June 18, 2011

I have always been fascinated by the concept of forbidden love. Cross- cultural love, political boundaries, and religious differences, to name a few, conjure up thoughts in my mind of Romeo and Juliet- esque, star- crossed love stories of denial, consuming passion, and best of all, betrayal. With the new arrivals of online dating, it seems a person can find his perfect match with just a click of a mouse. We rarely see a man throwing rocks at a starlit window in our technology- drunk society. Now, don’t get me wrong, I am the opposite of a hopeless romantic—my cynical roots are stubbornly grounded and cannot be pulled up (unless something miraculous happens, but, let’s be honest, it probably wont…there I go being cynical again!!). But it seems like love isn’t an obstacle any more, and most of the problems we have in relationships are the ones we create in our own twisted minds (“He didn’t call me back in 3.45 days…he hates me! He *used me*!”). But wouldn’t it be wild, crazily out of my comfort zone, to write a love story? If I am going to write a novel, I may as well go all- out and write something I would never consider writing about. I can write about murder, I can write about murder, unplanned pregnancies, divorce, but true love? Gimmee a break. And that’s why I am determined to write about it—goo- goo- eyed hopeless romantics ain’t got nothin’ on me, because I am going to make this work in a way that doesn’t muffle my own style, but is still about something totally unfamiliar to me. And I am going to prove that somewhere, in modern times, there are at least two people whose love really *is* an obstacle, a *real* obstacle, and that chivalry, perhaps, isn’t dead, or at least doesn’t have to be.

June 24

I have been toiling for days, trying to come up with a way to integrate a culture that is drastically different from mine, but still can be relatable. And I have got the perfect solutions. I will be dealing with semi- star- crossed lovers, right? So I may as well make *one* of them from my end of the block. They always say, “if you’re going to write, write what you know,” don’t they? So why not make one of the characters be kind of like me, in a way, and her “lover” can be a martian or something totally surreal. But, alas, I will not be writing about aliens. Or vampires—that’s *not* gonna happen. Plus, detailing passion with an alien (or, may I just say, a vampire…) could get super awkward, considering that could be considered semi- bestiality, and that’s from a whole other dimension that I am clearly not capable of dealing with. So, sure, I am going to try to “write what I know,” but only 50%...the other 50, well, that will be slightly more challenging. I need to come up with a reachable, believable, cross- cultural match for my lovely leading lady.

June 27

I did it. I said the “A” word. Alien? Don’t be crazy. We’ve already ruled that out. I have picked the perfect location for my forbidden love story. What’s even scarier than living on an alien spaceship? A place where looms came to die and women’s rights aren’t a thing of the past, future, or present. The inventors of the devilishly sweet whoopee pies that go all- out to avoid the devil have landed right- smack dab onto my brainstorming process, and I can’t seem to erase the idea from my mind. Where else can you get a horse- and- buggy ride from an old, bearded, man named Amos? That’s right. Amish. An Amish farm. I figured for an American girl, an Amish farm is a reachable place to get to, sort of…*how* I am going to get her there is a totally different story. I have no idea. This is going to get quite interesting…but, come on, it already has! Let’s go with *increasingly* interesting. That’s better.

June 28

I have been listening to Weird Al Yanchovic’s “Amish Paradise” non- stop. Does this count as research? I am guessing no. Off to the internet, or, better yet, the library! But first I’ll watch the music video again. Just one more time, I swear!

June 29

My junior year of high school, I wrote a research paper about Wisconsin versus Yoder, a court case regarding Amish education. I figured this is a good starting point for my research in order to get my feet wet. I am re- reading my paper and skimming through the works I used to research the paper so that I can get my first (well, first in a while) glimpse of Amish culture in a familiar way.

July 1

I am loving that this project gave me an excuse to drool over Harrison Ford. *Witness* was definitely a win for me—plus educational! That is, assuming the movie is pretty accurate when depicting the Amish lifestyle. The documentary *Devil’s Playground* was also seriously entertaining and incredibly eye- opening—I definitely want to include the tradition of *rumspringa* in my novel. My next step will be to research about specifically that, starting with the book *Rumspringa* by Tom Shachtman.

