATION
- JEALOUSY
- LONELINESS
- LOVE
- NERVOUSNESS
- NOSTALGIA**
- OVERWHELMED
- PARANOIA
- PEACEFULNESS
- PRIDE
- RAGE
- REGRET
- RELIEF
- RELUCTANCE
- REMORSE
- RESENTMENT
- RESIGNATION
- SADNESS
- SATISFACTION
- SCORN
- SHAME
- SKEPTICISM
- SMUGNESS
- SOMBERNESS
- SURPRISE/SHOCK

Keeping mementos from the happy time  
Telling and retelling stories about the past  
Seeking out those who shared the event  
Gently touching memorable items (a baby blanket, wedding invitations)  
Closing one's eyes to more clearly recall the memories  
Trying to recreate a past event (burning the same scented candle, wearing the old clothes)  
Seeing similarities in the present: *You look just like him* or *This is the same color as our first car*  
Increased tenderness (sitting close, a quick kiss) for those who shared in the event

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Eyes prickling with tears  
An excited flutter in the belly  
An overall relaxation of the body  
Breathing slows as a memory takes over  
Dulled awareness (sitting in an uncomfortable position without feeling it)  
Experiencing (to a lesser degree) the same physical sensations felt during the past event

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Losing track of the time while remembering



# PLOTTING

- Quick and dirty
- Tons of resources out there on this, utilize these. Jami Gold, Worksheets for Writers

# Story Structure

It's what wings are to airplanes.

It's what math is to programming.

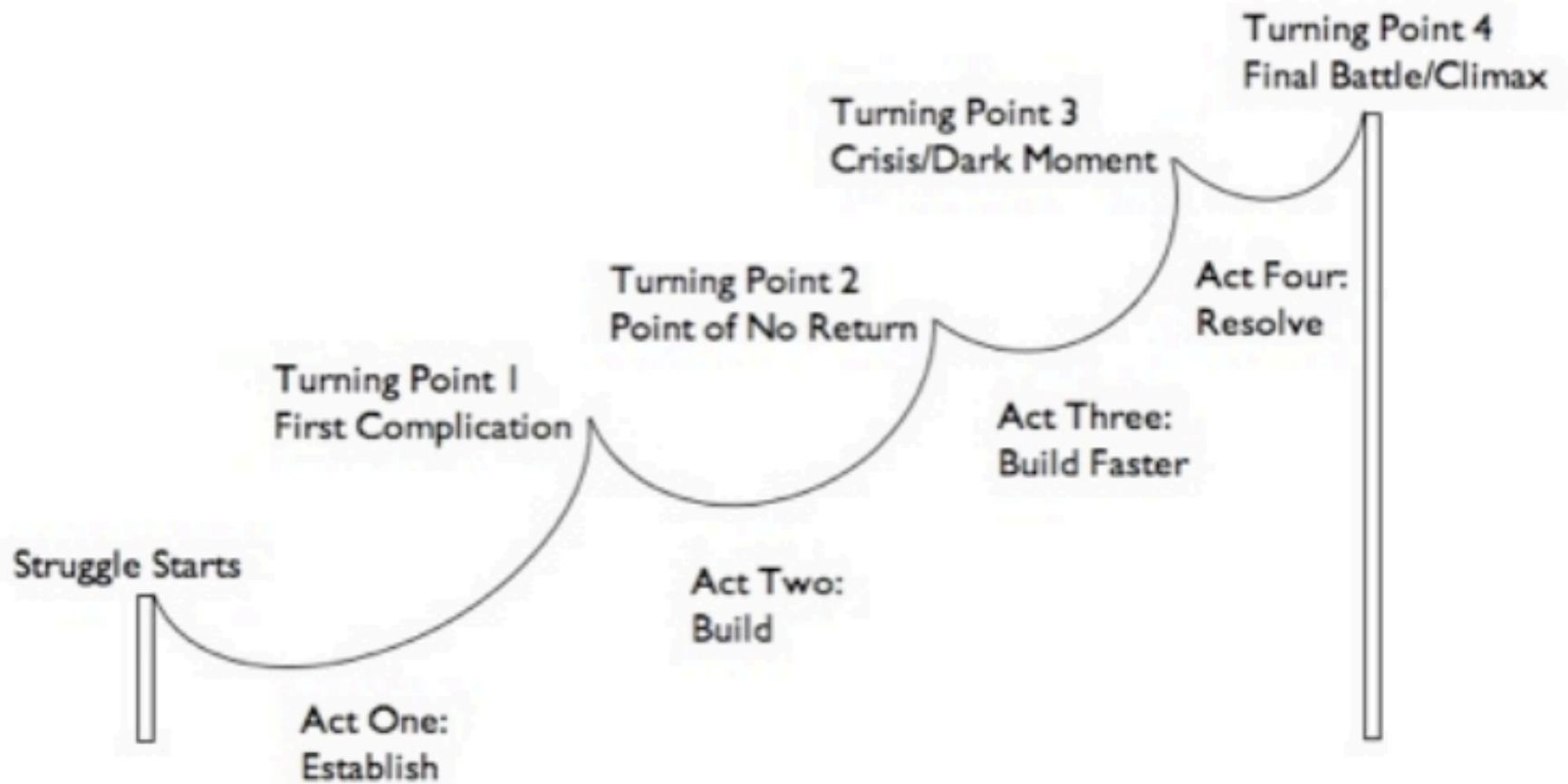
It's what the skeletal system is to humans.

