

LIVING, BREATHING, WRITING

# LIVING, BREATHING, WRITING:

## A Lesson A Day

Cordero

by **Chelle Cordero**  
Author in Residence



# **Living, Breathing, Writing: A Lesson a Day**

by

**Chelle Cordero**

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*Dedicated to the talented writers of Vanilla Heart Publishing*



## Introduction

*“Having Chelle Cordero's blog on my Kindle is like having an author here in residence with me. She gives inspiration, motivation, and best of all, practical advice and solutions. I love the ‘writing exercises’ she offers at the end of each blog, as well as the ‘writing prompts’.” ~J.B. Naylor*

And now, Kindle owner or not, writers are able to get in on the fun and active lessons from the Kindle Blog—*Living, Breathing, Writing*, by Chelle Cordero.

Welcome to a complete month of lessons about the craft of writing and being a writer. In the BONUS Section of this book you’ll find more than 50 brain-starting exercises to help you get those words on paper.

These short lessons and activities have been previously published as part of the acclaimed Amazon Kindle blog *Living, Writing, Breathing* available by subscription for Kindle owners, and consistently in the Top 100, for just 99¢ a month.

*from Chelle Cordero:*

”Living, Breathing, Writing is filled with weekly articles about writing, tips, trends, methods. Imagine a weekly writers' workshop and the convenience of your Kindle!”

<http://bit.ly/pILcG>

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### **Day 3: Abandon Your Excuses**

As a writer it actually pains me to hear the excuses many people make instead of following their dream to write. So many of the “reasons” people use to explain why they are not doing the very thing they say they really, really want to are decoys. People use excuses because of fear, because of false expectations, or because it just isn’t that important to them.

If you really want to “be a writer”, then write.

#### **Making Time**

“I don’t have the time to write.” That statement is a common one and often follows the declaration “I have the greatest idea for a novel, one of these days...”

Make one of these days NOW and write that book. No one expects you to finish writing all those magical words in one sitting, or even two. If you really want to write, there is time to write. Most published authors and writers have first or second jobs, families, schooling and other responsibilities. Few people can devote an eight hour work day to writing that great novel.

Part of the writing process is simply thinking – and we can think of scenes, characters and plot twists while we are doing housework, sitting in a traffic jam, riding the subway and even while we are in the shower. Keep a pad of paper in your briefcase, purse, in the kitchen. In your desk drawer, or next to your favorite TV chair to scribble notes whenever an idea occurs

to you. Many writers keep a pad and pencil on the nightstand to record bits and pieces of dreams before they vanish away in foggy memories.

Keep a file folder or a large envelope near your desktop or other workstation and store these snippets. These snippets will help you organize your thoughts and begin writing your story. You can find 15-minutes, or more, to write full sentences on a legal pad or type words on a keyboard. Just fifteen minutes, the time it takes to drink your morning coffee, the time it takes to let your hair dry after a shower and you will find your story growing.

### **What If No One Likes It?**

It is possible, even likely, that you will find editors and readers who do not like your work; that doesn't mean that it is not good. Try again with another editor or a different audience.

When you walk into your local bookstore, are you apt to want to read every book that is on the shelves? Some of the topics won't appeal to you, sometime you just don't like the writing. It's the same with your writing, not everyone is going to be enamored. Send your queries out to different markets. And while you are waiting, keep writing.

Many successful authors "papered" their office walls with rejections slips before connecting with the one right person.

### **I Don't Know How to Go About Publishing a Book**

Most of us didn't, some still don't. First you have to write the book and then you have to find a publisher. Speak to other writers, read magazines or books that appeal to the market you wrote for. Take names off of magazine flags (staff listings), look up publishing names you see on book spines. Join writers' forums and ask questions.

Most reputable publishers will take the time to explain the process. Understand that there are several different publishing methods. You can publish (if you are lucky to make the right connections) through a large house, small traditional press with small runs, small press with print-on-demand, e-publishing, and self publishing. Study the terms and again, speak to other authors. Lastly, don't sign anything until you are sure you understand what it means.



## **Day 7: Insults And Rejections**

Just about every writer receives multiple rejections often for each piece of work they send out. Perhaps writers are gluttons for punishment, but most of us wipe away the tears and re-submit somewhere else until we find someone willing to take a chance. We have all been treated to the stories of how M.A.S.H. (based on Richard Hooker's novel) was turned down dozens of times before becoming a hit novel, movie and long-running TV series. J.K. Rowling, E.E. Cummings and Stephen King were also rejected many times in their careers.

