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See Jane Write: A Girl's Guide to Writing Chick Lit

Farrin Jacobs
Sarah Mlynowski
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Lusting after Manolo Blahniks is no longer a prerequisite for chick lit. While the days of fashionista heroines with artsy jobs and jerky ex-boyfriends aren't necessarily over, the genre has begun to overlap into others, resulting in opportunities for writers who, say, love a good mystery as much as they love shopping.

Mlynowski, best-selling author of *Milkrun* and other novels, teamed up with former editor for Red Dress Ink, Jacobs, to pen a complete guide for aspiring chick lit writers. Written in a conversational tone, this book begins with a discussion of developing the idea for a book and moves through the entire process, ending with insights into submitting a manuscript, finding an agent, and what all those publishing terms mean.

At first glance, many of the chapters will seem to cover the same old ground as other writing books, but a closer look reveals advice on topics that most guides skip over. The basics of creating main and secondary characters are covered, but also supplemented with details like the importance of carefully choosing names: "if the love interest is named Mike, the gay best friend is Mark, and the brother is Mick, your reader might get confused and think the heroine's sex life is getting a bit … creepy." Likewise, the authors go beyond simply advising that writers find an agent who is the right fit; they include an "Agent Checklist" to help writers know how to tell what the "right fit" is.

The unique pairing of an author and an editor provides invaluable opportunities to learn what works, from people who have sat on both sides of the publishing table. Mlynowski shares her own writing experiences in sidebars titled "It Happened to Me," including the story she had to revise twice because each time she referenced a movie star who then was involved in a scandal before the story could reach publication. Jacobs gives a peek inside the mind of an editor in "Mistakes I've Known." For example, she warns that she, and most other editors and agents, can easily tell when a middle-aged woman tries to fake the voice of a trendy twenty-year-old, or when a writer sets her novel in New York City without ever having been there.

Though the advice offered here is geared toward chick lit, the insights will be of value to writers across many genres. The friendly tone of the book makes it both easy and enjoyable to read, with the bonus of gaining insider information. It's tough love with a healthy dose of humor and support: "You want your novel to be the best it can be. And that's what we want, too."

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (August 7, 2006)

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