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Agent/Query Submission Central

~this week 12-16-2016~

WORKSHOP #11

Queries, first pages, and agents . . . oh my!

Welcome everyone, including those of you in our “audience.”

I’m Molli Nickell, THE Publishing Wizard.

Opening comments:

Query revisions and shooting yourself in the foot.

In the process of pulling together a submission package (query, synopsis, and first pages) structure discovery continues, non-stop. All writers discover issues, usually related to the story core, they’d inadvertently omitted from their query letters.

Whoopsie!

Good thing that creation of submission documents is progressive. The most important of all is the query letter. It reveals the most important elements of any story: who wants what and why, why can’t they,

The query first draft turns into second and third and fourth, and finally, you have a query draft that “mostly” works. It reveals the story core and includes a tease at the end of the first paragraph and an even more dire tease at the end of your second paragraph.

The third paragraph is tightly written, with your credits and writing/group experience presented quickly for an easy read.

At this point, walk away. Leave your query alone and move on to your synopsis. That means, no editing, to changing, no additions, no nothing. Leave it alone.

But, you know how it goes, as you work through the first draft, the second and third and fourth of your synopsis, you're inspired to go back to your query and tweak it, just a little bit, or a whole bunch, and basically destroy the structure and the flow. This continues as you revise your synopsis until your query, which was in pretty good shape, isn't any longer.

Oh my goodness.

Practice patience.

When your synopsis is in good shape, tells your story from beginning to middle to end, then go back and look at whatever you feel needs to be shifted or placed in your query.

The moral of this story is, leave well enough alone!

First up is Carol

Story Core:

Georgie must get her sick little brother home amid a snowstorm.

WHO is this story about? Georgie

WHAT does she want? To get her little brother, Luke, home and out of the elements.

WHAT stands in their way? The weather

What is the terrible OR ELSE that might occur if she doesn't get what she wants? She and/or her little brother could suffer from hypothermia and never make it home.

Query

Georgie and her frail brother are downtown for the Armistice Day Parade. Their uncle is marching in the parade and to give them a ride home when the parade ends. A sudden snow storm comes up and the department store where they are to meet closes. On top of this, Luke starts coughing and says he doesn't feel well. How will she find her uncle and if she doesn't, how will she get her sick brother home?

The day had started out warm, so Georgie and her brother, Luke, are not prepared for cold weather. They have no money, and since they

can't find their uncle, they must make a long walk home to an empty house as their parents are at the hospital awaiting the birth of a new baby. After a long ordeal fighting the elements, they manage to get a free ride home on a streetcar only to find the electricity out in their cold home. Can Georgie figure out how to get the house warm, and what about Luke who becomes sicker by the minute?

“Georgie and the Armistice Day Blizzard” is a chapter book of 10,000 words. I have sold more than two dozen stories and articles to a variety of magazines including Highlights for Children, Girl's Life, the Writer Magazine and am the author of seven children's books. I was a writing mentor for, and have given presentations and speeches for the Minnesota chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and taught classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. I belong to two critique groups, one in person and one on-line.

This query is structured so it tells the story, but something is missing? What is that?

Tension.

Revelations about Georgie's inner world.

Her fears, her struggle, her need to protect her little brother.

Strengthen this with the following:

Replace **weak verbs** by revising sentences.

Revise sentences that **are about**, and insert Georgie into the action.

Georgie and her frail brother **are** downtown for the Armistice Day Parade. Their uncle **is** marching in the parade and **to give them a ride home when the parade ends. A sudden snow storm comes up and the department store where they are to meet closes.** On top of this, Luke

starts coughing and says he doesn't feel well. How will she find her uncle and if she doesn't, how will she get her sick brother home?

The day had started out warm, so Georgie and her brother, Luke, are not prepared for cold weather. They have no money, and since they can't find their uncle, they must make a long walk home to an empty house as their parents are at the hospital awaiting the birth of a new baby. After a long ordeal fighting the elements, they manage to get a free ride home on a streetcar only to find the electricity out in their cold home. Can Georgie figure out how to get the house warm, and what about Luke who becomes sicker by the minute?

HOMEWORK for next week on Facebook: Place Georgie into your first two query paragraphs. Show her reactions to every situation. Incorporate the most powerful verbs you can. Remember, this is being read by the agent, not a young reader. Be the adult who shows, and then tells this story.

FOR EVERYBODY:

A query filled with “about” information and weak verbs that doesn't clearly reveal the core of the story won't motivate any agent to keep on reading. Even if your query contains some of the story core elements, they must be written to engage the agent and not just present “ho hum” information. Big difference.

From Vicki

from Vicki

Crooked

Subject line: It followed her to school one day, breaking all the rules.