While the rejection form letter is a normal part of the writing life, there are also personalized rejections. Sometimes an editor will provide a reason for the rejection and if that reason has to do with content or style, it may be good to consider the comments honestly. However there are some editors who seem to take a particular glee in criticism "just because they can". These responses may arrive unsolicited save for the simple submission of work. These are the letters that can do the most damage if we let them.

Now before I open the doors to scores of angry responses from editors, let me clarify. When an editor takes the time to offer constructive criticism, it should be welcomed; while the criticisms offered may or may not be fitting, it behooves the writer to take an impartial and thorough look at the work and consider the recommendations made. I am not saying you have to make the suggested changes, but by all means look at it seriously. Professional critiques can cost big bucks and if you have received one for free that is indeed a bonus, give it some consideration.

Some writers may make nuisances of themselves. Some may counter an otherwise helpful rejection with a nasty comeback. And some may have done everything but follow the guidelines for submission or may make unreasonable demands in their cover letters. These are certainly instances that invite testy responses from editors. Then again, some editors are just testy.

Twice in my career I have received nasty rejection letters to work I have submitted. The first time was from a magazine that said they would accept unsolicited manuscripts. I followed the guidelines to the best of my ability. And I waited. About a week beyond the time the magazine said they would respond, I received a large envelope. My article was inside the envelope (this goes a long way back when all submissions were made in hard copies), a personalized rejection letter accompanied it. This letter did not start off with the customary “Thank you for your submission but...”; instead it said my manuscript was being returned and that “maybe you should go back to school and learn about the English language”! I was a new writer, I was devastated. I brought my manuscript to several friends including two high school English teachers and to this day cannot figure out what the editor was referring to.

More recently, I submitted a manuscript to an editor via email as per the submission guidelines after the response to my query letter was positive. The listed guidelines on the website stated that a response would be made within 6 to 8 weeks IF they were interested. Three months after my submission I still hadn’t heard anything so I sent the manuscript to another source. My work was accepted in less than a week. Long story short, two-plus months later, after my work was already in print, I received a response from the first submission. The letter included phrases like “hodge-podge” and “head-hopping”. It finished up with “The time required to properly edit this work is more than we are willing to invest.”

Writers must develop a thick skin, but not to the point of ignoring help when it is offered with good intentions. Part of the job is to learn the difference between constructive and destructive criticism and not to allow yourself to be defeated by unkind words. Most editors who take the time to personally critique work are trying to help you, most are not just spewing venom for the pure sake of it. But there are some...



## **Day 17: Finding The Time To Write**

Unless you are lucky enough to either be independently wealthy or comfortably taken care of, the chances are that you are also working long days at your “other” job, maybe you have a family to take care of, housecleaning, shopping, cooking... you are busy.

Forcing yourself to sit and write when you don't feel the energy can make you resentful and not very creative. Writing should be something you enjoy, something that you feel a need to do, something that you can do without using “toothpicks” to keep your eyes open.

Believe it or not, good nutrition and taking care of yourself will help to energize you and feed your creative mind. High protein meals – starting with breakfast – will help to get you through your hectic day much more effectively than snacking on junk food and sugary treats will. When a writer is energetic it comes through in his writing and the enthusiasm the writer feels will keep him motivated until he types the words “The End”.

After all of your “chores” are done – and don't hesitate to recruit the rest of your family members into helping, after all, they live there too – your mind will feel much more relaxed. Now I am not saying scrub your house from top to bottom on a nightly basis; when you feel the weight of unfinished business hanging over you, it cuts into your ability to feel

productive. Prioritize – get the tasks out of the way that absolutely have to be done and learn to delegate or even ignore.

There are many writers who will gleefully boast that they get up an hour early just to have some quiet time to write – if you are like me, you don't want to crawl out of bed any sooner than necessary. Learn to substitute time. Is it really important to watch reruns of your favorite sitcoms? Maybe a quick 15-minute shower instead of an hour long soak in the tub is worth it to gain 45-minutes to write. And trust me, once you experience the euphoria of writing and seeing your words become stories and worlds, you will find the desire to get out of bed early, or go to bed later.

