



## A Conversation With... Leslie Wainger

First in a series of editor and agent Q&As from the 2004 RWA National Conference in Dallas.

**Q** What are the key elements that make a great romance?

**A** Romances are defined by emotion. My way into any book are the characters. If you have the right set up, and the right tension between them, and a happy ending, that's what the reader expects.

**Q** Tell us about *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies*.

**A** It was interesting being on the other side. My editor was great. They were great in disciplining me.

I think there is stuff in here applicable to any genre of fiction. Even published authors have told me there was stuff in there for them, too.

I wanted to demystify the process. I'm just one editor, but all the editors I know are in the business because we love books. I tried to make use seem less intimidating.

**Q** You've been in the business a long time and have seen many changes in the publishing business. But is there anything that hasn't changed about what you're looking for?

**A** There is more room for mainstream writing in series. But

### At a glance

Harlequin Editor Leslie Wainger is the author of *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies*

it's all just trappings. Good writing, good storytelling and a unique voice are what we're still looking for.

**Q** What do you look for in a submission? How does a writer know which editor to target?

**A** For a query, you can send up to two single-spaced pages. Or a synopsis with accompanying chapters. I'm looking for a synopsis that keeps me interested; it's not a matter of a particular page count, but a matter of knowing your story.

You can target a particular editor. If all you have is a tip sheet with the senior editor's name, that's all you know. I rarely read them myself, I must confess. If you have an appointment with someone or you heard someone speak who seems to get what you're thinking... we all acquire for each line. I do occasionally take on a new author but not very often. A junior editor is hungrier for authors.

**Q** What are some of the trends in industry right now? What's new at Harlequin/Silhouette?

**A** Romantic suspense is huge. I think that will stay. I think people like the idea of a safe scare.

For us, inspirational is definitely growing. They are hungry for books. Love Inspired is going to six a month. That will continue.

A new line, Next, is going to be launched soon. It has a lot in common with Bombshell. Both focus on the heroine. It's about women at a different stage of life. She has lived more. She could have an ex-husband or aging parents. There's a romantic element, but it's not the driving force of the story. At the end, the relationship is ratcheted up a notch.

**Q** What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

**A** Read. Read. Read. Keep up with what's out there. Don't give up. You have to love the idea of writing romance. Just keep writing. If you get rejected, it's a fact of life. Just keep going.



Orange Blossom editor Louise Ahern writes romantic comedies and zany mysteries when she's not editing the alumni magazine for the University of Redlands.

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