Story Core:

Who is the story about: Sadie

What does she want and why: Sadie wants to be a normal teenager.

What stands in her way: Lack of self-esteem
What is the terrible or else: Suicide

Query

Last week: Born with cerebral palsy, Sadie's tangled walk attracts attention with every step she takes. The real Sadie hides from the world, believing others only see a cripple when she slithers by. Sadie's only friend Finn, an exchange student from London, returns home. Sadie's convinced she'll never see him again. Sent to her grandmother's Catskill Mountain house for the summer, Sadie decides the isolated setting a perfect refuge to end her life. But in the forest, as at school, Sadie knows she is being watched.

This week Vicki wrote first paragraph:

Born with cerebral palsy, Sadie's tangled walk attracts attention with every step she takes. The real Sadie hides from the world, believing people only see a cripple when she slithers by. Except for Finn, an exchange student from London. Sadie opens her heart, shares songs with Finn, finds laughter, and he shares his past of bad behavior and failing at school. An impulsive energy bounces off of Finn, and they sit up talking for hours into many nights. When the school year ends Finn returns to London. Sadie's convinced she'll never see him again. Sent to her grandmother's Catskill Mountain house for the summer, Sadie decides the isolated setting a perfect refuge to end her life. But in the forest, as at school, Sadie senses someone watches.

Slight revision: Born with cerebral palsy and self-conscious about her tangled walk, Sadie shrinks from relationships, believing others view her as a cripple when she slithers by. Until Finn, a British exchange student, see's past her shyness, befriends Sadie and teaches her to laugh, sing Gilbert and Sullivan duets, and cheat at poker. When the school year ends, Finn returns home. Despite constant promises of a visit before the fall semester, Sadie's convinced she'll never see him again. Sent to her grandmother's Catskill Mountain house for the summer, Sadie decides the isolated setting to be a perfect refuge to

end her life. But in the forest, as at school, Sadie knows she's being watched.

Vicki's 2nd paragraph revision:

After swallowing enough pills to kill a giant, Sadie wakes to face Devilia, a hand-sized fairy with a menacing grin. As her panic subsides, she cautiously befriends this creature. Sadie allows Devilia to live in Manhattan once school begins, but sets up strict rules. Devilia messes up. On a field trip, people stare in awe at a small miracle, as Sadie is covered by hundreds of butterflies, revealing her disability to the world. Cell phones flash and Sadie becomes an Internet sensation. Finn, evasive about his sketchy endeavors in London, emails Sadie how magical and radiant she looks. But it only makes her more of a freak. Even more devastating, Sadie learns Finn has been cutting school, and hanging out with a drug dealer. Sadie has a gut feeling Finn has been lured into danger. Sadie begs Devilia to help. Although terrified of electronics, Devilia uses magic to send herself through the Internet to rescue Finn. Sadie waits, and when she hears nothing from Finn she believes Devilia has disappeared into the cyber world, and never made it to Finn. Filled with despair, has Sadie lost the two beings that mean the most to her? And if so, will she follow them into a lonely afterlife?

Revision concepts:

After swallowing enough pills to kill a giant, Sadie wakes to face Devilia, a hand-sized fairy with a menacing (why menacing?) grin. As her (her who) panic subsides, she cautiously befriends (why?) this creature. (NOTE: more powerful if Sadie recognizes how much like herself Devilia is: not clear where she belongs, or afraid of not belonging anywhere in this world) Sadie allows Devilia to live in Manhattan once school begins (why) , but sets up strict rules (about what?) Devilia messes up (how?). On a field trip, people stare in awe at a small miracle, as Sadie is covered by hundreds of butterflies, revealing her disability to the world. (How is this revealed?) Cell phones flash and Sadie becomes an Internet sensation. Finn, emails Sadie how magical and radiant she looks. (delete: evasive about his

sketchy endeavors in London. But it only makes her more of a freak.) Even more devastating, Sadie learns Finn has been cutting school, and hanging out with a drug dealer. (why does he want the money? So he can come to visit Sadie?) Sadie has a gut feeling Finn has been lured into danger. Sadie begs Devilia to help. Although terrified of electronics, Devilia uses magic to send herself through the Internet to (delete rescue) Finn. Something goes wrong and Devilia disappears into the cyber world. Sadie emails and texts Finn, but he doesn't respond. Filled with despair, Sadie believes she has caused the deaths of the two beings who mean everything to her. Does she consider following them into death?

Comment: If Finn is doing a drug deal to generate money for airfare, this will generate tremendous guilt for Sadie. She's possibly killed Devilia and Finn has gambled his life away, looking for an easy way to pick up cash for an airline ticket to visit her. Her reason to possibly kill herself has to be powerful.

