

PRESS RELEASE

17th March 2014

Local Author Achieves National Success

Milly Johnson wins Romantic Comedy Novel Category

Romantic Novelists' Association Awards 2014

Milly Johnson was declared the winner of the Romantic Comedy Novel category of the Romantic Novel of the Year Award this evening

The announcement, made by Darcey Bussell CBE, was for the Barnsley-based author's novel *It's Raining Men*. To mark her success Milly was presented with a star-shaped crystal trophy by Ms Bussell during a glittering ceremony held in the Reading and Writing Room of the Gladstone Library, One Whitehall Place in London SW1.

Milly's novel then went forward, along with those of the four other category winners - Contemporary, Epic, Historical and Young Adult - to contest the Romantic Novelists' Association's (RNA) most coveted award, the Romantic Novel of the Year. This is the most prestigious award in the RNA's calendar and the winner was announced later in the evening.

The Romantic Comedy Novel category is for romantic novels intended to be consistently humorous or amusing. Milly won the category in the face of fierce competition from such highly respected authors as Margaret James, Ali McNamara, Fiona Walker and last year's winner, Jenny Colgan, who this year had two books in contention for the prize.

Published by Simon & Schuster, *It's Raining Men* is about best friends May,

Lara and Claire who are desperate for some time away. They have been dreaming of a little bit of time away from it all at a luxury spa. But when they arrive in Ren Dullem, a small Yorkshire seaside town, by mistake, they have to adjust to a totally different kind of holiday.

May can't wait to get away from men after being cruelly deceived. Then she falls hook, line and sinker at first glance - but he's already taken.

Lara is living with James and his awful step-children taunt her with tales of his younger, prettier ex, whom they adored - the woman Lara walks in to find him in bed with despite all his protestations that he wouldn't touch her again with a barge pole. Reeling from the hurt, she needs R&R to heal. What she doesn't need is to be constantly in battle with the owner of the holiday cottage - a man who is every bit as bitter, resentful and untrusting of the other sex as she is.

Clare's kind, steady boyfriend, Lud, wants her to go and live abroad with him for two years, but she's just been offered the promotion of a lifetime that she can't turn down. In Ren Dullem she finds some single excitement, which happens to turn up in the form of a very bad boy who is everything Lud isn't - impulsive, wild and dangerous. Will the holiday be the break they all need? Or will they be brought to breaking point?

The category winners' novels -

**A Night on the Orient Express* - Veronica Henry
Contemporary Category

**The Fever Tree* - Jennifer McVeigh
Epic category

**The Gilded Fan* - Christina Courtenay
Historical Category

**It's Raining Men* - Milly Johnson
Romantic Comedy

**Linked* - Imogen Howson
Young Adult

- were read and judged by a respected, highly experienced panel of five independent industry professionals who determined the overall winner of the Romantic Novel of the Year.

This year the five judges included Sarah Broadhurst, *The Bookseller*; Alison Flood, *Guardian.co.uk*; Jane Mays, *The Daily Mail*; Karin Stoecker, ex-Editorial Director, Harlequin Books and Chris White of Waterstones.

The judges said of Milly's novel, "We enjoyed the quirky magical element. Brave and ambitious plot twist."

For the past 50 years the RNA has set a benchmark in romantic fiction. Its President, Katie Fforde, commented, "The RNA was set up in 1961 to encourage the good writing of romantic fiction in all its many genres. We congratulate all of our category winners. To get this far and compete against some of the best authors in the land is no mean feat."

Cover images for all the above 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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Romantic Comedy Novel Finalists

Jenny Colgan, *Christmas At The Cupcake Café*, Little, Brown (Sphere)

Issy Randall, proud owner of The Cupcake Café, is in love. Her new business is thriving and she is surrounded by close friends, even if her cupcake colleagues Pearl and Caroline don't seem quite as upbeat about the upcoming season of snow and merriment. But when her boyfriend Austin is scouted for a possible move to New York, Issy is forced to face up to the prospect of a long-distance romance. When the Christmas rush at the cafe - with its increased demand for her delectable creations - begins to take its toll, Issy has to decide what she holds most dear. This December, Issy will have to rely on all her reserves of courage, good nature and cinnamon to make sure everyone has a merry Christmas, one way or another.

Jenny Colgan, *The Loveliest Chocolate Shop in Paris* Little, Brown (Sphere)

As dawn breaks over the cobbled alleyways of Paris Anna Trent is already at work mixing and stirring chocolate which she sells to the grandes dames of Paris. It's a long way from the chocolate factory where she worked in the north of England. But when an accident changed everything Anna was thrown back in touch with her French teacher who offered her the chance of a lifetime - to work in Paris with her former sweetheart, Thierry, a master chocolatier. With old wounds about to be uncovered and healed, Anna is set to discover more about real chocolate, and herself.

Margaret James, *The Wedding Diary*, Choc Lit

Cat wants a fairy-tale wedding in a luxury hotel but her Prince Charming has done a runner. Adam was devastated when his girlfriend turned down his proposal and vowed never to fall in love again. When Cat and Adam meet they shouldn't even consider falling in love - after all, they're both broken hearted. But they can't stop thinking about each other. Is this their second chance for happiness? Or are some things just too good to be true?

Milly Johnson, *It's Raining Men*, Simon & Schuster

Best friends May, Lara and Clare need a holiday. They head off to the Yorkshire seaside town of Ren Dullem ... May, who has never found Mr Right, falls at first glance in Dullem - but he's taken. Lara is living with James and his awful stepchildren. She walks in to find James in bed with the ex. Reeling, she needs the sea air to heal. What she doesn't need is to be in a constant battle with the owner of the cottage who's as bitter and untrusting of the opposite sex as she is. Claire's fiancé Hugh wants her to live abroad with him for two years, but she's just been offered the promotion of a lifetime. She needs space to decide, when she meets a man who is everything Hugh isn't. Will this holiday be the break they need, or bring them to breaking point?

Ali McNamara, *Step Back In Time*, Little, Brown

When Jo-Jo steps onto a zebra crossing and gets hit by a car, she wakes to find herself in 1963. The fashion, the music, her job, even her romantic life is different. And then it happens three more times, each time finding herself in a new decade, trying to live a completely new life in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. The only people she can rely on are Harry and Ellie, her companions from 2013, and George, the owner of a second-hand record store. If she's ever to return from her travels, Jo-Jo must work out why she's jumping through time. And if she does make it back, will her old life ever be the same again?

Fiona Walker, *The Summer Wedding*, Little, Brown (Sphere)

The hotly anticipated wedding of Iris Devonshire, ravishing teenage daughter of celebrity couple Mia and Leo, is to be held in the gardens of their grand Palladian pile alongside the Thames. However, Mia and Leo worry that she's rushing into marriage. Iris thinks marrying handsome stuntman Dougie Everett will surely liberate her from a life where she's typecast as the nation's fantasy adventure action heroine. When their wedding is hijacked by a runaway hot air balloon Iris soon learns that love is a force worth fighting for.

Note to Editors

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 2013 Romantic Novel of the Year Award winner was Jenny Colgan, for *Welcome to Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop of Dreams*, published by Sphere. Other recent winners include Jane Lovering, Julia Gregson, Freya North, Rosie Thomas, Jojo Moyes and Philippa Gregory.

A list of past winners of RNA awards can be found at www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org