



2025

Awards Finalists

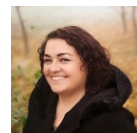
## THE JOAN HESSAYON AWARD FOR NEW WRITERS

**RNA** | JOAN  
HESSAYON  
AWARD



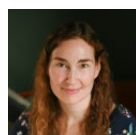
### **The Beat of Our Hearts** **Amanda Giles** **D C Thompson, The People's Friend**

1988. Rock star drummer Jonny rescues army sergeant Sian. From rainy London to lush Welsh hills, they squabble and laugh. But can they solve the puzzle of the farm saboteur? Will Bo the border collie recover? And can Sian release past heartbreak to take a chance on a drummer boy?



### **Love, Rebooted** **Katy Summers** **Audible**

Love, Rebooted is a steamy, slow-burn romcom that will steal the heart of your inner-nerd. Because if we want a second chance at love, sometimes we have to ask ourselves the most obvious question: Have you tried turning it off and on again?



### **Things We Do for Love and Science** **Ruth Kramer** **Champagne Book Group**

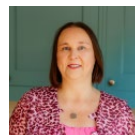
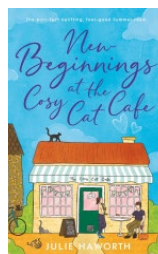
Delia, a commitment-phobic scientist, wants to have a baby via sperm donor. Enter Gabriel, an earl who's about to lose his ancestral home. He offers to become Delia's donor, and together, they plan to co-parent as friends. But when Gabriel loses his heart, Delia must decide whether to risk hers.



### **Secrets at Sunset** **Vanessa Woolley** **Kingsley Publishers**

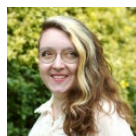
Journalist Kate arrives in Africa to write about conservation and is soon drawn into a poaching investigation working alongside ex-soldier Ryan. As they grow closer, their relationship is tested by Kate's secret and Ryan's troubled past. Will they overcome their struggles and find a future together in the African bush?

## THE POPULAR ROMANTIC FICTION NOVEL AWARD



### **New Beginnings at the Cosy Cat Café** **Julie Haworth** **Simon & Schuster UK**

Tori Baxter returns to the Sussex village of Blossom Heath with her dreams shattered after being dumped. Whilst working at The Cosy Cup Café, Tori realises, with the help of a hunky fireman and a clowder of rescue cats, that true happiness might lie closer to home than she thought.



### **All the Painted Stars** **Emma Denny** **HQ**

When Lily Barden hears her best friend Jo's hand in marriage is the first prize in a tournament, she steals her brothers' armour and enters herself, determined to save her. But things spiral out of control, and after a dangerous confrontation both women are forced to flee.



### **A Christmas in Prague** **Helga Jensen** **Canelo Hera**

When Olivia's Aunt Grace passes, she leaves everything to Olivia, with one condition: travel to Prague and deliver a message to Grace's long-lost true-love, Marek. As Marek's nephew, Tomas, shows her around, Olivia wonders if her secret Christmas wish will come true and grant her a second chance at romance.



### **Things We Do for Love** **Miranda Dickinson** **HQ**

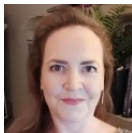
Lucie Hart, a struggling actress, performs scenes from Shakespeare plays in the beautiful garden at the bard's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon. Theo Larkin, an almost-A-lister with a serious PR problem, is about to crash her stage. What happens next will steal the show, setting the scene for a summer of love.



### **The Best is Yet to Come** **Jessica Redland** **Boldwood**

An exciting new chapter awaits Emma – running an alpaca-walking business on one of Beatrix Potter's tenant farms. When her fiancé tells her he doesn't want the alpacas or her there, she's heartbroken. But perhaps the best is yet to come for Emma as one door closes and another opens.

## THE FANTASY ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD



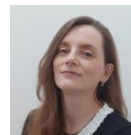
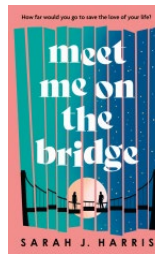
**The Love of Her Lives**  
**C J Connolly**  
**Joffe Books**

Millie stumbles on a door that thrusts her into alternate versions of her reality, and she explores many what-ifs as she seeks a life with the guy she wants. But what if she can't find it? And what if she should have been seeking something else – someone else – all along?



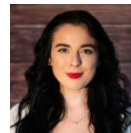
**Now Comes the Mist**  
**Julie C. Dao**  
**Podium**

Lucy Westenra is fascinated by death. Sleepwalking in Whitby she meets mysterious Vlad. He asks her to live with him in immortality. He expects her to be appalled by his darkness, but Lucy is enraptured. Vlad reacts with violence and Lucy has to fight for her agency.