Find a comfortable place to work – it can be in a fully equipped home office where you can block out everything else, or it can be sitting in your favorite living room chair with a laptop while your family watches TV. Take a deep cleansing breath and let it out. Envision the words you want to see on paper. Let your mind wander and free write. Your busy life can provide all of the material that you need.

Did your boss hand you an impossible task and you swallowed the words you really wanted to say? Think about what would have happened if you had said them. Put those words on paper, tell the story as if you really had uttered those words and tell us what happened (what you imagine would have happened) after you loosened your tongue. Did the boss gain sudden respect, did the boss fear you, or did the boss fire you? Did this lead to a promotion, a job search, unemployment and unpaid bills? Did you have the support of your family? Just free-write and you have a short story, editing to come later.

Carry a small memo pad with you during the day, or night depending on your shift, to jot ideas down as they occur to you. When you are sitting at your keyboard and wondering what comes next to keep the story flowing, this memo book will help to feed your creativity. Develop a pattern, something to condition your responses and help you write; you might listen to a mournful ballad, or sink into your favorite chair or even stare at a beloved photo. You will find that these habits will help you get past the dreaded “writer's block”.



## **Day 23: Look Who's Talking Now...**

Storytelling is done from a point of view, POV, and there are four choices the writer can choose to tell his story – 1st, 2nd, and 3rd limited or unlimited.

1st person narrative is told from the perspective of a major character. Like all perspectives this can be colored by emotions, fears, motive and misunderstanding. In other words, the perspective can be skewed and not necessarily the truth, but it is the way the character sees things.

The following is told in 1st person: “I was sitting and watching TV when Joe entered the room. He looked stressed and I tried to get him to calm down. Joe paced and refused to talk.” Notice that Joe LOOKED nervous, but we weren't told how he was feeling. In 1st person, the narrator only knows what he or she is seeing or hearing, but cannot get inside the other person's head.

2nd person is least likely to be used in a work of fiction; you'll find 2nd person in self help guides and instruction manuals. “You need to sit quietly and visualize a quiet beach. Think about the waves gently lapping at the shore.” Or if it's in a novel, it might read, “You could almost hear the silence after Brenda made her announcement. Seeing the pain on the groom's face just makes you want to hide.”

2nd person point of view talks directly to the reader. It would be difficult to maintain a storyline effectively using 2nd POV especially something as lengthy as a novel.

3rd person limited tells the story from a character's point of view, but only one character at a time (scene or chapter) The writer can share the emotions and senses of that character from within the mind, but when talking of other character's reactions it is only what the first character sees or hears.

John was overtired and frustrated as he watched Rachel pouring another drink. Rachel smiled as she handed him the drink, but he could see the smile didn't reach her eyes. Somehow he would find out what she was thinking, but in the meanwhile he was going to enjoy having her company for the evening.

The reader only learns what is in "his" head and what his feelings are. We know that Rachel seemed phony only because that was the way it looked to John.

3rd person unlimited allows us to move from head-to-head to see the action from each one's point of view. This method is most like watching a movie where the reader has a chance to learn the different perspectives. A writer has to be careful how quickly he "head-hops" so as not to confuse the reader.

Dan wanted to convince her to stay with him. "I promise you'll be safe." He was willing to put his life on the line for her. Janet was wary. He had no idea how guilty she was feeling, she knew she had brought this on herself.

"I can't let you put yourself in danger."

"But I would do anything for you." Right now all Dan could think about was wrapping his arms around her and never letting go.

Beginning writers are cautioned to remain consistent with whatever POV they choose to write in. There are times when combining different points of view helps to tell your story. In my novel *Final Sin* I used 3rd person unlimited for all of my major characters, but I had the unknown murderer appear now and then in 1st person. Since the villain was mentally ill, his point of view was skewed as only he could see things.



## **Day 29: The Business Of Being A Writer**

Some people choose to write for themselves or their family and that is perfectly fine; there are several self-publishing opportunities you can use for distribution amongst your family and close friends. Or you can keep private journals for yourself.

However if you want to write professionally, market your writing, and earn an income from your craft, then you have to treat it like a business. A professional writer is a business owner. It doesn't matter if you write articles for publications or write a book or novel and take any of several publishing routes. Your business is your name (or pen name) and the goods are words. You must be willing to invest time, effort and often money into making your business work.