HOMEWORK: Show what matters. Remove whatever doesn't. Reveal more about Sadie, about her guilt regarding Devilia and Finn. Justify her mulling over the comfort of death instead of guilt and a lifetime of loneliness.

From Janet:

Revised query second paragraph and manuscript first pages.

WHO? Professor Grace Stone

WHAT and WHY? She wants the love of a good man and the family she never had.

WHY NOT? Her fear of being vulnerable and having her heart broken.

THE TERRIBLE OR ELSE: She remains alone and a family outsider.

SUBJECT LINE: Glass Promises

FIRST page (350 words that engage)

As written this week: Chapter 1

Grace jammed her laptop and a pile of over-the-holiday paperwork inside her briefcase. Palm fronds scraped against her office window, whipped by strong but warm breezes from the Atlantic Ocean. She glanced down the hall at the other shut doors as she locked hers. I guess I'm the last to leave for Winter Break.

In the front office, the department secretary fingered her blinking ornament necklace and scanned the outer hall through the floor-to-ceiling glass wall. She was a pale, stork-like woman who had the alertness of a creature always under the threat of attack.

“Merry Christmas, Carolyn. See you in January.”

At the sound of Grace's voice, her secretary jumped as though stung.

“Oh, Dr. Black-Stone, did you hear that noise? It sounded like a bomb, didn't it?”

A sonic-like boom **had** sounded about thirty minutes earlier. The detonation startled Grace. She had jerked and banged her ankle on the corner of the desk. For several weeks the construction project across the street unleashed window-rattling vibrations or wall-penetrating reverberations. None was similar to the one from today.

“I'm sure it was nothing. I hope the worst of the noise is over by the time classes resume in January.”

Grace waved good-bye and headed down the hall. She planned to pick up Lily early from preschool and go Christmas shopping. At the exit doors, a student with a Billabong tank top entered. “Whoa, Dr. B.! Your Beemer's been beamed.”

“What do you mean?”

He brushed his shoulder-length, muddy-blonde hair out of his eyes and nodded toward the double doors. “See for yourself.”

Grace pushed past and hurried outside. A crowd was clustered in front of the building. Campus security cruisers blocked the street. Emergency lights flashed. The deep rumble of fire engine motors added to the commotion.

Then she saw it.

The obelisk of an I-beam rose into the air. A chain attached one end to the long arm of a tower crane. A second, shorter chain dangled in the wind. The opposite end of the steel girder was where her car had been parked. She stood frozen, mouth agape. Then her view was blocked.

A man in a hard hat and acid-green shirt with a Charvet Crane logo stood in front of her. “Can you tell me where to find Dr. Black-Stone?” It took several seconds to process his words. “Uh, right here.”

“Yeah, I know. Someone said he’d be in this building.”

“No. I mean, I’m Dr. Black-Stone.”

His eyes widened. “I’m Joe, the site foreman. There’s been an accident with your car.”

Her mouth went dry. Her coveted parking spot was rumored to be a sexual favor from a university power broker. Since she was a widowed blonde under the age of thirty, even her hiring created speculation regardless of how hard she worked. What would the gossip mongers say now?

Without asking permission, Joe plunked a white hard hat on her head, took her elbow, and lead her toward the calamity. She scurried alongside his long strides in her heels and pencil skirt. Onlookers

parted for them like torn cloth. Some offered nods of sympathy. Others sported gleeful better-you-than-me smirks. Her now unobstructed view revealed the beam had pierced the car and folded it upward. Michael's BMW looked like a taco. Grace choked down a snort of hysteria. Her dead husband's babe-mobile was impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she'd ever seen.

Firemen sprayed a chemical around the area. A knot of hard-hatted workers stood by the parking lot entrance. All at once, shouts from two of the firemen pierced the air. Squeals and gasps rose from the crowd. Joe jerked her to a halt at the curb.

The girder swayed in the sudden gusts of wind. One man sprang forward. With his hand on his hard hat, he sprinted toward the crane as firefighters and the men he'd been with scuttled backward into the street. The workman climbed with nimble grace into the crane's cab. Coordinating hand and foot controls, he slackened the tension on the attached chain at the same time as the tower arm lowered the beam toward the upturned nose of Grace's car. With delicate precision, the girder touched the front bumper and, like an under-baked cake, half of the taco-mobile collapsed under the weight. Metal shrieked as the front half the car dropped. The other end of the beam rose from its cavity and pushed back the rear of the car. Soon most the metal bar rested on the flattened vehicle.

The spectators cheered and applauded. The man climbed down from the crane and strode toward his men. Joe tugged on Grace's elbow.

