

# CRIMINAL INTENT

Featuring: Kate Freiman

Interviewed by: Janet Costello



*Kate Freiman is the author of 8 novels of romance fiction and two romantic novellas. She is a member of RWA, Toronto Romance Writers, RWA's Kiss of Death chapter, Novelists, Inc., and SFFWA. She was born in Hartford, CT, but moved to Canada for a love that is over 35 years strong. Kate has been a Sister in Crime for so long, she can't recall when she first joined. She was a long-time member of the Toronto chapter of SinC, got lost, then found her way back this year. Kate has a Master's Degree in English Literature from Trinity College, Hartford; she wrote her thesis on British detective stories of the "Golden Age": 1920-1940. In addition to writing and reading, she enjoys teaching writing and mentoring writers. (She's also a Morgan horse fanatic, but that's another story.)*

**Q: You've had several books published by Silhouette and Jove that achieved bestseller status. Tell us about what it takes to achieve success in the romance market.**

**A:** There's no magic formula for success in any genre, and with the changes in publishing happening these days faster than the speed of light (in some cases), or almost not at all (in others), it's impossible to predict what will sell well, let alone what will sell big. Agents and editors have always advised writers to write good books, but the recent market has shown that even that wisdom isn't always right on. However, I can tell you some of the things that writers can do to ensure they do write good romantic fiction: create appealing, albeit flawed, characters readers want to see succeed at life, not just love; tap into the kinds of fears, joys, passions and conflicts readers can identify with; don't forget that while you're writing a romance, there has to be an interesting plot; don't forget that while your plot must be engaging, you're writing a story about pair bonding (and the survival of the species).

**Q: Your protagonists are smart, including several computer geeks. But they have a lot to learn about love. How do you balance this contrast in their experience?**

**A:** Often that balancing act is part of the fun of telling a story about people who are very competent in their areas of specialty but inexperienced in matters of the heart. It allows me to tap into that stimulating, frightening, exhilarating "first love" with adult characters instead of adolescent ones. And of course, the word "balance" is important to the stories I like to tell: the balance between head and heart, body and spirit, family and work.

**Q: What do you do to differentiate your writing when your viewpoint is that of a male character?**

**A:** Good question! Technically, there are "tricks" to switching to a male POV: shorter sentences, fewer

adjectives, more expletives; concrete imagery (often sports-related); more goal-oriented and solution-oriented thinking and less tendencies toward achieving consensus. But a lot of it is using my imagination combined with a certain amount of reader-expectation. Just as mystery readers expect certain traits and behaviors from sleuths and sidekicks, romance readers expect heroes and other male characters to exhibit traits and behaviors that define them as romance heroes. I do try, in creating male characters, to bridge the gap between the typical alpha male hero and the kind of man a real woman wouldn't mind partnering with.

**Q: Ireland, in your Moonlight books...the setting dripped off the page. How did you achieve that?**

**A:** Oh, thanks! I went to Ireland a couple of times, and I'd go back in a heartbeat! I took tons of photos (back before digital cameras were even a gleam in anyone's eyes) and employed all my senses to absorb as much of the feeling of being there as possible. And I eavesdropped constantly, savoring the music of speech in English and Gaelic. Of course, even though it's a small country, there are regional differences, so I concentrated on the one area we spent the most time in, County Sligo (Yeats country). I did a fair bit of research into Irish culture and then channeled my inner Irishwoman. The trick was to evoke the feeling of being in Ireland without falling into stagey clichés, something I was very conscious of while writing those books.

**Q: You have written contemporary romance, romantic suspense and paranormal romance. Are there rules that you follow when writing a double-genre novel?**

**A:** Somerset Maugham is credited with saying, "There are three rules for writing, but no one can agree on which three they are." If I have any "rule" about storytelling, it's, "Honor the genre and remember the

reader. Even in a contemporary romance, there is a double-helix sort of plot: the romantic plot, and all the other stuff the characters are doing. In some ways, it's easier (not easy!) to write a cross-genre romance, because the conventions and reader expectations of the second genre are there to rely on. A lot of mystery, suspense, thriller, fantasy, science fiction, even horror novels contain a romantic subplot. The hallmark of a "romance" is that the focus is on one primary pair and the ending is guaranteed to be "happy ever-after." So my reference shelves are filled with books about writing all sorts of non-romantic genre stories, and of course, my pleasure reading is all over the genre map.

**Q: According to your website, there is one significant critter in each story. Describe some of your favourite critter characters.**

**A:** Lucky, the little abused stray kitten in *Earth Angel*, is one of my favorites, because he repays the favor of being rescued by helping to solve the crime and save the day. And Dolly, the exuberant but thunder-shy Irish Wolf Hound in *Mother Nature's Hidden Agenda*, who eventually wins the heart of the equally dog-phobic heroine, is another.

**Q: How would you describe the romance market today?**

**A:** The romance market, which accounts for way more than 50% of all mass market paperback sales, is stronger than ever and growing stronger constantly. One of the factors in this consistent growth rate is that the romance genre has embraced the cross-genre story very enthusiastically, while still providing readers with the optimistic resolution that draws them to romance in the first place. Not just cross-genre, but cross-species and cross-reality romances fill the shelves; the hero of *Earth Angel* has been dead for over thirty years when the novel opens! If you peruse the "Romance" shelves of any large bookstore, you'll find heroes and heroines who are anywhere from half to totally non-human, heroes and heroines who solve crimes and fight wars and disasters, heroes and heroines who battle disease and social disadvantage, and heroes and heroines who just have a lusty old time.

**Q: What attracts you to writing mysteries?**

**A:** The simple answer is that mystery provides a solid plot foundation for a hero and heroine who are falling

in love or dealing with relationship issues as they solve the mystery. Unfortunately, I am a very straightforward person, so it's agonizing for me to create the twists and turns and reversals a true mystery requires, and I have an aversion to really nasty people, so I don't like having them in my head while I'm writing. However, I appreciate the additional heightened awareness created by danger. And of course, just as I want my heroes and heroines to find their happy endings, I want my stories to end with the good people being rewarded and the bad people being punished.

**Q: Are there plotting similarities between romance and mystery writing?**

**A:** There certainly are. Let's see: both have to engage the reader, from the beginning of the story, so that he/she cares about what happens to the characters and their world. The plotline must, to varying degrees, threaten the existing order of the society in which the story takes place, whether by a crime or by a clash of two strong-willed people who belong together but, for whatever reason, haven't figured that out yet. Both mystery and romance depend on true and false clues to solve the central problem, whether it's whodunit, or how the hero and heroine will get over whatever is holding them back and realize they love each other. Readers of both genres want real solutions, not deus ex machina endings with some outside party or force dropping in to fix things. And, to quote Nora Roberts, "What could be more mysterious than the workings of the human heart?"

**Q: How has being a Sister in Crime affected you?**

**A:** Being a Sister has been more than fun, it's been interesting and exciting. I've met and listened to experts in a variety of crime-fighting fields and, of course, I've met lots of interesting Sisters (and Brothers) who've helped broaden my awareness of mystery and suspense authors. I also appreciate being able to support my sister authors in the quest for due respect from the literary community, an issue common in romance as well as mystery.

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For more info on Kate, visit her website <http://www.novelwriter.net/>.

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