

## **CONFLICT**

**It isn't just internal and external anymore!**

### **WHAT IS CONFLICT?**

**First what conflict is not - it is not a misunderstanding that can be resolved if the characters simply sat down over coffee and chatted and it is not some convoluted circumstance you make up for convenience.**

**Conflict is a struggle between opposing forces. It makes the story outcome seem uncertain and opens the doors for suspense. It defines the characteristics of the hero and the heroine and it will also define their growth throughout the story. Conflict also defines their relationship with each other and any other characters in the book.**

**But the most important thing about conflict is that the conflict you've chosen to create must be able to be resolved within the word count parameters of your book with a logical outcome and in a way satisfying to not only the reader, but also to the characters you have created.**

**A lot of suggestions seem to revolve around the thought that you need to find your characters' Achilles heel and then shoot an arrow into it. This method holds a lot of potential for suspense, emotional turmoil, action and the part I like, the make-up sex, after**

**your hero and heroine spends a good part of the book trying to convince each other of merits the “right” side of the problem.**

**While at first this premise does seem like a good idea, you have to keep in mind that not only do you have to create conflict, you have to resolve it by the end of your book. This is especially important in a romance where the hero and heroine are expected to be together at the end.**

**So if the goals of the hero and heroine are completely opposite when it comes to the conflict, then one must win and one must lose. If the heroine wins, the hero turns into a moosh, giving up everything he believes in. What happened to his passion, his conviction, his one true belief. Where is the hero we loved so much? Well. he’s now a wimp.**

**If the hero wins, the story now is just another tale of how an alpha male has just once again defeated the weakling female. Og from the Bog rises again.**

**What ‘s left in those types of resolutions are no-win situations with a lot of resentment simmering underneath and probably a divorce when one of them realizes just how much he or she has given up for “love”.**

**So in reality, while there is a lot of talk about two kinds of conflict - internal conflict and external conflict, there should be a lot more about how conflict must be influenced by an**

**underlying goal that is in concert. The best method to obtain this goal is what is actually creates the conflict that drives the relationship.**

**Let's take a closer look at all three types of conflict:**

**Internal conflict confronts the hero or heroine at the very core of what he or she believes.**

**Internal conflict usually arouses an emotional reaction .**

- **Human nature wants to avoid difficult or unpleasant situations – so put your characters in them**
- **Internal conflict forces the characters to choose between the easy way and the hard way – taken them on the hard way**
- **Characters must be in a situation they want to avoid or there is no story**

**External conflict is shown in events that involve the hero or heroine and obstacles she or she must resolve during the course of the book.**

- **External conflict must be something the character can't resolve or can't resolve easily (natural disaster, loss of a loved one, loss of a job)**
- **Goals must be so strong that they cannot be abandoned even in the face of external conflict**
- **External conflict can also be a collision of the hero and heroine's goals**

**These apparent conflicts are easy to recognize. They are loud and showy and start your books off with a bang. They may appear to be unreasonable, but we know better. It will just take some time, and our great story, to show the reader how.**

**But in romance reality, these terrible conflicts are really minor compared to the actual relationship between the hero and the heroine. It is the underlying goal of the hero and heroine and their binding conflict that is really important to the continuing relationship. The binding conflict appears gradually in your story and builds until the hero and heroine seem to be wanting the same goal, albeit hard to admit for them.**

**In setting out your apparent conflicts, both internal and external, you must also have a clear idea of the just what the binding underlying conflict will be. Just as the relationship grows bit by bit, the binding conflict is revealed bit by bit. In this way, while we see our hero and heroine falling in love, and we know their love is doomed because of all the internal and external conflicts we have thrown at them, we want to see how they are going to work out their differences because of the binding conflict.**

**That's how we get the readers to keep on turning the pages because in the apparent conflicts we select, we lay the seeds of resolution for the binding conflict.**

**Let me explain using one of my stories:**

**In DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON the heroine is a novitiate in an ominous sect devoted to Hecate, a dark goddess. The sect is lead by a High Priestess who helps the Archon of Attica Greece keep the people in check through fear and torture. The heroine is opposed to the harsh rule of the High Priestess and the Archon, but has been at the temple since birth and with no family or apparent possessions, if she asks for release from her vows, her only recourse, under the laws set down by the Archon, is to become a slave.**

**The hero is the Archon's son, born to royalty and heir apparent to a government that treats slaves as property and puts to death all dissenters. Although he is sympatric to the plight of the people, he is torn by loyalty to his father and the desire to right the wrongs caused by the laws his father wrote.**

**So at first glance, while there is little chance for my hero and heroine to be happy together in the historical climate of the period and the extreme separation of their social levels, over the course of the book we find that their underlying goals are the same – a yearning for justice, happiness, love and peace. This is the binding conflict.**

**But even when the underlying goals are in concert, the best method for the hero and heroine to reach their goals must stay in strong conflict well into the story. As the book progresses and the hero and heroine begin overcoming the obstacles set for them and get closer to achieving their underlying goals. Only by the end of the story do they come to realize that they both want the same thing.**

**It is the binding conflicts that gives the hero and heroine the opportunity to see each other through different eyes, understand each other's ambitions, and by so doing, become one with that person. The conflicts that binds them despite all the obstacles they face is the key to change, character growth and the romance.**

**In another vein, one of the most common problems we as writers have is either that our conflict falls flat or it is not strong enough. To correct this, we can draw from life and our own experiences.**