The worker who had safely lowered the girder had his back to them. As they neared, he stood with hands on his hips and shouted. "Where the hell is Joe?"

"He went to get the professor who owns the car."

“Goddamn it! A professor owns this mess! Now I’m gonna have to deal with some four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd. Why couldn’t it fall on a Kia or Escort? This is a fucking disaster!”

“Boss, Joe is here. With...the professor?”

The man spun around, cocked his head, and studied Grace. He stood over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled. Thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. Cropped brown hair furred his head and stubble darkened his cheeks and chin.

Joe moved her forward. “This is Dr. Black-Stone.”

The Boss frowned. “Gigi?”

In front of Grace stood her tenth rejected speed date. “Hello, Beau.”

Trimmed and tightened.

The manuscript first page is specifically written to engage the reader with an interesting character they’ll want to know about. No yak-yak . . . get right to it. When the reader doesn’t know the protagonist, they have no reason to keep reading unless you create a first page that grabs their interest.

What will make this first page engaging is “**getting right to it,**” the set up that brings this story to life.

Grace jammed her laptop and a pile of over-the-holiday paperwork inside her briefcase. Palm fronds scraped against her office window, whipped by strong but warm breezes from the Atlantic Ocean. She glanced down the hall at the other shut doors as she locked hers. I guess I’m the last to leave for Winter Break.

In the front office, the department secretary fingered her blinking ornament necklace and scanned the outer hall through the floor-to-

ceiling glass wall. She was a pale, stork-like woman who had the alertness of a creature always under the threat of attack.

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A sonic-like boom sounded about thirty minutes earlier. The detonation startled Grace. She had jerked and banged her ankle on the corner of the desk. For several weeks the construction project across the street unleashed window-rattling vibrations or wall-penetrating reverberations. None was similar to the one from today.

“I’m sure it was nothing. I hope the worst of the noise is over by the time classes resume in January.”

Grace waved good-bye and headed down the hall. She planned to pick up Lily early from preschool and go Christmas shopping. At the exit doors, a student with a Billabong tank top entered.

At this point, you are introducing unknown characters and it’s not compelling, engaging, or interesting. Even your enticing title will not hold a reader at this point.

This is where your story begins:

A student breaks into the reception office.

“Whoa, Dr. B.! Your Beemer’s been beamed.”

“What do you mean?”

He brushed his shoulder-length, muddy-blonde hair out of his eyes and nodded toward the double doors. “See for yourself.”

Grace pushed past and **hurried outside.** A crowd was clustered in front of the building. **Campus security cruisers blocked the street.** **Emergency lights flashed.** The deep rumble of fire engine motors added to the commotion.

Then she saw it.

The obelisk of an I-beam rose into the air. A chain attached one end to the long arm of a tower crane. A second, shorter chain dangled in the wind. The opposite end of the steel girder was where her car had been parked. She stood frozen, mouth agape. Then her view was blocked.

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It took several seconds to process his words. “Uh, right here.”

“Yeah, I know. Someone said he’d be in this building.”

“No. I mean, I’m Dr. Black-Stone.”

His eyes widened. “I’m Joe, the site foreman. There’s been an accident with your car.”

Her mouth went dry. Her coveted parking spot was rumored to be a sexual favor from a university power broker. Since she was a widowed blonde under the age of thirty, even her hiring created speculation regardless of how hard she worked. What would the gossip mongers say now?

Without asking permission, Joe plunked a white hard hat on her head, took her elbow, and lead her toward the calamity. She scurried alongside his long strides in her heels and pencil skirt. Onlookers parted for them like torn cloth. Some offered nods of sympathy. Others sported gleeful better-you-than-me smirks.

Her now unobstructed view revealed the beam had pierced the car and folded it upward. Michael’s BMW looked like a taco. Grace choked down a snort of hysteria. Her dead husband’s babe-mobile was impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she’d ever seen.

It looked like a BMW taco.

Firemen sprayed a chemical around the area. A knot of hard-hatted workers stood by the parking lot entrance. All at once, shouts from

two of the firemen pierced the air. Squeals and gasps rose from the crowd. Joe jerked her to a halt at the curb.

The girder swayed in the sudden gusts of wind. One man sprang forward. With his hand on his hard hat, he sprinted toward the crane as firefighters and the men he'd been with scuttled backward into the street. The workman climbed with nimble grace he climbed into the crane's cab, shoved the operator aside, then, Coordinating hand and foot controls, he slackened the tension on the attached chain at the same time as the tower arm lowered the beam toward the upturned nose of Grace's car. With delicate precision, the girder touched the front bumper and, like an under-baked cake, half of the taco-mobile collapsed under the weight. Metal shrieked as the front half of the car dropped. The other end of the beam rose from its cavity and pushed back the rear of the car. Soon most the metal bar rested on the flattened vehicle.

