

Ohio Romance writer joins multi-author Valentine's event

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ThisWeek Contributor

Cincinnati author Dianne Castell offers a double dose of romance this February with the release of her Harlequin American book and its sequel, a free online novella.

Fans of funny, heart-warming stories can meet Castell and fellow Ohio romance authors at a Valentine's Day booksigning hosted by the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble.

"I love meeting the readers, hearing what they want to read and just talking about romance books," Castell said. "The signing on the 14th includes Jenny Crusie. I've known Jenny a long time and learned a lot from her. She's an incredible teacher and author."



Dianne Castell

Statistics show that romance readers purchase more than 50 percent of all paperback fiction sold in the United States, a remarkable show of support for happily-ever-afters.

"The reason romance is so popular is that it's about relationships," Castell said. "We like to read about things we can relate to, and the romance genre offers that in spades. There's nothing like falling in love."

Castell wrote for nine years before selling her first book to Harlequin, part of the romance powerhouse publisher that includes Silhouette and Mira. Of the approximately 2,000 romances published each year, half are Harlequin and Silhouette category romances.

These 180- to 250-page books are sold by subscription as well as through stores, and many are translated and published -- often with different titles and cover art -- in countries around the world. Castell writes for the Harlequin American line, which she describes as "about life in America, falling in love with the girl next door, the hunky cowboy on the ranch or at the rodeo, the local doctor or lawyer, and getting to meet all their crazy friends and relatives along the way."

Castell's February release, *The Wedding Rescue*, is set in Kentucky horse country and introduces the three McKay sisters, one who is getting married and another who's trying to keep the groom's misguided, meddling brother from sabotaging the wedding.

The third McKay sister gets her own story in *Cowboy To The Rescue*, Castell's current online novella.

In *The Wedding Rescue*, the characters work together to discover the cause of a mysterious ailment threatening the lives of the thoroughbred horses.

"That's a real story," the author said. "Two years ago there was a terrible epidemic of foals being still-born in Kentucky, and no one had any idea why."

For Castell and other authors, the Internet is a great research tool.

"In *The Wedding Rescue*, the hero and heroine help deliver a foal, and I had to find what was involved," she said. "The Internet made it easy."

The Wedding Rescue "is infused with wit, chemistry and fun dialogue," according to *RT Bookclub*, which described the book as "well-crafted" and awarded it "Top Pick" status and a four-star review.

"I've always wanted to write a story about the horse farms and the owners who work relentlessly to keep them so perfect," Castell said. "*The Wedding Rescue* is that book."

On Feb. 2, eHarlequin.com, the romance behemoth's elaborate Web site, began posting a chapter of *Cowboy To The Rescue* each weekday.

"I did 20 chapters between 500 and 700 words each," the author said. "That's two to three pages. The story is fast-paced, with a ton of sexual tension, a lot of fun and on the steamy side. I loved writing it, and it's free.

"The online reads are incredibly popular with romance readers," she said, "as is proven by the fact they get nine to ten million hits per story."

A site that attracts both romance readers and writers, eHarlequin.com has become a powerful promotional tool for the publisher's book lines and authors. Online novellas such as Castell's offer a chance to sample an author's voice and story-telling, while introducing readers to fictional characters whose related paperback books are for sale through the Web site, as well as in stores.

Most online novellas are posted a chapter a weekday or one chapter a week, while others are interactive, with the readers voting to determine what happens next in the story. In addition, eHarlequin.com has message boards where readers can chat with authors, see suggestions and guidelines from editors to aspiring authors and sample blurbs for upcoming print releases.

The eHarlequin.com promotion is significant, but Castell puts a lot of time and money into doing PR for her books as well. "I try to sign all my books within a twenty-five-mile radius of my house," she said. "That means I drive to every Barnes and Noble, Borders, Waldens, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Krogers, etc. and sign my stock. I also send out 750 bookmarks and postcards to romance reader groups all over the U.S.A."

In addition, Castell has a Web site, places ads in industry trade magazines, sends her book out for reviews and talks to the media. And as a member of Romance Writers of America, she presents writing workshops and attends romance conferences.

What does the future hold for Castell? "My next project is a 'Forty and Fabulous' series -- three books that deal with three woman turning the big 4-0," she said. "I truly enjoy writing the middle-aged hero and heroine. They've been around the block a time or two and see life entirely differently than the twenty-somethings. They don't take themselves so seriously and are out to live life on their own terms ... sort of like me."

Meet the author

What: Dianne Castell, author of *The Wedding Rescue*, will appear at a free multi-author Valentine's booksigning to celebrate romance. Also participating are Jennifer Crusie, Rosemary Laurey and J.C. Wilder.

When & Where: Saturday, Feb. 14, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble book store (3280 Tremont Road, Columbus).

For More Information: Call the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble at (614) 459-0920.

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