



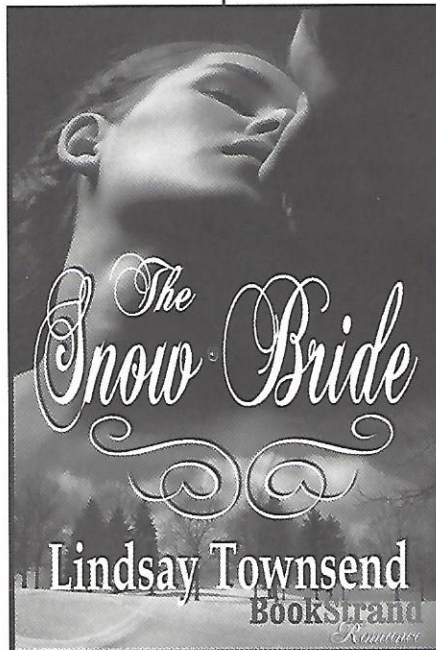
## THE RED PENCIL

Cindy Vallar analyzes the work behind published manuscripts. In this issue, she profiles Lindsay Townsend's *The Snow Bride*.

Every story requires a plot, a setting, and characters. The more memorable the characters the better, for their story will remain with the reader long after the final page is turned. One such tale is Lindsay Townsend's *The Snow Bride* (BookStrand, 2012), a historical romance based on *Beauty and the Beast* (B&B). Why choose this particular fairy tale?

*To me, fairy stories are the bones of a country's beliefs about itself and powerful for that. B&B is a timeless tale of love, sacrifice, yearning and redemption, a metaphor for change and acceptance. I love stories that look beneath the surface of appearances and B&B does that in force. The whole story is very romantic, with its high stakes and caring. . . . Love is at the heart of the story, transforming the characters – literally in the case of the Beast. For me as a romance novelist, this makes the whole story immensely compelling and inspiring. Many of my romances have elements of B&B in them, particularly the idea of love changing one's perceptions so a character can see another beyond the dazzle, or otherwise, of looks, and also the idea of high stakes and emotions – feelings matter in B&B, love matters and is the major force in the story.*

Lindsay definitely focuses on these key elements in her medieval tale. The hero is Magnus, a knight badly scarred physically and emotionally from his ordeals as a Crusader. Elfrida, the heroine, is the "witch of the woods" who takes care of others, especially her sister. Just as parents struggle over what to name their child, so does a writer. The name provides insight into a character. For example, Lindsay says: "Elfrida means 'elf-strength' and is derived from the Anglo-Saxon . . . it matched her wiry and subtle strength and hidden magic power . . . giving her a fey element to both her character and appearance. It also rooted her firmly in the English past. Magnus calls her 'elf' at times, which both fits her nature and shows his developing



feelings toward her." On the other hand, "Magnus means 'Great' and became popular in 11<sup>th</sup>-century Scandinavia. I chose it because I felt it matched him and also hinted at his Viking past."

The next step in making a character three-dimensional is to create a dossier about him/her. Some authors fill out biographical data questionnaires. Jeannie Reusch's *My W-I-P Notebook*,<sup>1</sup> which I use, includes character templates detailing such information as education, residence, physical traits, significant relationships, life events that impact the character's life, and traits (positive and negative). What does Lindsay do?

*I consider my characters' wants and needs, what drives them, their virtues and flaws, their fears. I also create a basic back story for each of my people and go on to make a note of their appearance: hair and eye color, complexion, any particular marks or wounds or tattoos. Before beginning to write the story, I jot all these aspects down on a bit of card that I keep propped on my computer at all times. As I create and discover my people by placing them in situations and learning how they react, I discover their own catch-phrases and speech habits, likes and dislikes, yearnings and fuller back stories. These aspects emerge as I write and rewrite, and I go over the MS again to make my people consistent, while fitting into a particular story arc of either growth or decline.*

Providing her characters with back stories allows her to "understand what motivates them. I write all this down beforehand and add to it as I write. I like to know their particular likes and dislikes, their fears, hopes and aims. I picture them moving and note any particular gestures or habits. I consider their dreams and nightmares and sometimes show both, to add insight for the reader." Although much of this material never appears in her story, the dossiers add depth to her characters.

Elfrida and Magnus meet when she offers herself up as a sacrificial bride for an unseen, unknown beast that has been stealing brides on the eve of their weddings. It is the only way she knows to save her sister, one of the captives. But the "beast" that comes for her isn't the one she expects; rather, Magnus comes to her rescue. Only by pooling their knowledge and skills



will they find the missing brides, but the vile beast also employs magic – one that is dark and evil – and there are many forces at work to keep them from locating the women in time. While on their quest, their journey leads them to the castle of another Crusader.

*Magnus was still so blistered with rage that she could feel the heat rising off him like steam. As they passed the kitchen block and then the stables, Elfrida wondered where they were going. “What did you say to him?” she ventured.*

*Magnus shook his head. “Leave it, Elfrida. Leave it all.”*

*It was hard for her to be quiet. “But I have news!” She had so much to share with him, and he was making it impossible.*

*Perhaps he spotted the sheen of tears in her eyes for suddenly he stopped and shook his head. “Ach! I know I am a bear this evening.”*

*She wanted to deny it, to make him kiss her, but pride made her respond. “Indeed you are. And when are you going to set me down?” “Right in here.” He stepped forward a few more paces and pushed at a series of wooden timbers leaned against one of the keep’s outer bailey walls. . . .*

*“But your men, will they not be anxious?”*

*He laughed and some of the iron left his face. “Mark knows I take care of myself and he has sense enough to see the men all right. I am sorry to say this, Elfrida, but not even the Denzils turn on guests, not for a fall out over a lone woman, however beautiful she is.” He touched her cheek with his fingertips. “You are a prize, my darling, and Gregory Denzil wants you but he will not fight for you. A mort of treasure, that would be different.”*

Denzil is Magnus’ antithesis, a man who has “no compunction in trying to kill Magnus on the hunt, while at the same time fulfilling the idea of chivalry to guests by not seeking to murder Magnus in his home, under his roof. It shows Denzil’s twisted morality and hypocrisy.”