**Meet Me On The Bridge**  
**Sarah J Harris**  
**Amazon Publishing**

Julia Hockney falls in love with the perfect man... in her dreams. But she discovers Alex died one year ago – on the bridge where they'd agreed to meet for a first date. Who wouldn't want to go back and change destiny? But Julia learns meddling with the past has heartbreaking consequences.



**Apprentice to the Villain**  
**Hannah Nicole Maehrler**  
**Penguin**

Working for an evil overlord is rewarding but being bad is demanding. Something peculiar is happening with the kingdom's magic, making it vulnerable to its enemies. It's time for Evie to step out of her comfort zone. But what happens when the assistant is ready to become the Villain's apprentice?



**The Courting of Bristol Keats**  
**Mary E Pearson**  
**Pan Macmillan**

The Courting of Bristol Keats is a story spanning worlds and decades, a story about love, second chances, and the lines we cross that can never be forgiven. Or can they? Bristol Keats fights to save her family, even as she finds herself falling in love with the enemy.

## THE DEBUT ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD



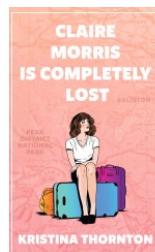
**The Night Before Christmas**  
**Nicola Knight**  
**Bloodhound Books**

Felicity Brooks hates Christmas. But when she meets a man dressed as a giant penguin on Christmas Eve, could it spell a change of heart, in this laugh-out-loud festive romance?



**Summer at Tillingford Hall**  
**Flora Dunn**  
**Self Published**

Studios divorcee, Alice Mellow, is on secondment at Tillingford Hall to catalogue the Tillingford family's collection of miniature portraits. When she realises that everything – and everyone – at the Hall are not as they seem, her discoveries could tear the family apart. And where will that leave Guy, the handsome heir?



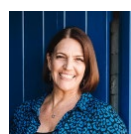
**Claire Morris is Completely Lost**  
**Kristina Thornton**  
**Northodox Press**

Claire is a London party girl... until her dad dies unexpectedly. Grief-stricken, she quits her hectic life and rents a Peak District cottage. She ends up befriending local widow, Hazel and hot farmer, Sebastian. Can Claire rebuild her life in Baliston? Or is she running away from her problems?



**Plot Twist**  
**Breea Keenan**  
**Headline**

Becca Taylor is having a bad summer. When fellow writer Riley O'Connell invites her to the Irish countryside, Becca can't pack her bags fast enough, even though they've never met. But Riley is not the sensitive romance novelist like Becca assumed. He's most definitely a man. A hot, six-foot Irishman.



**Floating Solo**  
**Shelley Wilson**  
**Self Published**

Budding entrepreneur Kat Sinclair wants to grow her quirky solo narrowboat holiday enterprise but faces rejection at every turn. Until a Hollywood film crew gets in touch, with the potential to change her business, dreams, and love life forever. Climb aboard the Creaky Cauldron for an adventure like no other!



## THE FESTIVE HOLIDAY ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD



**A Scottish Christmas**  
**Emma Bennet**  
Joffe Books

Rose Aldridge isn't looking forward to Christmas until she's offered a job organising Christmas for a handsome, brooding Scottish laird and his family. She's soon surrounded by tinsel and fairy lights, but in rediscovering her love for the holiday season, will Rose find romance herself?



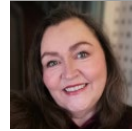
**The Secret Santa Project**  
**Tracy Bloom**  
Harper Collins

This December, Jolene can't wait for the office Secret Santa moment and the swapping of festive gifts. But her colleagues need more than a novelty wine glass and some soap to get their tinsel twinkling. Jolene's on a mission to use Secret Santa to make this their best Christmas ever.



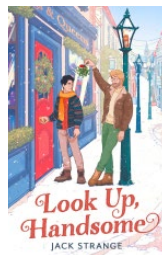
**The Most Wonderful Crime of the Year**  
**Ally Carter**  
Pan MacMillan

The bridge is shut. The phones are down. And the most famous mystery writer in the world just disappeared out of a locked room three days before Christmas. Knives Out gets a romcom twist in this rivals-to-lovers Christmas mystery-romance.



**A Very Irish Christmas**  
**Debbie Johnson**  
Storm Publishing

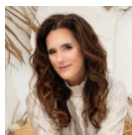
Cassie O'Hara is about to discover the recipe for the sweetest Christmas. Using the money her Irish nana left her to visit a quaint country village, she expects a cosy cottage and Christmas cheer. Instead, she gets a draughty disaster, a stray dog and two gorgeous but very different men.