The spectators cheered and applauded. The hero of the moment The man climbed down from the crane and strode toward his men. A workman tugged on Joe tugged on Grace's elbow and propelled her forward toward the man who'd . The worker who had safely lowered the girder had his back to them. As they neared, he turned, stood with hands on his hips and shouted. "Where the hell is Joe?"

"He went to get the professor who owns the car."

"Goddamn it! A professor owns this mess! Now I'm gonna have to deal with some four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd. Why couldn't it fall on a Kia or Escort? This is a fucking disaster!"

"Boss, Joe is here. With...the professor?"

The man spun around, cocked his head, and studied Grace. He stood over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled. Thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. Cropped brown hair furred his head and stubble darkened his cheeks and chin.

Joe moved Grace forward. "Boss, this is Dr. Black-Stone."

The Boss frowned, then squinted and leaned forward. "Gigi?"

In front of Grace stood her tenth-rejected speed date. “Hello, Beau.”

Trimmed and tightened.

Grace looked up as a student burst into her reception office.

“Whoa, Dr. B.! Your Beemer’s been beamed.”

Grace hurried outside. Security cruisers blocked the street. Emergency lights flashed.

Add a line about Grace follows the student, teetering on heels, tugging at her pencil slim skirt.

Then she saw it.

The obelisk of an I-beam rose into the air. A chain attached one end to the long arm of a tower crane. A second, shorter chain dangled in the wind.

One end of the beam had pierced the car and folded it upward, like a BMW taco. Grace choked down a snort of hysteria. Her dead husband’s babe-mobile was impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she’d ever seen.

The girder swayed in the sudden gusts of wind. One man sprang forward while others scuttled backward, away from danger. He climbed into the crane’s cab, shoved the operator aside, then, lowered the beam. With delicate precision, he guided the girder to lay over the entire car until the taco-mobile totally collapsed under the weight. Metal shrieked as the front half of the car dropped.

spectators cheered and applauded. The hero of the moment as he climbed from the crane and strode in her direction.

A workman gently pushed Grace’s elbow and propelled her forward toward the man, who stood with hands on hips.

“Where the hell is Joe?”

“He’s getting’ the professor who owns the car.”

“Goddamn it! A professor owns this mess! Now I’m gonna have to deal with some four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd. Why couldn’t it fall on a Kia or Escort? This is a fucking disaster!”

“Boss, um . . . this is Dr. Black-Stone.”

The boss studied Grace. He stood over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled. Thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. Cropped brown hair furred his head and stubble darkened his cheeks and chin.

The Boss squinted, and leaned forward. “Gigi?”

Grace forced a smile as she greeted her 10th rejected speed date.

“Hello, Beau.”

(336 words instead of 950)

Wind messes up her hair, flying in her face. He comments, now I recognize you. Then he recognizes her.

HOMEWORK: For evaluation on FB next week. Use this format, revise if you can tighten it. Keep the word count under 350 words. No fluff. No back story. No explanation of who is whom or what. Grab your reader’s attention.

Her recognition of him is the frosting on the cake. Nice job.

Last week:

Grace Stone jammed her laptop and a pile of over-the-holiday paperwork inside her briefcase. Palm fronds scraped against her office window, whipped by strong but warm breezes from the Atlantic Ocean.

“Excuse me.” Carolyn, the department secretary, stood in the doorway. “Someone is here to see you.”

Grace’s shoulders sagged. After final exams, she had planned to leave campus for Winter Break. Lily expected to be picked up early from preschool. “Who is it?”

“I don’t know. He’s here about your car.”

“My car?” Grace grabbed her briefcase and followed Carolyn. A man in a hard hat and acid-green shirt with a Charvet Crane logo stood in the reception area. She tilted her head back to look at him. “I’m Dr. Black-Stone.”

His eyes widened. “Uh, I’m Joe, the site foreman, for the construction project across the street. Your car’s been damaged in the faculty lot.” Grace shook her head. Since she was under thirty, blonde, and single her coveted parking spot was rumored to be a sexual favor from a university power broker. What would the gossip mongers say now? She scurried alongside Joe in her heels and pencil skirt.

At the exit doors, a student with a Billabong tank top entered. “Dr. B.! Your Beemer’s been beamed.” **GREAT COMMENT!**

Grace pushed past Joe and hurried outside. A crowd was clustered in front of the building. Security cruisers blocked the street. Emergency lights flashed. The deep rumble of fire engine motors added to the commotion.