This draft scene hints at something that has happened between Denzil and Magnus, but it’s not a strong scene. It fails to have much impact, in part because personal observations and details, such as Denzil’s morality and hypocrisy, are missing. Consider this version from the published book.

*“Denzil never leaves his own dinner table. If he*

*sends others, they shall not find me.”*

*Magnus was still so blistered with rage that she could feel the heat rising off him like steam. As they passed the kitchen block and then the stables, Elfrida wondered where they were going. “What did you say to him? . . . And what happened while you were hunting? What harm did Denzil attempt?” She knew something had gone amiss. She could sense it, vividly.*

*Magnus shook his head. “Leave it, Elfrida. Leave it all.”*

*It was hard for her to be quiet. “But I have news!” She had so much to share with him, and he was making it impossible.*

*Perhaps he spotted the sheen of tears in her eyes, for suddenly he stopped and shook his head. “Ach! I know I am a bear this evening.”*

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*“Right in here.” He stepped forward a few more paces and pushed at a series of wooden timbers leaned against one of the keep’s outer bailey walls.*

*. . .*

*“But your men, will they not be anxious?”*

*He laughed and some of the iron left his face. “Mark knows I take care of myself and he has sense enough to see the men all right. I am sorry to say this, Elfrida, but not even the Denzils turn on guests under their own roof, not for a fallout over a lone woman, however beautiful she is.” He touched her cheek with his fingertips. “You are a prize, my darling, and Gregory Denzil wants you, but he will not fight for you.”*

*She knew that he was not telling her everything, that the forest hunting had led to some kind of malice, but she sensed she would not get that out of him tonight, if ever. She asked instead after another, more urgent danger. “How can you be sure the Denzils will not betray us? They are not good or decent.”*

*“They are a dangerous family,” Magnus agreed. “I cannot promise they will treat us forever as honored guests, but for now I think the pretence of chivalrous behavior holds Denzil back. He wants you certainly, and for a small time I think he will make some show of courtesy.”*

*He grinned. “A mort of treasure, now, that would be different. For gold he would break all laws of hospitality, even more than for you, my*



*comely little auburn wench."*

In this revision, the contrast between the two Crusaders is more apparent. Readers better grasp that Denzil's chivalry only goes so far. Another change involves Elfrida's ability to intuit that something happened. Why did Lindsay make these additions?

*When I was re-reading the MS after allowing a "cooling off" period . . . I realized that I needed to show Elfrida's insight as a wise-woman. Accustomed to dealing with others, she can pick up gestures and non-verbal clues. I also wanted to suggest that as a witch she can sense still more, through her magic. Whether she can or not, she and others, including Magnus, believe she does, which shows the beliefs of the time. I thought too that the additional questions would sharpen tension between Elfrida and Magnus, as she realizes something happened on the hunt and Magnus, in typical fashion for his kindly, knightly character, does not want to worry her and wants to deal with it himself. She wants to know more and he doesn't want to tell her. This makes a tension between them and also moves their relationship forward as Magnus admits a little . . . and Elfrida learns to let some matters lie, a hard task for her as a wise-woman used to sorting things out and taking charge.*

The three additional paragraphs "clarify what Elfrida senses and show what she and Magnus have learned of Denzil, especially with regard to Denzil's love of gold." All these changes combined show Elfrida and Magnus "striving together, close to quarreling but being able to put their mutual irritation aside for the sake of each other and for their ultimate quest. I consider it important as it shows Elfrida's insight, reveals Magnus' steadfast bravery and laconic wit and has them accepting each other's flaws – Magnus' sometimes quick temper ("I know I am a bear this evening") and Elfrida's relentless curiosity and wish to be at the heart of things. (It was hard for her to be quiet...)"

I agree with Lindsay's assessment that *The Snow Bride* is a blend of historical fiction, historical romance, and historical fantasy. She "strove to root the story in as realistic a historical setting as I could," she says, "and show the difference between the beliefs of that time and those of our day. For example, the magic Elfrida uses is based on medieval sources and ideas. At the same time, I wanted the story to have elements of romance (via the relationship and the quest of seeking for the missing brides)

and also the elements of fable." At the same time, she creates characters that come to life because she gives them "real fears and dreads. I make them tired, hungry, lonely, hurting, striving, aching with need. I put them in situations of real heartbreak and danger, where the stakes are high. I write strongly within their viewpoints so the reader can identify with their emotions and their delights and pains. I try to show them as vividly as possible and show my main characters through each other's eyes, so that my readers can savor the developing relationships and romance."

*The Snow Bride* demonstrates how gifted a storyteller Lindsay Townsend is.<sup>2</sup> Her love of words and her ability to create worlds that bring the past to life are helped by the vivid characters that populate her story. ❁

#### Notes:

1. For more information on Jeannie Ruesch's workbook, please visit <http://jeannieruesch.com/books/work-in-progress-notebook/>.
2. To learn more about Lindsay and her writing, visit her at <http://www.lindsaytownsend.co.uk>.



CINDY VALLAR is a columnist, freelance editor, historical novelist, and workshop presenter. Dark Oak Press recently released her historical fantasy, "Rumble the Dragon," in their short story anthology, *A Tall Ship, A Star, and Plunder*. You can visit her at [www.cindyvallar.com](http://www.cindyvallar.com).