**Look Up, Handsome**  
**Jack Strange**  
Harper Collins

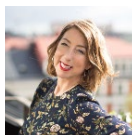
Bookseller Quinn Oxford must save his queer bookshop from closure at Christmas. So when romantic novelist Noah Sage comes to town, he's a distraction Quinn doesn't need, but desperately wants.

## THE SHORTER ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD



**Camera Shy**  
**Julia Boggio**  
Home By Midnight

Heartbroken after her almost-engagement is called off, Jess goes on a mini-break to Paris seeking closure and meets a hot French stranger called Gabriel. Sparks fly, but can they both heal their emotional wounds and let love back into their lives before it's too late?



**The Christmas Book Hunt**  
**Jenny Colgan**  
Amazon Publishing

Mirren's great-aunt Violet is seriously ill. Her Christmas wish is to be reunited with a long-lost hand-illustrated book from her childhood. Through her search Mirren meets Theo who's searching for the same book. As they join forces will she find her Christmas miracle – and maybe a kiss under the mistletoe?



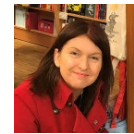
**A Highlander to Protect Her**  
**Jeanine Engert**  
Mills & Boon

The Highlander's choice: Protect her or his clan? Every family has secrets. Kenna Hay's? The mother who abandoned her is alive! Kenna must journey across Scotland to find her. After years of lies, she's determined to keep Rolf Cameron, who's tasked with escorting her, at arm's length... despite their unexpected connection.



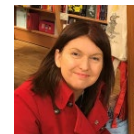
**The Kiss That Made Her Countess**  
**Laura Martin**  
Mills & Boon

Desperate to experience Society before entering an unhappy marriage, Alice sneaks into a masquerade ball. Catching the eye of a dashing stranger, the evening ends with a kiss. As their encounter is observed, he confesses he's the Earl of Northumberland. To save her reputation she must become his convenient countess.



**Her Summer With The Brooding Vet**  
**Scarlet Wilson**  
Mills & Boon

The last thing vet nurse Aurora expects is for her quiet life to be interrupted by the arrival of new vet Eli. With secrets of her own, Aurora finds her attraction to the brooding vet completely inconvenient. But could a moonlit kiss change everything?



**Slow Dance With The Italian**  
**Scarlet Wilson**  
Mills & Boon

A bucket list from her late-sister pushes Darcy out of her comfort zone – to a dance class with charismatic Arturo. Sharing a connection, she accepts his offer of help when she adopts a puppy. She easily falls for the pup, but can she open her guarded heart to Arturo?

## THE ROMANTIC SAGA AWARD



**The Story Collector**  
Iris Costello  
Penguin

Sweeping through the cobbled streets of World War 1 ravaged London, a German prisoner of war camp, and the present-day, rugged coastline of Cornwall, The Story Collector is the thrilling, richly woven story of Katerina, Miriam, and Edie, three visionary women, divided by time but bound together by a century-old mystery.



**Evacuees at the Wartime Bookshop**  
Lesley Eames  
Penguin

It is 1942 and World War II is raging. The village of Churchwood is doing its best to meet the challenges of life on the home front but it isn't easy. And then, to add to the problems, comes an unexpected influx of lively evacuees from London's East End.



**Felicity's War**  
Jean Fullerton  
Atlantic

1941. London is battered by air raids as Felicity "Fliss" Carmichael returns home to St. Winifred's Rectory. She crosses paths with Detective Inspector Timothy Wallace and a spark ignites between them. In a city under siege, can their blossoming romance endure as Fliss and Tim fight crime and corruption?



**Secrets for the Three Sisters**  
Annie Groves  
Harper Collins

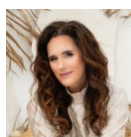
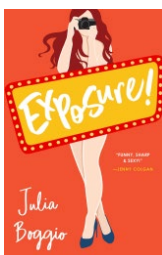
It's the London Blitz of 1940 and everyone is doing their bit, including the three Harrison sisters. Even in wartime there's a wedding on the cards, but the bride is keeping a secret. Can the sisters stick together and keep mum, and win the battle on the home front?



**A Sister's Hope**  
Mollie Walton  
Headline

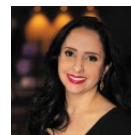
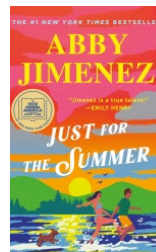
In 1941, eighteen-year-old Connie runs away to work as a carpenter's apprentice. Life is tough, but Connie finds comfort in the friendship of her glamorous flatmate, Valentine. When Valentine disappears and the police won't investigate, Connie takes matters into her own hands. What terrible secrets will she uncover?