Essential

Producing endless results.

# Is Formula Bad?

- No way.
- Humans mostly come with two legs and two arms and one head. All are unique.
- **The reader expects you to provide her with the unexpected in a framework of the inevitable.**
- *Do you think they know this?*



## **TURNING POINTS with ACTS**

## Setup

Intro Hero

Intro hero.  
Setup and foreshadow stakes and quest

## Response

Hero is a wanderer

Hero reacts to the change resulting from first plot point

## Attack

Hero is a warrior

Hero proactively reacts as the antagonist ramps up

## Resolution

Hero wins

Hero steps up, steps in, confronts, resolves.

Hook

First Plot Point  
at 20-25%

Second Plot Point aka  
Context Shifting Midpoint  
at 50%

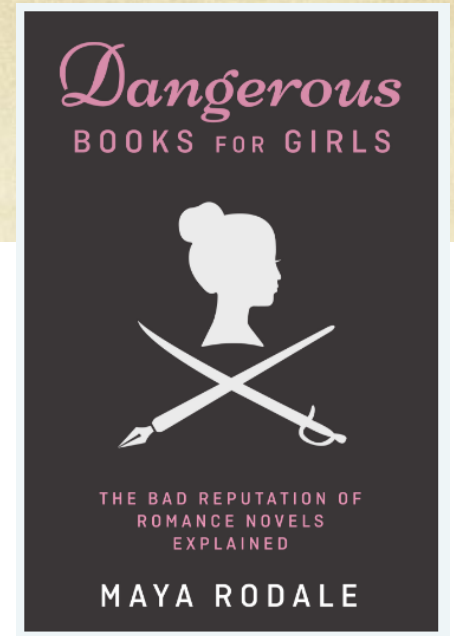
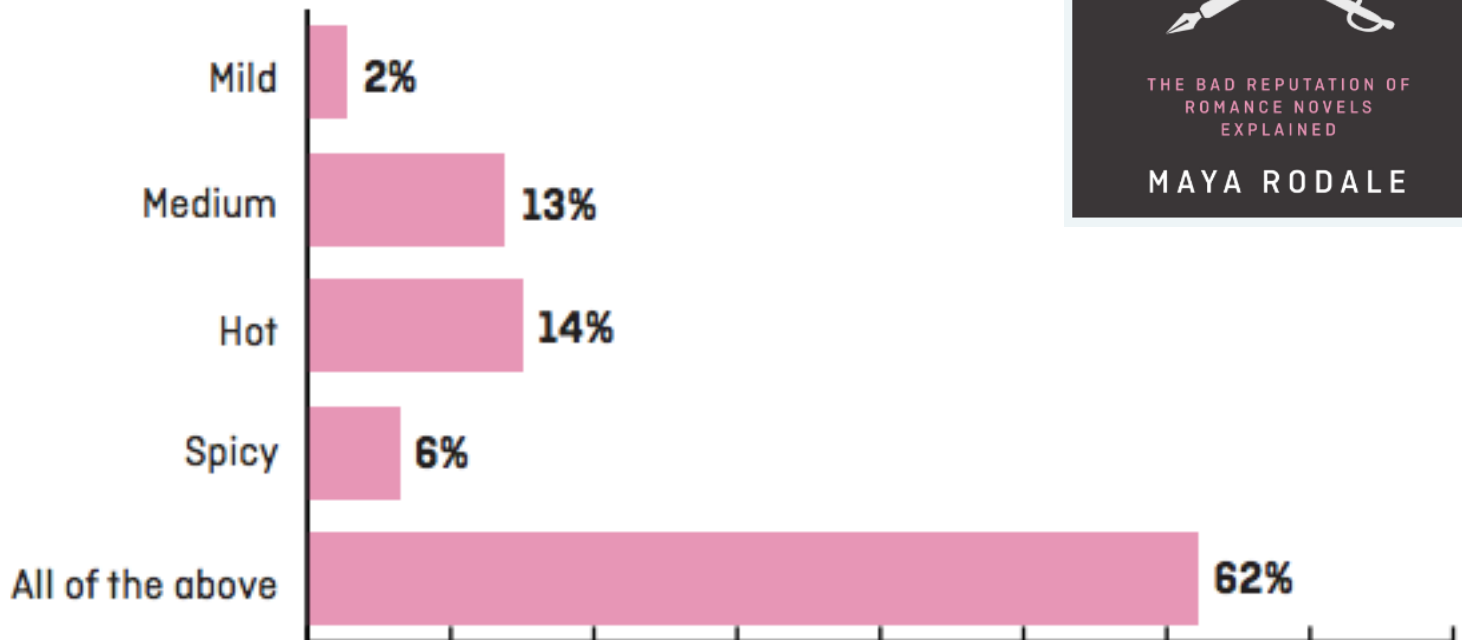
Third Plot Point  
at 75-80%

# Turning Points/Plot Points

- Spaced tightly together, to increase pressure on protagonist and increase reader's interest/pleasure.
- NO KITCHEN SCENES
  - Scenes should do at least two things, never just one
    - Develop character motivation
    - Develop relationships
    - Explore backstory
    - Advance plot
    - Increase suspense
    - Up the stakes

# Writing Sex

## WHAT HEAT LEVEL DO YOU PREFER?



# ProTip

- Layer like a lasagna in revision!
  - Don't have to do everything at once!
  - Setting, character description, voice words, attraction



# #WeNeedDiverseRomance

- “Underrepresented people are systematically being excluded from benefits that are extended to white, straight authors. Kirkus Reviews published a piece admitting that, with only a tiny number of exceptions, they don’t review romances except those written by white authors.”