July 5

I have to admit, this research stuff is *exhausting*! But not to mention fun! It really is a lot of fun, even though it’s a ton of reading and skimming and highlighting and note-taking. I am learning a ton about Amish culture, including Amish cooking! Yum!—the desserts are “yum” at least, but all this meat is too much for a vegetarian like me, obviously.

July 11

All of this research about Amish people is all well and good, but I am ready to create me some characters! I have been thinking a lot about Felicity’s leading man. Did I mention yet that the main character is named “Felicity”? The name pays homage to my favorite American Girl Doll growing up, but the main reason I chose the name is because Felicity means “happiness,” and I just thought that would be a good, positive message right off the bat, since she will be the first character introduced. I have got some ideas up my sleeve about how I am going to get her to the farm, but I don’t want to give *too* much up out front. But, back to my, er, Felicity’s, man. He needs to be quirky and charming, making it easy for Felicity as well as the reader to fall in love with him. I want him to be good- looking, but not take your breath away good- looking, because he is Amish, which is random enough, and this needs to be believable. That’s the whole point, right? I’ve got it! Give him red hair. Yup, I am making him a ginger! It’s risky, but that way, he isn’t the tall, dark, and handsome “perfect” hunk, and he isn’t a golden- boy Greek Adonis, but he will be cute in a playful way, making him easy to get along with. We can’t just stare at him, we gotta talk to him, too! But he has to be built—he does toil endlessly on a farm, after all. And, yes, I did just type “toil endlessly.” Oh, and another thing, I am going to sneak in that he has crooked teeth. I love tiny imperfections like that on a person, and it ties in with the setting—no braces on the Amish! I also wanted to give him—Ezra—a signature “look” that I can somehow twist into a symbol because I *love* symbols. But I need to figure out how to do that, considering the Amish can’t really have a signature “look.” Symbols are totally legit, though, and although I am no Shakespeare, I *am* attempting to pay homage to Romeo and Juliet, and I *am* trying to get at least a shred, but probably more, of symbolism into this book. Did I mention I am making Felicity obsessed with Shakespeare? Yup. I went there.

July 13

I just realized the Amish speak in a different language. I mean, I knew that, but I never really thought about it in terms of my book until now. I will need to work that into my novel somehow without saying it straight out, and overcome the language barrier (the Amish speak English, too, of course, but not primarily). I want to teach the reader as well as myself some Pennsylvania Dutch words, as well. Yes, a challenge!

July 16

Ok, I can’t keep how she gets to the Amish farm a secret any more! It is *so* genius, and it poked fun at the whole “study abroad” experience that people seem to be totally obsessed with nowadays. Felicity’s parents, who, although Felicity is incredibly loosely based on me (she kind of-ish looks like me and lives where I live…that’s pretty much it; but, like they say, “write what you know!”), are going to send her on an “experience” living on an Amish farm. It’s crazy, it’s pushing the envelope, but I think it really *works*! I am so excited about this!!

July 25

I just finished the section of my novel in which I introduce the reader to Ezra. The scene is wonderful—providing a perfect comic relief (that I will incorporate throughout the novel because that is how I roll; I gotta keep my peeps laughing) as well as leaving the reader wanting to find out more about this Ezra guy, who is sure to be important. I also introduce the entire Stoltzfus (Ezra’s) family, including Ezra’s grandma, who is hinted to be slightly maniacal (ok, not maniacal, maybe a little annoying, though…I just really wanted to use the word “maniacal.” And who can blame me? It’s a great word!)—a potential antagonist? We shall see—the reader and I, because I am not sure yet! Oh, and later, I am going to seamlessly introduce the fact that Ezra is single due to his lack of beard, and I know how I will symbolically pull together a signature look for Ezra. I am thinking it will come in the form of a baseball cap, which can represent teenage rebellion for the Amish because it is a foreign thing to wear, but, to an American girl like Felicity (ha-ha…did you get the pun?), it is a staple in traditional American garb. Ezra is in his *Rumspringa* years, which is a time for Amish teens to explore the English world before they join the Amish church, so him wearing a baseball cap is pretty typical. I will use the baseball cap to reflect how Ezra is changing but at the same time staying the same—sounds confusing, but it will make sense as I write it and as *you, yes YOU* read it.