## THE ROMANTIC COMEDY AWARD



**Exposure!**  
Julia Boggio  
Home By Midnight

The final book in the Photographers Trilogy, Exposure! is a funny and fast-paced second chances romance that explores marriage, family, and love, and why the biggest risks can be the most rewarding.



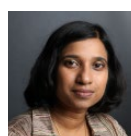
**Just For The Summer**  
Abby Jimenez  
Little Brown

It's supposed to be a quick fling, just for the summer. But when Emma's toxic mother shows up and Justin has to assume guardianship of his three siblings, they're forced to navigate more than they expected – including catching real feelings. What if Fate has actually brought the perfect pair together?



**Love Me Till Wednesday**  
Suzanne Lissaman  
Octosulis Publishing

Lisa hates her job, her youngest child is about to head off to uni, and now her ex wants his share of her house. Determined to improve her life, she decides to resurrect her former singing career. But after uncovering some shocking secrets, will she find happiness again?



**The Winner Bakes It All**  
Jeevani Charika  
Harper Collins

Elodie is the queen of sugarcraft. Mal is a keto fan who hates carbs. When they're both hired to cater the same celeb wedding, they have to work together to pull it off. Will their clashing culinary worlds create a recipe for disaster, or a deliciously unexpected romance?



**The Happy Place**  
L K Wilde  
Self Published

When Liv loses everything, she and her son swap luxury for a shabby room at a co-living farm. But sharing Lowen Farm with Seb, her teenage heartbreak, is the last thing she needs. Can Liv navigate communal living, rekindle old flames, and stop the past from catching up with her?

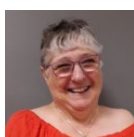


## THE HISTORICAL ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD



**The Butterfly Garden**  
Rachel Burton  
Boldwood

Meredith is bequeathed a cottage by an unknown great-aunt but she discovers a man already living there – a young gardener who's also been left half of Butterfly Cottage. Together they unearth a mystery involving Meredith's great aunt, the garden, and letters left unread for over 50 years.



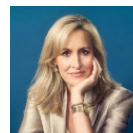
**The Earl Pretender**  
Caitlyn Callery  
Wild Rose Press

Robert searches for his disabled older brother, who disappeared at birth. Meeting Jane and her brother, Ben, he believes his search is over, although she insists he is mistaken. Meanwhile, someone is trying to kill Robert. If they believe vulnerable Ben is his brother, will they come for him next?



**The Wicked Lady**  
Elena Collins (Judy Leigh)  
Boldwood

1658. Heiress Katherine Ferrers' unhappy marriage leaves her impoverished and desperate for love. The present day. The local myth of The Wicked Lady, the notorious highway robber, captures newcomer Charlie Wolfe's imagination, and as he renovates his old cottage, he can hear the hoofbeats of her horse echoing across time.



**Shadows in the Moonlight**  
Santa Montefiore  
Orion

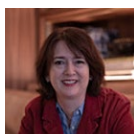
Timeshifter psychic detective Pixie Tate is summoned to a Cornish Elizabethan mansion to deal with a ghost who refuses to leave until her child, who went missing in 1895 is returned to her. When Pixie travels back into the past she accidentally meets the love of her life.



**The Last Song of Winter**  
Lulu Taylor  
Pan Macmillan

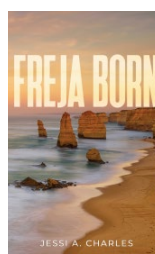
The fates of Veronica and Romy intertwine on the beautiful Welsh island of St Elfwy. Veronica lived there during the war, dreaming of her lost love, and Romy in the present day, discovers the secrets of the past and what the future holds.

## THE ROMANTIC THRILLER AWARD



**Cold Fury**  
Toni Anderson  
Self Published

Hope Harper was a star defense attorney with a wonderful life – until she got the wrong defendant released and he viciously slaughtered her family. When the killer escapes, Hope knows the brooding FBI bodyguard assigned won't be enough to protect her. Not when she's hellbent on getting revenge.



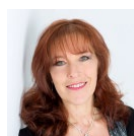
**Freja Born**  
Jessi A. Charles  
Austin Macauley

Fiercely independent Freja falls in love with her neighbour's son, who is sixteen years her junior. Fear of being ostracized for her affair, Freja must choose between her life and him. And, also find a way to get out from under the prying eyes of a dangerously envious woman.