Start with a business plan; decide what it is you want to do. Research the market. Know how many hours and money you have to invest. Understand that "being your own boss" and running a business means you really have many bosses. Every client (publication you sell to and book editors) becomes your boss. If you want to sell your product, those are the people you have to impress. When it comes to books it doesn't matter if you have taken the self-publishing route or if you've been traditionally published – you still have to immerse yourself in promotion, it is not all up

to the publisher to market your work. Publishers who do contribute to your marketing want to see that you are willing to invest in yourself first.

Editors and publishers will expect the same qualities from you that you expect from any store or business you frequent – customer service, reliability, value and stability. Does your article meet the needs of the publication? Do you tackle the assignment topics as they are given? How easily do you accept editorial comments and edit your work as requested? Is your work ready on time without being hounded for it? What kind of reputation does your name carry? Are you a prolific writer and one which the publisher feels safe investing in because you're going to be around a while? Are you willing to do what it takes to stand out as a writer?

Most writers rely on multiple clients so time management and organization is imperative. Keep a calendar of your assignments and allow sufficient time to work on each of them, don't wait until the last minute (editors have an uncanny way of knowing when the job has been rushed). Be realistic when accepting an assignment and make sure you can reasonably expect to have it done in the time allotted.

Unless it is otherwise stated, you automatically hold the copyright to your work, but make sure to clarify this with your editor. A work for hire clause usually means that you cannot use the same story or research for multiple publications; in some cases even work for hire rights will revert to you for re-use after a specified time period. When signing book contracts be aware of rights that you are granting to the publisher as well as any right of first refusal clauses. If you are not sure, ask for clarifications and consider having an entertainment lawyer look over the contract.

Other business-like concerns include billing and payment, taxes, business registration, liability and advertising. Congratulations, you are an entrepreneur.



## **Day 31: Failure Is Not An Option**

Every star performer has his off days – even when he doesn't like to publicly admit it.

Sometimes we “fail” at what we are supposed to do. Perhaps an editor is just not happy with the product we turned out, maybe it's his peculiarities or maybe we just “didn't get it”. After you get over the initial self-loathing and labeling yourself a “screw-up”, it is time to take a few steps back and see how you can use this failure to your advantage.

Offer a do-over included in the original or reduced price. Be careful though that the circumstances are appropriate in making this offer and being able to come through this time. I once had an editor who assigned me a story, I did the work entailed, and submitted it to specification (I thought). It wasn't the first time I had worked with him and my previous work had always been lauded; so this time I was surprised when he sent it back saying it wasn't right. I re-wrote the article three times before I cut my losses and suggested that we pull the item. I wasn't paid for the work. A few weeks later I heard (from a reliable inside source) that the editor's boss had a nephew who wanted to get into print and my editor wound up with two articles on the exact same subject and no easy way to can mine without at least paying a kill fee. This was certainly an exception.

Being professional and accommodating can go a long way to salvaging your reputation. And hopefully the end result will be exactly what the editor

ordered. Sometimes it does take a shot or two to write in the exact and specific style that is wanted by a particular publication. Quite often you will only get one chance to do the job “right” and when that happens it doesn’t mean that you can’t re-work the story for another market (so long as the “research” wasn’t collected under a work-for-hire situation). In the meanwhile, take the time to study articles that are printed in the first magazine or newspaper and learn the style so the next time your submission will fit better.

Use the experience to not only learn but to strategize your future moves. If you have “always” been a success and you attempted a foray into another field (i.e.: the romance writer dealing with a hard-news documentary), then maybe the new field is not for you, especially if this is not the first or only rejection you’ve suffered. Learn which areas you are strongest in and use that as a foundation to build on (i.e.: the romance writer dealing with a hard-news documentary about failed marriages?). See if there is some way to back your work up – maybe the photographer you normally work with isn’t available, so you borrow the camera... If you are not familiar with the equipment such as a camera, bring along a 2nd one that you are more familiar with even if the resolution isn’t quite as high (it still beats blur).

Share your experience with a writing group. You may very well find that a particular editor is difficult to work with. More than likely, though, you will find many helpful tips on the required style and formatting, maybe you’ll hear about an editor’s pet-peeve and you will know how to avoid it. Group critique can go either way, but most professional groups will offer solid and honest suggestions on how to tighten up your writing and make it a better fit for the market. If the discontented editor told you exactly what he was unhappy about, try re-writing the piece with those suggestions in mind, even if it isn’t for resubmission – it will help you get a better feel for the next time.