Then she saw it.

The obelisk of an I-beam rose into the air. A chain attached one end to the long arm of a tower crane. A second, shorter chain dangled in the wind. The opposite end of the steel girder was where her car had been parked.

Spectators parted for her like torn cloth. Some offered nods of sympathy. Others sported gleeful better-you-than-me smirks. Her now unobstructed view revealed the beam had pierced the black car and folded it upward. Firemen sprayed a chemical around the area. Grace choked down a snort of hysteria. The car looked like a taco. Her dead husband’s babe-mobile was impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she’d ever seen. **GREAT DESCRIPTION.**

A knot of hard-hatted workers stood by the parking lot entrance. One man, whose back was turned, shouted. “Where the hell is Joe?”

“He went to get the professor who owns the car.”

“Goddamn it! A professor owns this mess! Now I’m gonna have to deal with some four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd. And the thing couldn’t fall on a Kia or Escort instead of a BMW? This is a fucking disaster!”

“Boss, Joe is here. With... the professor?”

The man spun around, cocked his head, and studied Grace. He stood over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled. Thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. Cropped brown hair furred his head and stubble darkened his cheeks and chin. **HE WOULD BE WEARING A HARD HAT.**

Joe moved her forward. “This is Dr. Black-Stone.”

The Boss frowned. “Gigi?”

“Hello, Beau.”

Tighten to heighten the tension of the moment. Don't futz around. Your goal is to capture the interest of the agent with a scene that reveals much about your protagonist and her love interest, Beau, and begins the story with a bang as her Beemer is destroyed.

Begin your story the moment something happens, something that demands the telling of your story. A steel beam smashing a Beemer is something. Lots of action, emotion, noise. It brings Grace together with her future by destroying her past, the babe-mobile.

Revision concepts:

The squeal of metal smashing into metal reverberated through her office. The building shook. Coffee sloshed out of her cup.

She races out of her office door, almost ran over student wearing

“Dr. B. Your Beemer's been beamed.”

She races around the corner and stops dead in her tracks choking down a snort of hysteria. Her dead husband's babe-mobile had been folded into the shape of a giant steel taco, impaled with the biggest phallic weapon of destruction she'd ever seen.

A knot of hard-hatted workers stood by the parking lot entrance. The burly forman slammed his hard hat to the ground, shouting. “Where the hell is Joe?”

“He went to get the professor who owns the car.”

“Goddamn it! Now I’m gonna have to deal with some four-eyed, pencil-necked nerd. Damn beam couldn’t fall on a Kia or Escort instead of a BMW? Fucking disaster!”

“Boss . . . um, Joe is here. With the professor.”

The foreman spun around, and cocked his head. Over six feet tall, tanned, and muscled, his thick dark brows arched above golden eyes. He studied Grace as Joe urged her forward. “This is Dr. Black-Stone.”

“Gigi?”

“Hello, Beau.”

Or does she react internally. God damn that speed dating.

Here’s a golden opportunity to show more about Beau, what kind person he is.

The beam begins to shimmy as it swings wildly out over the crowd. People scatter. “Sonofabitch” Beau races to the crane, dodging the swinging beam as it passes by him, climbs into the cab, shoves the operator out of the way, and deftly lowers the beam, crunch, on top of the car again, halting the potential of harming people, or other cars.

From Linda

Story Core:

Who wants what? Wu Meichen wants freedom to control her own future.

Why does she want it? The head of the family tells everyone what to do.

What stands in the way? Chinese cultural traditions

What will happen if Meichen doesn’t get what she wants? Her husband will go to America, and they may be separated for years.

Fifth Draft of Synopsis OK for now.

First Paragraph: On her wedding day, Wu Meichen becomes a member of the Chao family. They are all strangers, even her husband, Chao Chung. She struggles to win Chung's affection and the approval of his relatives, but she cannot please her hyper-critical mother-in-law, especially when Meichen fails to conceive a child after a year of marriage.

Second Paragraph: Meichen panics when Chung leaves for America, but he must obey. Her father-in-law sends her to a missionary school which provides mental challenge and safety from her mother-in-law. Li Biyu, a mission teacher, befriends Meichen, but even Biyu can't cure Meichen's impatience. After five years without Chung, Meichen decides to go to America and convinces Biyu to accompany her.

Third Paragraph: Outraged by Meichen's disobedience, Eldest Uncle stops her in San Francisco and arranges her return to China. Meichen escapes and boards an east bound train. Eldest Uncle telegraphs an ultimatum: Chung must divorce Meichen, or the family will disown him. Four weeks later, Meichen reaches Chung. He can't bear to end the marriage after her courageous journey. Chung struggles with guilt over his decision. Meichen understands his depression and tolerates his irritability. During an argument, Chung crushes Meichen's heart with a confession that he kept her only for sexual pleasure. Meichen agrees to a divorce so Chung can win forgiveness.