  - Courtney Milan

# How?

- Search it out.
- Buy it.
- Review it.
- Write it.



# Publishing Routes

- Traditional Publishing
  - Big 5
  - Need agent in most cases, with some e-only exceptions
  - Why aim for this?
    - Prestige
    - Placement/Distribution
    - Because you just *want* it.

# What do agents do?

- They have the connections to sell your work to reputable publishers - GATECRASHERS
- Have subagents for foreign rights, film rights.
- Know the law
- Negotiate the terms/\$/% of your contracts
- Collects 15% (20% on foreign) commission
- Offer edit/revision advice, sometimes pre-offer of rep
- Return your calls/emails in a timely manner (remember, they work for you).

# AgentQuery.com

AgentQuery :: Find the Age x Rachael

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## AgentQuery.com

The internet's largest free database of literary agents

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**Skip the Literary Agent  
We Will Match You With A  
Publisher. Tell Us About Your Book  
Now!**



# Include

- If you know the agent's work, compliment it. If you don't, don't fake it.
- Title, genre, completion status, length. (Pro-tip, if it's your first book, even if non-fic, should be complete)
- Elevator pitch sentence
- Blurb (jacket copy)
- Bio – relevant, please.
- Thanks

August 4, 2008

Dear Ms. Herron,

I got the chance to finish LOVE SPUN over the weekend and I really liked it. I think it needs some editing, but I'd love to talk to you about it. When would be a good time for me to call you and at what number can I reach you?