Under no circumstances should you ever “stop writing” because of a single (or even a few) rejections. Improve your style, learn your strengths, focus your efforts and keep writing.

Yes, sometimes we have to take ownership of the reasons things went wrong. When that happens you should cease and desist on the self-flogging, which serves no valuable purpose. Give yourself five minutes to feel bad about it and then get back to work.



## Writing Exercises And Prompts

- Activity: Write three blurbs about your life: A 10-15 word tagline; a 50-75 word blurb; and a two paragraph blurb.
- Activity: Imagine that your television/DVR remote control worked on people. Pick any three people in your life. Describe what you would see if you were to use the channel change, fast forward, mute, and slow-mode on each.
- Activity: Write an instruction guide for a common, everyday chore (housework, driving, dressing, making a phone call, etc.). Avoid making a simple list and using mere phrases. Write this instructional guide in the form of paragraphs and complete sentences. Make it detailed so that even if someone has never used a telephone they will know how to make a telephone call, etc.
- Activity: Imagine that you are meeting, for the first time, with a friend who you haven't seen for at least 10 years - write

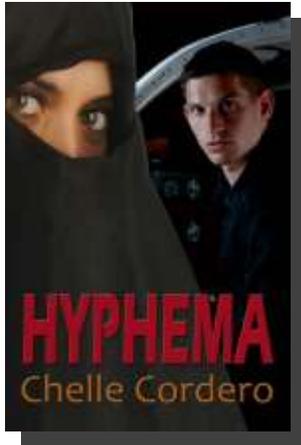
approximately 3 paragraphs telling us about your conversation. Do a little bragging about your own accomplishments.

- Activity – Finish these sentences:
  - 1) My greatest flaw...
  - 2) No one...
  - 3) My worst fear is...
  - 4) I was arrested because...
  - 5) My worst day began with...
- Activity: What topic/subject are you most passionate about? Write a brief article (about 300 words) about that topic.
- Activity: Choose any five random words from the dictionary or thesaurus; set your timer for 15 minutes and free-write. Make sure you use each word with its correct meaning.
- Activity: Choose any mundane task you've done in the past 24-hours and describe it from different points of view – 1st person (I went to the grocery store and bought milk...) and 3rd person (she rolled the shopping cart down the aisle stopping only to pick up a gallon of milk). Rewrite it, this time focusing on your thoughts and motivations (the milk was necessary because Johnny really enjoys his morning cereal). Have fun with this, maybe forgetting to replace the milk had caused a family argument and mention the conflict, etc.
- Activity: Choose any 2 TV characters from DIFFERENT shows - they are trapped in a stalled elevator for 10 minutes. You are able to listen in on their conversation (they must each remain in character) - What do they talk about?
- Activity: Write a book review for the book YOU want to write. Remember that this is a review and not a book report.

**Writing Op:** Take a look at my blog at <http://cce613.xanga.com> Write a 300-350 word essay on any writing topic, be sure to include your byline. Send it to [bylines@optonline.net](mailto:bylines@optonline.net) with the word XANGA in the subject line.

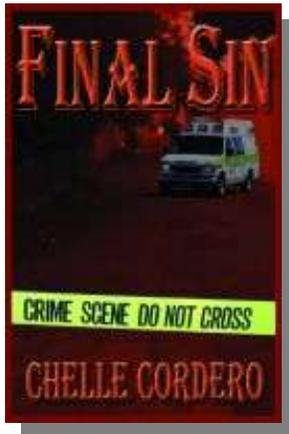


Novels of Passion and Suspense  
by  
Chelle Cordero



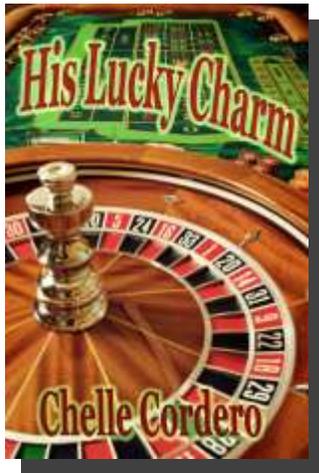
## *HypHEMA*

*HypHEMA: Bleeding in the eye caused by trauma...* Matt Garratti, a paramedic from New York, moves his wife and son to North Carolina to work at his dream job as a flight medic. Pakistani born Sudah, his wife, receives frosty stares and insensitive comments from their new neighbors... Matt wonders if he is pursuing his dream or bringing his family into a nightmare from which they may never wake.