Fourth paragraph: Heartbroken, Meichen joins Biyu, who speaks at churches to raise money for Chinese girls' schools. Meichen discovers her power as a speaker brings in impressive contributions. But an unexpected pregnancy cuts her career short. Biyu insists she return to her husband. When Meichen arrives home, she learns Chung left to remarry in China.

Fifth paragraph: Chung abandons his journey and returns home after he secretly watches Meichen speak. Her ability to inspire the audience amazes him. He admits he loves her. Meichen and Chung remind Eldest Uncle that American immigration policies often change. Chung might be unable to re-enter America if he leaves. This will end financial support for his family. Eldest Uncle desires money more than revenge and restores Chung and Meichen to the family.

First pages: Unbound Woman

Heart pounding, Wu Meichen crouched beneath the stairs that led to the upper story of the house. Outside, fire crackers and gongs silenced the din of neighbors who stood at the Wu's front gate. The bride stealers had come.

Thirteen year old Meichen shrank into the narrow space, concealed by her aunt's broad body. A stern voice spoke in the courtyard. "Bring out the bride."

"No. You can't have her," the neighborhood girls shrilled back.

"Don't take my niece away from me." Her uncle blocked the front door.

Meichen heard the girls shriek and laugh, and her uncle's helpless bleats. Feet pounded on wood as the strangers entered the house. One of them shouted instructions as they searched the ground floor, shoving furniture aside. The stairs over Meichen's head shook as one thundered upstairs. Two invaders ordered her aunt to move aside. Mei Yuk wailed, but gave way. Four arms reached into the alcove to seize Meichen. With the game over, she should accompany them without protest, but her feet refused to move. "

The bride stealers led Meichen over the threshold as the crowd laughed and applauded. Mei Yuk smoothed Meichen's red silk tunic and skirt, richly embroidered with gold flowers. Meichen took two steps, then turned to look back at her aunt. Impatient young women surged behind her, pushing her to the courtyard gate where an enclosed sedan chair waited.

Four servants dressed in bright yellow stood ready to lift the chair. The palanquin was painted red, the lucky color, with silk fringe and red streamers along the curved roof. Gold symbols for happiness decorated three side panels, with one left side open. As soon as Meichen sat, her aunt pulled a red silk curtain shut. The bearers picked up the poles and jogged forward followed by Meichen's aunt, uncle, and the "kidnappers", including the groom, Chao Chung. Her hands trembled as she thought of the day, and especially, the night, ahead. A tight, hot ball grew in her stomach and rose to her throat until it hit the barrier of her clenched teeth. She wondered for

the thousandth time why she had been chosen to marry a man so far above her status.

Elder brother, I know somehow you played a part in this. I wish you were here to help me. You wouldn't have let our aunt get away with her lies. What will I do if my new family learns the truth?

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply to ward off tears and nausea. She'd ~~would~~ be disgraced if she left the palanquin with streaked makeup and vomit-stained clothes. Meichen concentrated on the dream in her heart. Her husband would be a kind man who respected her. They might even fall in love if she was very lucky. The gods would bless her with many sons, and her husband's family would hold her in high esteem.

The bridal party passed through the dusty streets of her neighborhood, into the village market where the shoppers made a narrow passageway for the parade, shouting good luck slogans to the bride and groom. The pungent smell of fish and animal manure mingled with the odor of dozens of people who pushed against the palanquin, rocking it like a cradle. With the market behind them, Meichen **tipped back into her seat**, ~~felt herself tip backward~~. She could hear the runners panting, ~~and~~ **and** their speed decreased as they started up a hill to the houses where wealthy people lived. At last the journey ended and the bearers stopped inside the walls of the Chao compound. ~~Someone pulled the curtains aside, and she studied her new home.~~

The Chao family house formed a large square, the doors decorated with red paint, the green roof ornamented with up-tilted eaves, and a ~~Meichen saw~~ a stone courtyard lined with plants. Sunlight glinted on gold fish that darted in and out of lotus blossoms in a small pond. She'd never imagined she would live in such a place. She fanned herself as she sat in the palanquin waiting for her groom. "Why is he taking so long?" She spoke softly so only her aunt could hear.

“He has to wash-off and put on his wedding clothes.” Meu Yuk put her head close to Meichen’s ear. “When you step out, keep your feet together with the toes pointed down. That will make them look smaller.”