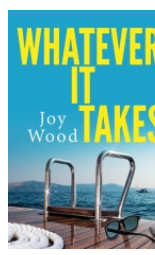
**Deadly Treasures**  
Jane McParkes  
Pencreek Publishing

At the launch party for eco-architect Olivia's latest project, a waitress is found dead. Is she connected to barrister Jago's recent trial, or are other forces at work? As their professional lives collide, can they work together to uncover those responsible, or are their problems more personal than they thought?



**The Memory of Us**  
Dani Atkins  
Aria/Head of Zeus

An accident leaves Amelia with false memories about a man named Sam and a love story that never existed. Her sister, Lexi, attempts to trigger Amelia's true memories, helped by vet, Nick. Except Nick looks like Sam. Can Lexi stop herself falling for the man her sister thinks is hers?



**Whatever It Takes**  
Joy Wood  
Self Published

New neighbours become friends, sharing dinners, trips and a holiday in Greece. While there, a fatal accident occurs. They don't all return, but those that do hide a huge secret. Someone will do whatever it takes to make sure that it never comes to the surface.

## THE CONTEMPORARY ROMANTIC NOVEL AWARD

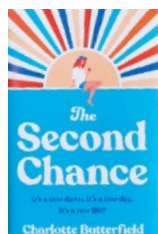


### Coming Home to Starr's Fall

Kate Hewitt

**Boldwood**

An eternal optimist and a grumpy bookseller band together to uncover secrets from the past in this cosy New England-set story of starting over and second chances.

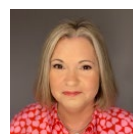


### The Second Chance

Charlotte Butterfield

**Harper Collins**

After a psychic predicted the day Nell would die twenty years ago, she's lived life embracing adventure, choosing fun over commitment and laying down roots, but when the fateful day comes, she wakes up very much alive, realising she's been given a second chance at life and finding true love.



### A Secret Cornish Wish

Ali McNamara

**Little Brown**

When Frankie and her friends discover an old barrel washed up on the beach, they learn the ancient tale of the mermaid who grants wishes to those who find her treasure. Even though they know it's just Cornish folklore, the girls make a wish for what they want in life.

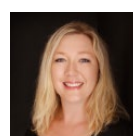


### P.S. I Hate You

Lauren Connolly

**Quercus**

In this splendidly bittersweet romantic comedy, enemies forced together by a mutual loss are led on a cross-country journey toward a second chance.



### A Love Letter to Paris

Rebecca Raisin

**Boldwood**

In a charming Parisian neighbourhood, dreamy Lilou sells whimsical vintage love letters... and acts as an anonymous matchmaker known as Paris Cupid! But when she receives a letter of her own – from a secret admirer – is it her turn to find her soulmate in the City of Love?

Congratulations to all of our finalists and winners of the Romantic Novelists' Association  
Romantic Novel of the Year Awards 2025.

With special thanks to the estate of Dr Hessayon,  
sponsor of The Joan Hessayon Award for New Writers.

**Seána Talbot, Chair**

**RNA**

**JOAN  
HESSAYON  
AWARD**

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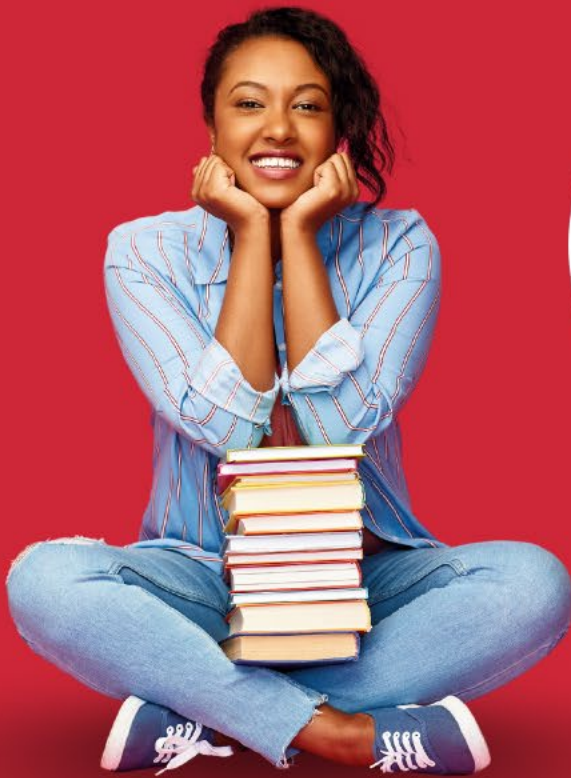


**NEWS**





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established  
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