Thanks and all best,  
Susanna Einstein

INSERT RACHAEL  
FREAKING OUT HERE





# Good Agent Blogs

- Pub Rants, Kristin Nelson
- Janet Reid
- Rachelle Gardner
- Nathan Bransford (also author)
- BookEnds

# Self/Indie Publishing

- Open market
- Many resources online (I like podcasts: The Creative Penn, The Sell More Book Show)
- Higher royalty rate
- No agent needed (but often helpful re: foreign sales/translations/film rights)

# DANGER DANGER

- DON'T MOVE TOO FAST
- The Gold Rush is over. At one time, you could be a bad miner and get away with it. Now you can't.
- GOLD IS STILL VALUABLE. Don't rush this.

# Dunning-Kruger effect

- Don't worry too much about this, but be aware of it
- “The Dunning-Kruger effect is a cognitive bias in which relatively unskilled persons suffer illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability to be much higher than it really is. Dunning and Kruger attributed this bias to a metacognitive inability of the unskilled to recognize their own ineptitude and evaluate their own ability accurately.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*

# The Bad News

- If you're incompetent, you can't tell you're incompetent
- But people will tell you, if you ask.
  - Ask by using beta readers
  - Ask by querying agents till you get requests
  - CAUTION: Ask by publishing

# The Good News

- “Their research also suggests corollaries: highly skilled individuals may underestimate their relative competence and may erroneously assume that tasks which are easy for them are also easy for others.”
- **The better you get at writing, the worse you’ll feel you are at it.**
- *Wait, that’s good news?*

# How Do You Get Better?

- The more you write, the better you get.
- The more you read, the better you get.
- Period.

# What do you have to do?

- Complete MS
- Edits: Developmental, line edit, copy edit, proof - all hired out
- Choose your level of distribution
- ISBN
- Format interior for e platforms
- Consider print - different formatting
- Cover (x 2 for print)
- Compile metadata: data about the data: category, BISAC listing, keywords, even the text
- Upload to each platform
- Selling (Promo/Marketing)
- WHILE WRITING THE NEXT BOOK which is always your best promotion tool



# PAY FOR:

- Editing (all three types, developmental, line, and copy edits)
- Covers.
- Editing and covers.
- Covers and editing.
- Did I mention editing and covers?

# IT'S OKAY

- It's okay not to know what the hell is going on here.
- It's okay not to know what you'll do with your next book.
- It's okay not to know what you're going to do TOMORROW.
- It's okay not to remember all this - it'll change, anyway!
- THIS IS AN OVERVIEW. You're smarter already!