**Everyone, even the characters we create, have holes in their lives, some experience endured that has left them emotionally scarred. That's their vulnerability. It's the vulnerability that must be overcome and confronted that shows growth in our characters and keeps the reader turning the page.**

**Character growth is essential to a story a reader just can't put down. If nothing in our story forces the characters to see something in a new light, to confront their worst fears, or face their greatest challenge, there is no conflict and therefore no growth. The character is then the same one we began our story with. If the character remains the same over the course of the story, why even bother to tell it.**

**Breaking down your story to simple terms should read something like this.**

- **In the beginning your hero and heroine has emptiness or a flaw caused by a bad experience, or maybe something or someone he or she knows is being threatened. This forces your characters to make a decision to act.**
  
- **Over the course of your story, turn up the pressure on your characters. Put them in the middle of what they hate the most and then show them making choices to avoid, change or escape the obstacles created that impact on the experience. The obstacles grow greater and more difficult to overcome as the book progresses. Establish your character's dream and then show the obstacles continually getting in the way by the choices make based on their characters flaws.**
  
- **By the end, the conflicts are all resolved – first the smaller conflicts which lead the character to address the inner conflict and find a solution. Then equipped with this new knowledge and strength gained by this small resolution, the character is able to overcome the larger conflict.**

**In a romance, the conflict focuses on a hero and heroine who want to be together but some circumstance is preventing it from happening. In a romance internal conflict can be a collision of values, goals and beliefs. External conflict deals with the circumstance that keep them apart. The love relationship needs to be well established before the complicating factor emerges otherwise they don't have an emotional bond to want to keep the relationship in tact.**

**Conflict must then have a strong emotional content that gives the readers a stake in the romance. Obstacles must be formidable, creating risk, dangers and the negation of beliefs**

**TRAITS OF WELL DEVELOPED CONFLICT;**

- **Makes the goal seem out of reach**
- **Introduces obstacles**
- **Can not easily be explained away**
- **Pits major characters against each other**
- **Forces characters to discover something about themselves**
- **Forces characters to discovers something about each other**
- **Forces characters to face their greatest fears**
- **Challenges and manipulates the characters emotions**

**Remember the three essentials in conflict – No misunderstandings, no convoluted logic just for convenience and no insignificant roots to the conflict.**

**Conflict must be strong, complex, logical, motivated and of consequence.**



## **EXAMPLES FROM KATHYE'S BOOKS**

### **BLUE DIAMOND:**

**Hero** – F16 fighter pilot and member of the Blue Eagles, the premier Air Force Demonstration Team

**Heroine** – Development Planner whose brother and fiancée were also members of the Blue Eagles but died in a crash practicing for an air show

**External conflict**- Congresswoman wants to shut down Air Force show business and cut the Blue Eagles out of the federal budget for good. The hero needs the heroines' support to change the Congresswoman's mind and keep the team flying.

**Internal conflict** – Heroine doesn't want to get involved, still feels the pain of her loss. The hero can't imagine being grounded but knows that if he asks the heroine for her help, he will be opening old wounds.

**Underlying conflict** – each feels a responsibility for the tragedy. The heroine asked her fiancée not to fly with the team once they get married and feels he may have been

distracted that day thinking about her request. The hero was part of the ill-fated team asked that another team member take his place flying in the diamond the day it crashed

Underlying goals – come to terms with the terrible tragedy and move on with life

### STEALING APRIL'S HEART

Hero – Showy Pro baseball player who ripped the cartilage in his knee during a world series victory celebration and had to have arthroscopic surgery. Must now rehab in order to return to the field

Heroine – owner of a Sports Medicine Center. Determined to make it in a man's world.

External conflict- Hero doesn't know why he has to rehab in a small clinic, especially one run by a woman. The heroine needs some high profile clients to keep her clinic afloat and needs the hero to follow her regimen exactly if he is going to recover. But he doesn't think she's the right person for the job.

**Internal conflict** – Heroine’s brother had a sports injury in high school and she helped him hide it. The damage done was so severe that it ruined any chance he had of a career.

Does she dare risk ruining another career.

The Hero is at the end of his career and sees a lot of hot-shot rookies waiting in line. He needs to be healed and healthy by spring training, but doesn’t know if he really can do it.

**Underlying conflict** - Heroine’s brother blamed the loss of his dream on her and they haven’t spoken since. She’s afraid of letting down another person by making the wrong decision again.

He knows the injury is severe and doesn’t want to face the possibility he cannot get back into the line-up in time to save his job.

**Underlying goals** – Get the hero as physically healthy as possible by working together to overcome doubts.

## DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON

**Heroine** – Priestess in training. Sold to coven at birth.

**Hero** – son of the Archon. Born to royalty.

**External conflict- Politics and religion do not mix.**

**Internal conflict - The heroine has not known any other life, but cannot seem to hold to the strict morays of the temple. Wants to be a commoner and build a life for herself. She risks the wrath of the high priestess by questioning some of the temple practices that seem unfair and arbitrary to her.**

**The hero is sympathetic to the plight of the people as forged by the harsh lawcodes laws of his father that favor the rich and exploit the poor. Does not want to risk betrayal, but sees a rebellion brewing.**

**Underlying conflict – can our heroine trust a member of the aristocracy to give up all he has to be with her? Can the hero betray his own father to do what is right?**

**Underlying goal – A yearning for happiness, justice and peace, and the freedom to chose one's own destiny**