

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED until 19.45 16th March 2015

**Joss Stirling's *Struck* is first Young Adult novel to win
The Romantic Novel of the Year Award**

Trophy and £5,000 prize presented by Barbara Taylor Bradford

**Jill Mansell and Carole Matthews receive
RNA Outstanding Achievement Awards**

Joss Stirling triumphed over fellow competing authors to win the Romantic Novelists' Association's highest accolade, the Romantic Novel of the Year, with *Struck*, published by Oxford University Press. *Struck* (formerly *Storm and Stone*) is the first Young Adult title to be awarded the RNA's prestigious prize, reflecting the increasing popularity of this sub-genre. Barbara Taylor Bradford presented Joss with her trophies and a cheque for £5000 at a star-studded event, compèred by Jane Wenham-Jones.

Joss Stirling was the winner of the Young Adult Romantic Novel of the Year Category, for which she also received an engraved star-shaped trophy. Her book then went forward, along with those of the five other category winners – Contemporary, Epic, Historical, RoNA Rose and Romantic Comedy – to contest the Romantic Novelists' Association's (RNA) most coveted award, the Romantic Novel of the Year.

This year, books shortlisted for the RoNA Rose (for category/series and shorter romance) competed for the first time with all other categories for the overall prize of Romantic Novel of the Year.

A panel of independent judges read the six category winners' novels before meeting to debate the finer points of each book. The panel included Sarah Broadhurst, formerly *The Bookseller*; Alison Flood, *Guardian.co.uk*; Jane Mays, *The Daily Mail*; Karin Stoecker, ex-Editorial Director of Harlequin Books and Matt Bates of WHSmith Travel.

Romantic Novel of the Year Category Winners

Prior to announcing the overall award winner, Barbara Taylor Bradford revealed the winners of the individual categories and presented them with star-shaped crystal trophies.

The winners were:

Lucy Dillon, *A Hundred Pieces of Me*, Hodder & Stoughton

Winner Contemporary Category Romantic Novel of the Year

(for mainstream romantic novels set post-1960, and can include chick lit, paranormal and romantic suspense)

Ella Harper, *Pieces of You*, Avon

Winner Epic Category Romantic Novel of the Year

(for novels containing serious issues or themes, including gritty, multi-generational stories)

Hazel Gaynor, *The Girl Who Came Home*, William Morrow, (Harper Collins)

Winner Historical Category Romantic Novel of the Year

(for novels set in a period before 1960)

Lucy-Anne Holmes, *Just a Girl, Standing in Front of a Boy*, Sphere (Little, Brown)

Winner Romantic Comedy Category Romantic Novel of the Year

(for consistently humorous or amusing novels)

Louise Allen, *Scandal's Virgin*, Harlequin Mills & Boon Historical

Winner RoNA Rose Award

(for category/series and shorter romance)

Joss Stirling, *Struck* (formerly *Storm and Stone*), Oxford University Press

Winner Young Adult Category Romantic Novel of the Year

(featuring protagonists who are teenagers or young adults)

The five judges were fulsome in their praise of *Struck*:

"A fast-paced novel, full of adventure and danger, as well as a satisfying

romance with an instant attraction.”

“*Mean Girls* meets *21 Jump Street*, navigating life and themes of school cliques and bullying.”

“Main characters were well drawn.”

“A satisfying developing relationship between heroine and hero. A provocative read which delivered on the romance. Good plot. Great hero and heroine.”

“An absorbing read that really pulled you in – I admired the energy and pace.”

Pia Fenton, Chairman of the RNA said, "I'm absolutely thrilled that a Young Adult book has won the overall award of Romantic Novel of the Year! It's such an exciting sub-genre which has been embraced by both teenage and adult readers during the last few years. This win really highlights its growing appeal and Joss's book is fantastic - huge congratulations to her!"

Outstanding Achievement Awards

Jill Mansell is the author of twenty five novels which have consistently appeared in bestseller lists, and Carole Matthews has also written twenty five bestselling novels. Both Jill and Carole were presented with outstanding achievement awards for their continued championing of the RNA and romantic fiction.

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Cover images for all the novels, together with author photographs, can be found at:

http://www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org/activities/photo_galleries

High resolution pictures of the Romantic Novel of the Year Awards can be found in the media section of our website

http://www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org/news/media_centre

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About the Romantic Novelists' Association

The RNA was formed in 1960 to promote romantic fiction and encourage good writing and now represents more than 700 writers, agents, editors and other publishing professionals. The Romantic Novel of the Year Award was launched in the same year, and recognises excellence in romantic novels thereby enhancing the standing of the genre.

The RNA has always involved readers in judging the awards. Keen readers are asked to rate nominated books on a number of criteria including romantic content, readability, characters, plot, dialogue, style and ending. These readers' favourites are then presented to the expert independent judges, who decide the overall winners.

The 2014 Romantic Novel of the Year Award winner was Veronica Henry, for *A Night on the Orient Express*, published by Orion. Other recent winners include Jenny Colgan, Jane Lovering, Julia Gregson, Freya North, Rosie Thomas, Jojo Moyes and Philippa Gregory. The Joan Hessayon Award in 2014 was won by Jo Thomas for her contemporary debut novel *The Oyster Catcher*, published by Accent Press.

A list of past winners of RNA awards can be found at

http://www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org/index.php/awards/romantic_novel_of_the_year

About Joss Stirling

Former British diplomat and Oxfam policy adviser, Oxfordshire-based Joss Stirling has now published over thirty books in genres ranging from historical adventure to fantasy. She has a doctorate in English literature from Oxford, is a Fellow of the English Association and also writes under the pen names Julia Golding and Eve Edwards.

Joss Stirling has won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize 2006, the Nestle Children's Book Prize 2006 (formerly the Smarties Prize), the honor book medal of the Green Earth Book Award (USA), and the 2012 Beehive Book Award, Young Adult Division, from the Children's Literature Association of Utah. Over half a million of her books have been sold worldwide in many languages.

Joss Stirling said of her winning novel: "My hero and heroine are very special to me in this book. Raven has a black American father. I think there are too few ethnically diverse heroines in YA so I'm trying to do a little towards setting the balance right. My own family has become wonderfully diverse in the last generation thanks to some recent marriages – as are so many other families these days – and I'd like to see that reality reflected in the novels young people get to read in teenage years. Her name was 'borrowed' from a real girl I met in Edinburgh on a school visit. I warned her I might do the magpie author thing and save up her name for a heroine. Years later I've finally found my Raven in the right book. I hope she'll approve! As for

Kieran, well I have to admit he owes quite a lot to thinking what it would have been like to go to school with a young Sherlock of the Benedict Cumberbatch sort. I love the idea of a clever man who needs someone to help him socialise, so you can see how Raven and Kieran would grow to depend on each other once they get past their initial distrust.”

She continues, “I wrote *Struck* as a romantic detective story where the denouement is not heading so much for traditional wedding bells but in a perhaps more contemporary direction of two young people moving toward a great working partnership – one that it is fun to imagine in the future, with plenty of romance too of course! It is really pleasing to have that concept given this seal of approval from the selectors.”