Prepare Yourself



*Fire at Twilight*



**Lila Ashe**

The Firefighters of Darling Bay, Book 1

# LILA ASHE

THE FIREFIGHTERS OF DARLING BAY



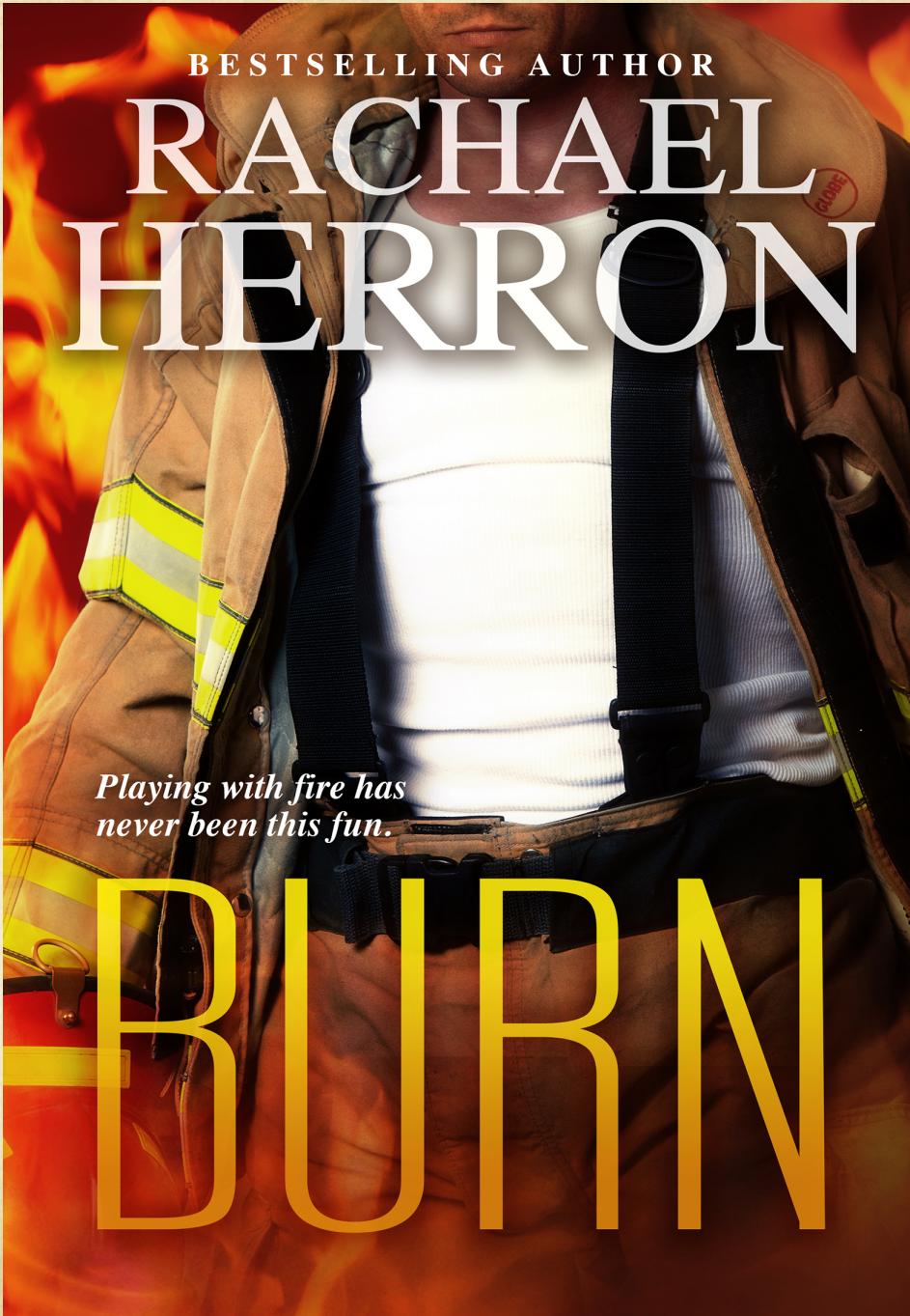
FIRE AT TWILIGHT

BESTSELLING  
**LILA  
ASHE**

*Love in Darling Bay*

**FIRE AT TWILIGHT**

**THE FIREFIGHTERS BOOK 1**



BESTSELLING AUTHOR

RACHAEL  
HERRON

*Playing with fire has  
never been this fun.*

BURN



*Beautiful Wreck*

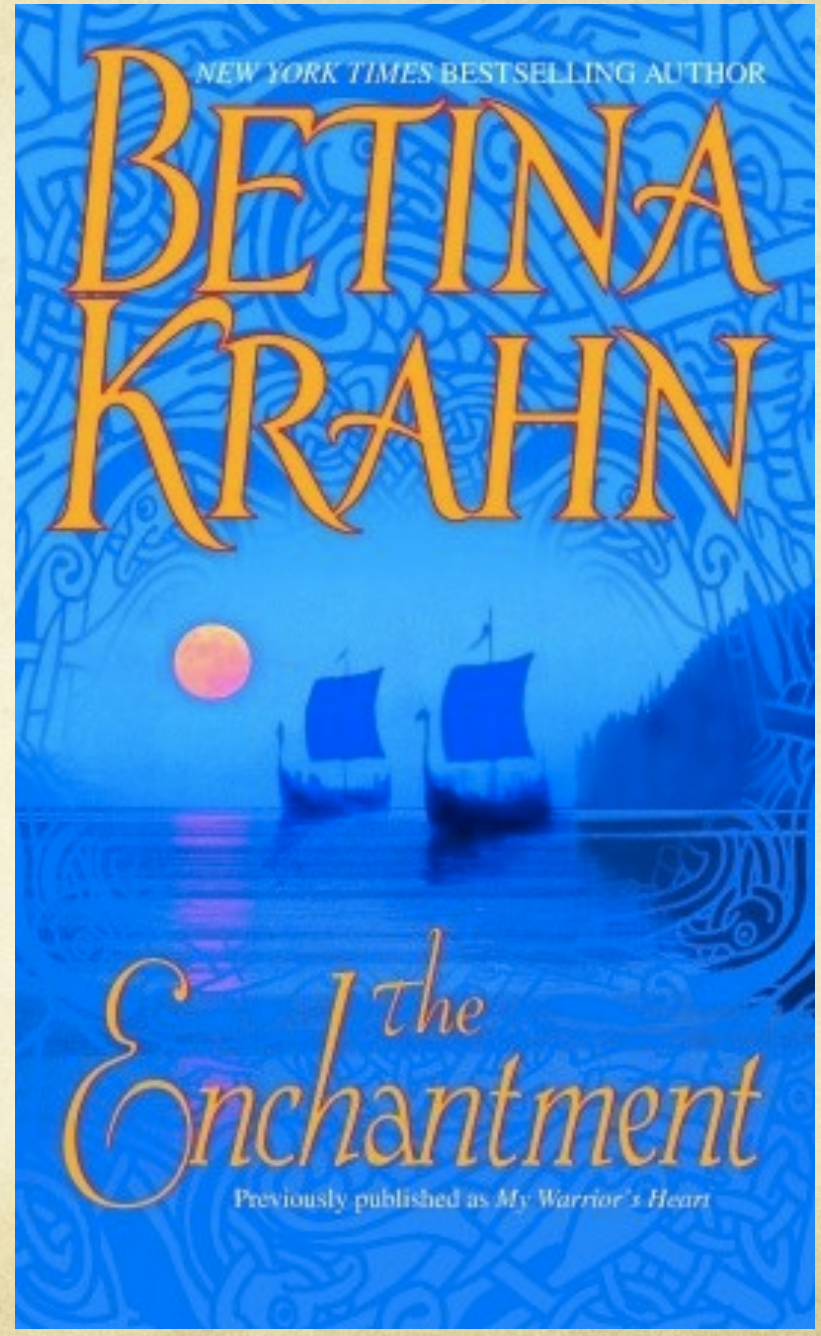
Larissa Brown



*Beautiful*  
Wreck

LARISSA BROWN





# How to Finish the Dang Book

- Don't talk about finishing it, finish it.
  - (Pro tip: the middle sucks for everyone. Don't give up. You're in the middle of the who-cares draft. NO ONE cares until you finish. And no one ever will if you don't.)
- Write as fast as you can (unless your current method is working for you).
  - *Zero draft*
  - *NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month)*

# Tools to Help You Finish

- Post-its
- All caps
- Asterisks
- MacFreedom.com
- WriteorDie.com
- 45/15s
- Scrivener

# Decide:

Do you really want to write?

If your answer is

“Yes, but...”

you’re just using six letters and two words to say “No.”

*- John Scalzi*

# It's Okay to Do EVERYTHING WRONG

- In fact, you will do everything wrong.
- And then you'll make the same mistakes, over and over.
- When you finally realize what those mistakes are, you'll make newer, bigger, more horrifying ones!

# REVISION *is the best part.*

- Seriously. Revision is where the fun really starts.
- Lyrical is for later. Don't revise what you might not save!

How to Revise Your Novel, [rachaelherron.com](http://rachaelherron.com)

# Stay in Touch!

- RachaelHerron.com
- Writer's weekly email: [RachaelHerron.com/write](http://RachaelHerron.com/write)
- Coaching: [RachaelHerron.com/coach](http://RachaelHerron.com/coach)
- Twitter/Facebook
- Podcasts:
  - How Do You Write?
  - The Writer's Well