

I'm about to bring my long-running vampire series to a close. It's tempting to keep riding that horse as long as I can. I know those characters and I'm comfortable in that world. Maybe too comfortable. I've had ten books so far then my publisher decided they were done. It was a good run and we parted amicably. My editor made it clear she'd like to work with me again on something else. Great. Of course I wasn't satisfied and immediately self-published a novella and am working on a book eleven. I'm stubborn that way. Nobody tells me I'm done until I say I'm done.

Then I picked up a very famous and New York Times best-selling author's eleventh book in her vamp series. Same characters star throughout. Similar to what I've done in mine. Not that I'm comparing. Her print run has several more zeroes than mine. Anyway, I started reading because I've loved her characters for years and she's an auto-buy. But something happened about page 30. I got bored. The writing was still good, the characters were familiar, but so was the plot. Yep, I felt like I'd fallen into a comfortable rut. And, oops, the sexual tension that used to zing between the hero and heroine had moved from a conflagration to a cozy burn. I saw similarities that shook me awake. I'd planned a similar change in my course. My two were going to commit. And, yes, that takes a lot of the tension out of the relationship. Even I had moaned about the challenge of writing love scenes with the same two over and over and over... You get the idea. It was clearly a sign.

So I realized it was time to move on. I had to jump out of the cozy world of Glory and Blade and into a new and much more frightening one. Maybe, gasp, leave vampires entirely. Because they aren't selling like they used to. What is? It's anyone's guess. Today it's contemporary and erotica. But by the time the books editors buy today come out there could be an entirely new trend in vogue. A friend of mine loves cowboy books and she's made me notice

the dozens of reprints of that genre crowding the shelves. I'm sure Linda Lael Miller is happy dancing all the way to the bank.

It's a scary thing, jumping off that cliff. I've had a historical published before. But it was Regency. Not sure that's a good bet in today's market. And I love to write romantic suspense. Too bad it seems like the big names there are the only ones making good money in that market. So what to do? I know the tried and true advice. My agent keeps telling me: write what you love to write. Seriously? And is she guaranteeing she can sell it? Doubtful. But I plug along. My mood lately has been dark. So I sent her a dark vampire proposal. No word yet. My fans would be surprised. Where's my trademark humor? I have no idea. I've been grasping for it and have another proposal started. A friend's agent tells her to have several proposals out at all times. Great advice and the reason we're working up bleeding ulcers.

I want job security. My little 99cent novella is selling well. It's been in the top one-hundred vampire romances for weeks. Super. But you don't get rich at 35% of 99cents. And, frankly, I resent selling my hard work that cheaply. It smacks of desperation. But I wanted some new work out there. Oh, maybe I am desperate. Because if I sold on proposal today, I probably wouldn't have a book out until mid to late 2015. That gives people way too long to forget Gerry Bartlett. Not how to build a career or keep one.

Which leaves me to the last sign: Writers write. I used to have this posted next to my computer. But then I made my office pretty and that sign disappeared. Along with my motivation. Without deadlines, without contracts, it's easy to sit and ponder a cursor or check email and get absolutely nothing done. Sitting naked on an ice floe without Glory and her crew to keep me warm has left me shaking and vulnerable. I don't want to start over. Writing those books was *easy*.

I just read a book called *Fangirl*, about a girl who writes fan fiction. I see the appeal. You can justglom onto someone's ideas and stop thinking of your own. I could do that. But I won't.

I'll suck it up and get going again. Because the sign I love the best is the one they put on my table at the Literacy Signing at RWA. It's the one with my name: Gerry Bartlett, Published Author. I won't let that go. Not now, not ever.

Gerry Bartlett is the nationally bestselling author of the Real Vampires series. *Real Vampires Take a Bite Out of Christmas* is her novella, on sale now. Subscribe to her newsletter at gerrybartlett.com