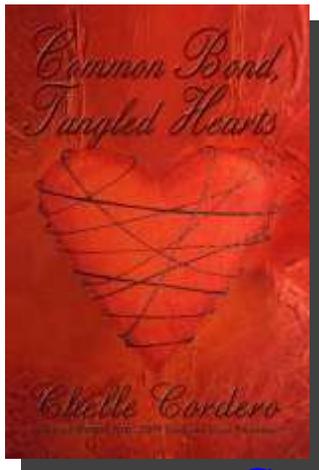
## *Final Sin*

Deputy Sherriff Commander Jake Carson has his hands full... investigation of a brutal multiple homicide, a troubled son and a vindictive ex-wife. He meets young, free-spirited paramedic Julie Jennings. When Julie becomes the subject of an obsession, it puts both of them in danger...



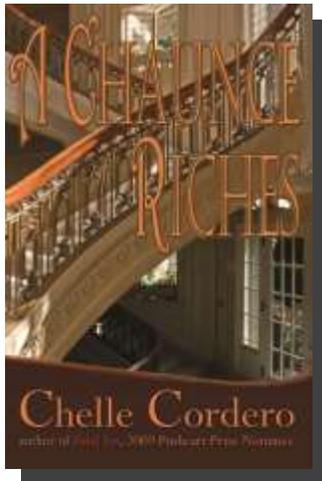
### ***His Lucky Charm***

What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas... this time it follows Brandon and Caitlyn across the country and into a world of espionage and danger. The one thing that Brandon knows for sure is that he can't afford to lose his lucky charm, Caitlyn.



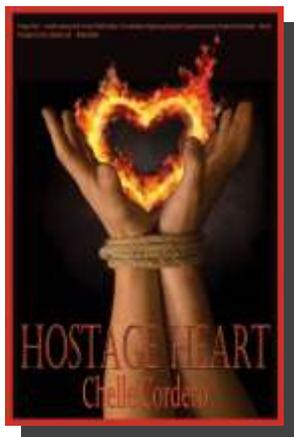
### ***Common Bond, Tangled Hearts***

Layne Gillette's world is turned upside down when a man she has never met shows up to lay claim as the father of her 6-year old son. When Layne's abusive "ex-husband" shows up, they are torn apart by danger, kidnapping and lies.



### ***A Chance of Riches***

Ben Johnson was hired as a bodyguard for a rich widow and her kid, but he never expected to be working for the woman who had abandoned him just when he had needed her the most. Damn it all, he still wanted her. Samantha Chaunce never thought she would have to explain why she married the rich man instead of Ben. Or that her husband had been murdered...and Ben was the prime suspect.



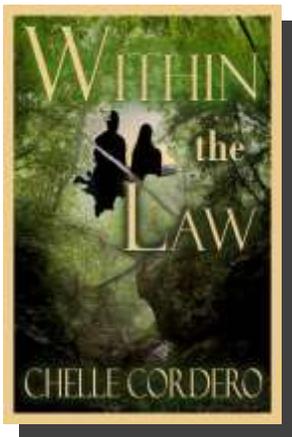
### ***Hostage Heart***

Life was hard after the hurricanes swept through, destroying her parents' home and livelihood... An errand for her boss - a chance encounter with a crew of bank robbers - a kind man who tried to help her ... a man who isn't all he seems...no, he is so much more.



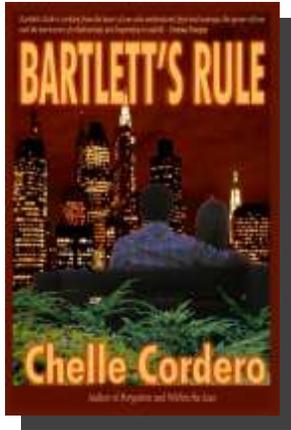
### ***Courage of the Heart***

Courage of the Heart shows us that sometimes love is the only cure for the very deepest of emotional wounds. The story of the two lovers takes a series of unexpected and fast paced turns where lives, sanity and love are put in jeopardy. Their commitment to one another results in a spirit that binds them together and helps them to overcome physical and emotional dangers



### ***Within the Law***

Tom gave up on ever falling in love again the day that he buried his high school sweetheart and fiancé. He started a career in law enforcement just so that he could find her murderer and rapist. Just when he is about to see justice done, he meets Alli Davis- the defense attorney for the murdering rapist who took his love from him.



