

When I first started writing, I was after the Holy Grail, writing for Harlequin. I submitted manuscript after manuscript to the editors there and never made it. In my mind, that was the path to job security back then. Get on their roster and you'd be writing a couple or three Harlequins a year FOREVER. Well, I've since learned that there is no job security in the writing biz and certainly not at Harlequin where lines close, editors leave or are pushed out, and the guidelines can change overnight. Also, I didn't have the right voice for Harlequin, though I didn't know it then. So I was lucky enough to sell my first two books, which were romantic suspense, to Kensington. Yes, they could have fit into what is now the Harlequin Romantic Suspense line but that didn't exist in the late nineties.

Now I write single title paranormals. My books are over a hundred thousand words and, like a lot of us single title authors, I got a little uppity about what I did. Oh, those short little Harlequins. I could write two of those to one of my big books. Not so, of course. Each of them is a complete story with compelling characters and I have more than one friend who is hooked on them. But the friends who pick them up are not kids. The younger generation coming up would probably not be caught dead in the series aisle at WalMart or the grocery store. Which is why you've seen it shrinking lately.

Hence the growth of what we are now calling New Adult. I've been reading a lot of those. News flash: they are very much like the Harlequin stories of old but packaged to appeal to the late teens and young twenty-somethings who don't want to be seen with a Billionaire's Mistress's Secret Baby book. Now don't get me wrong. There isn't going to a billionaire or a mistress and probably not a secret baby in these books. But you'll find some familiar romance tropes. She's got a secret in her past that has made her afraid of a relationship. Or maybe it's him but that's not as common. He's an alpha hero who is just about too good to be true—handsome, understanding of her reluctance to commit and smart, of course. Their backgrounds may be

different but they are probably in college, one of them on scholarship. There's not much studying going on but a lot of partying. The amount of "hooking up" varies. Add the F-bomb and you have a New Adult. Of course the packaging is important. The books are trade size and have a young hot couple on the cover. The titles are short and hint at the issue. Some are a little profane with words like "nasty" or "bastard". Are you getting the picture?

I swear, read one and you'll see the similarity to the vintage Harlequins we were reading when we were young and discovering romance for the first time. Yes, there's a happily ever after. There are the wacky best friends though they will invariably include a gay guy now. But perception is everything. I doubt you'll find a cowboy or Navy Seal. I'd like to sell them mine with a vampire but not sure it's going to fly. The books are fast and satisfying reads. Just like we enjoyed back in the day.

Now how can we use that perception thing to our advantage? Good question. How do you perceive yourself? Are you a winner? A success or a failure? Are you sitting on your stories, afraid to send them out or enter a contest? Or are you revising ad nauseum, still insecure in your efforts, terrified the story is still "not right?" We all go through the doubts and second guesses. It's easy to eat pumpkin pie and put off doing anything until after the holidays. What do they say? No one in New York works during the holidays anyway. Not true. Get your stuff out there. Be perceived as a working author who has something to tell and to sell. I'm giving myself this pep talk too. It's the time of year when I want to slack off, give up, play and not pay the piper. But the piper will come and I'll have nothing to show for the past month or two. What about you?

Gerry Bartlett is the best-selling author of the Real Vampires series. Real Vampires Know Size Matters hit shelves December 3. You can subscribe to her newsletter at www.gerrybartlett.com.