July 26

To start out my first scene of Felicity and Ezra alone, I wanted it to begin with a confused Felicity providing comical relief. She is attempting to milk a cow and hopelessly failing, and Ezra breaks the news that they have machines to milk the cows, and that technology is not totally beyond the Amish. This scene reflects not only Felicity’s initial stereotyping of the Amish community, but also mine, as well, before I began my research. The scene quickly changes from funny to romantic, and the reader gets a first glimpse of a hint that something may happen between Felicity and Ezra.

August 7

I know I haven’t reflected much in a while, but that’s because I have been busy typing away! I cannot believe how much I have done in such a short amount of time! Granted, I don’t just type- type – type away; I am constantly writing notes and perfecting my outline—I know every scene like the back of my hand, now, I just need to finish writing them all! I am starting to realize that the book is written like how I think, and that is apparent even when you just compare this short blog to the actual novel itself. I am constantly jumping from thought to thought, so I am having Felicity do the same, making her character become for dynamic and real. In fact, as Felicity learns more and more about the Amish lifestyle, so do I. I would continue to reflect, but I’ve got me a novel to write, people!

August 8

I wanted to take a moment to discuss a controversial topic that I bring up in this novel—abortion. You might be wondering why I decided to include such a heated topic that is surrounded by much debate, and I wonder that, as well. I almost didn’t include the “abortion talk”—I was incredibly close to highlighting the section and pressing delete. But I didn’t for a few reasons. This is a novel, but it is supposed to reflect *real* life and *real* problems. If I didn’t put Ezra and Felicity in a potentially tough situation, which happens in all relationships and in every person’s life, their characters would seem underdeveloped. How they each reacted to the situation was essential to make their characters as dynamic as possible. The situation also brought their cultures together, because, Amish or not, everyone goes through a major crisis at least once in their lives, usually more. Felicity and Ezra working together and talking the problem through is as real as real life gets. As for the questions racing through your minds—Who is pregnant? Is Felicity pregnant? Or somebody else? Or was it just a pregnancy scare? Did she get an abortion? Did she keep the baby?—you’re just going to have to read the book! Ha! Suspense!

August 14

I have this horrible curse in which I can’t type out my ideas. Handwriting is the only way I can effectively flow my writing and merge my ideas. So, yes, I am handwriting the entire novel before I type it. Sounds crazy, right? But I am alternating between handwriting and typing, and as I type I edit…so I suppose it isn’t as terrible as it sounds, but it’s still insanely time consuming! Why am I such a crazy person?! I gotta admit, it has been incredibly challenging to balance summer classes, a job, *and* writing (handwriting then typing!) a novel at the same time. But I did this to myself—maybe I *am* certifiably insane! Just kidding. Off to handwrite some more (in purple ink, no less!).

August 18

2 AM. Can’t. Stop. Writing. No time for sleep!

August 21

Ok. It’s finished. I did it! The working title for a while was *Rumspringa.* I loved it as a *working* title, but, alas, I knew it wouldn’t *work* work for real, for the obvious reason that a book I read is called *Rumspringa.* And the title finally hit me—*The Corner Piece*. Trust me, it makes sense as you’re reading it, because you get one of those *aha!* “that’s- where- the- title- came- from” moments. And it’s a symbol! A reoccurring symbol! Gotta love it!! It really is the perfect title, and I really pride myself in writing perfect titles for everything, from essays to email subjects (yes—email subjects) to poems and short stories, and, obviously, novels. Titles are, to me, the most important aspect of a novel or any work, because, and here is the genius of it, *it’s the first thing you see*! And I *always* judge a book by its title. So, needless to say, I am super proud of mine. Oh, another thing I decided to do was title each chapter with a line from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18 (“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”). Explaining it all would be a drag, but once you read the book you’ll get it—it *fits*.

August 25

Recently, I’ve been spending my time trying to find agents to represent my novel via agentquery.com so that I can hopefully find a publisher. This was not an expected part of my project, but I finished the completed work earlier than expected, so I figured I may as well give it a shot. I have learned to write a convincing query and have gotten a glimpse into what the publishing industry and agent process is all about. I’m definitely not an expert, and I am preparing myself for rejection, but this unexpected part of my project has given me a lot of insight so that I can hopefully get this thing published someday! I’m excited about *The Corner Piece* and I’m trying to think positively in terms of publishing without getting my hopes up to high—fingers crossed that things work out eventually!