## *Bartlett's Rule*

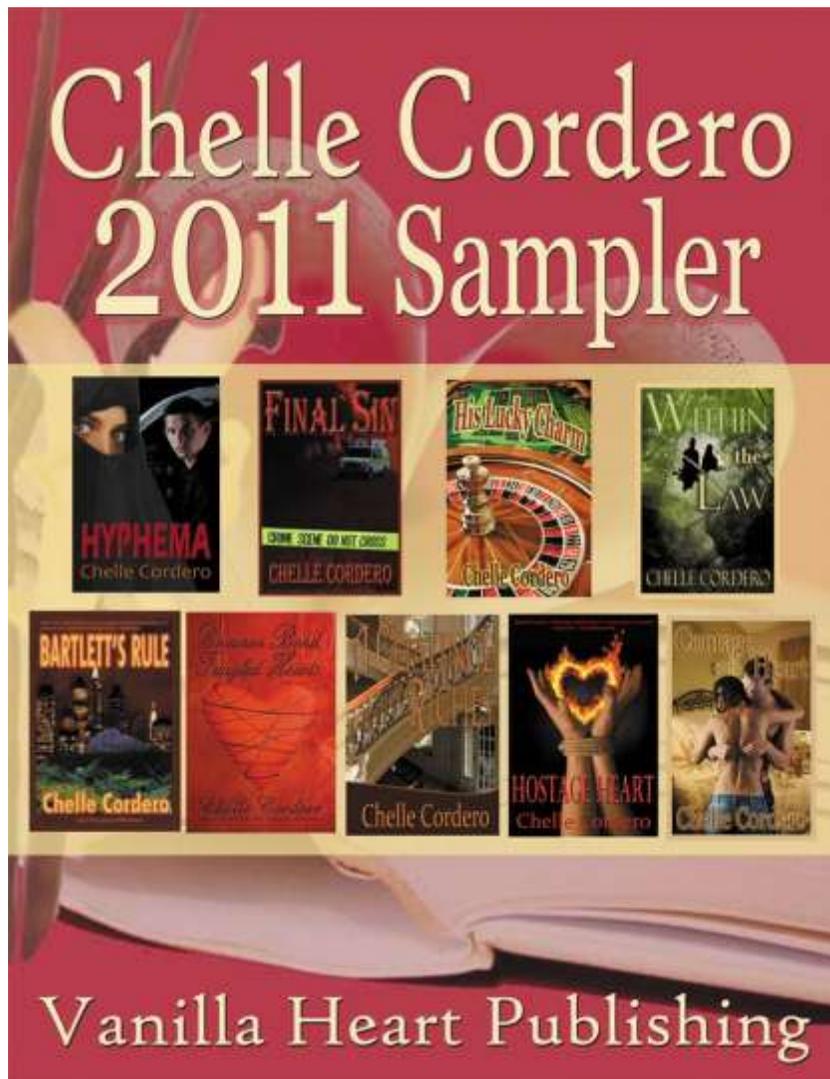
Bartlett's Rule shares the story of Lon and Paige's love affair; a romance filled with hardship, emotion, danger and triumph. Falling in love was never the challenge; being there for each other, knowing just what to say and making it work is the real test. Paige and Lon are real; they are human, they cry and they laugh. Paige has to learn to trust. Lon has to learn to be patient.



Photo by Mark Engelman

Chelle Cordero is author of seven romantic suspense novels and two mystery novels (Vanilla Heart), and short stories in five anthologies. She also writes for several national newspapers, magazines and regional publications; her articles have appeared in Gannett Newspapers, SPOT-LIGHT Magazine, Hudson Valley Magazine, and EMS Responder.

Ms. Cordero has conducted several writing workshops and authors the Amazon Kindle blog, Living, Breathing, Writing (available by subscription). She also does book and project editing in her “spare” time. Along with her husband Mark, she is a partner in By-Lines, an editorial and photography company catering to the business community. They live in the scenic Hudson Valley of New York with their son; their daughter and son-in-law live nearby. She is also a NYS EMT and the entire family volunteers with their local ambulance corps.



### [2011 Chelle Cordero Novel Sampler](#)

This sampler of Chelle Cordero's novels is free for your enjoyment. All of Chelle's novels are available in both print and ebook editions for every reading device, through online retailers and in select bookstores around the world.