A middle-aged lady left the house and helped Meichen out of the chair. Meichen kept her eyes cast down, as was proper for a modest girl. She paused as her aunt straightened the red veil covering her face. She walked slowly through the courtyard and front door. ~~the front door opened, and~~ she heard the murmuring of her husband’s family in the main hall.

She glanced at her groom’s parents as long as she dared.

I’m glad Scholar Chao looks so kind. But Madam Chao is frowning. She doesn’t like my wedding clothes. Perhaps she thinks there’s too much embroidery on them. She thinks I’m vain. Oh, no, she’s looking at my feet. Surely her husband told her they were not bound.

Question: How do you plan to show her thoughts? Chao Chung, dressed in an elegant blue robe, stepped forward and pushed aside the veil that concealed his bride’s face. They studied each other discreetly.

barely had time to taste the dishes as she circled the room serving tea to all the ladies. Her hands trembled under the stern scrutiny of her mother-in-law. **Across the room, the men downed wine and more potent beverages. Chung’s formal stiffness gave way to laughter as the men gave him advice.** The women tittered behind their fans as they guessed what the men were saying.

She followed Chao Chung to the family altar. Together they chanted a blessing to the sky and earth, then bowed before the altar dedicated to the Chao ancestors and the kitchen god who kept watch over the family. Meichen filled delicate cups with steaming tea which she served to Scholar and Madam Chao and her aunt and uncle. She and Chung faced each other and bowed. With the wedding rituals concluded, she became Chao Chung’s wife.

That evening there **was** a great banquet with nine courses, many of them ~~made with~~ expensive delicacies believed to promote happiness, *I never expected this. He's tall and well-shaped. Nothing like his father with shoulders hunched from studying books.*

wealth, and fertility. Meichen gazed with longing at the suckling pig, shark fin soup, sea bass, and whole, crackling fried chicken. She Meichen's face burned at the women's' whispered jests, humiliated to be the focus of ~~all the~~ ribald comments. Her aunt's description of marital intimacy had done nothing to reassure her. The ~~, and all the~~ teasing spurred her conviction that she faced a night of horror. Scholar Cho called the newlyweds to his side. The guests called out toasts to wish the couple long lives and many sons.

Sooner than Meichen wished, Chung led her to his chamber, followed by a few persistent guests, most of them rowdy young men. Chung's parents had purchased a new bed for the bride and groom. Enclosed on three sides, the open panel faced the room, framed with red curtains ~~that could be shut~~. Brightly painted flowers meandered up its wooden walls. Meichen stopped, overcome with the magnificence of her nuptial bed. Chung gently took her arm and pulled her down beside him. They sat together on the open side as people passed by and offered advice to the couple.

One young man stopped in front of them, rocking perilously as he balanced himself. He exhaled whiskey fumes as he leaned close to the groom. "Chao Chung, I hope you didn't drink too much tonight. You don't want your jade stalk to wilt."

Next 10 pages

Chung laughed, and looked at Meichen who lowered her head, puzzled.

What does that mean? I know the stalk is a man part. But can it really wilt like a dead flower?

At last the guests **left** and Chung and Meichen were **left** alone. He turned his back to allow her privacy to undress. As her aunt had advised, Meichen shed her clothes quickly and slid beneath the covers. Chung adjusted the lamp until it barely glowed. She looked away as his silk robe dropped to the floor. The bed dipped as he settled next to her.

Meichen longed to scoot further away. But she could not shirk her duty. A wife must receive her husband's seed and produce a son. If only there was a less disgusting way to do it.

Meichen shivered as Chung put his hands on the sides of her face and turned her head toward him. She couldn't avoid his eyes as he observed every detail of her face.

"Ling Mo never told me he had such a beautiful sister." He ran his finger along her cheek bone. "I wonder what you look like with all that paint off your face."

"I'll take it off."

"No, let me." Chung took the cloth and water the servants had left and gently washed the powder and rouge away. "That's better. Whoever did your makeup has a heavy hand."

"My aunt put it on. I'm sorry my face displeased you."

"I didn't say it displeased me. But I like you better like this."

He put his mouth against her neck. "Your perfume is sweet and light. At least in that, your aunt chose well."

Meichen recalled her apprehension when her aunt had dabbed perfume between her breasts and thighs. Would he sniff those places, too?

She held her breath as his hand slipped beneath the covers. His fingers stroked her shoulders, slid down her arms, passed her hips,

and settled on her thighs. Meichen's whole body tensed as his hands reversed the motions.

Chung sat up and balanced on his knees, pushed the quilt off her feet, and massaged her slender ankles. He placed one foot on his hand and stroked the arch with a light touch.

The Matchmaker was right. My large feet don't disgust him.

Chung's hand moved back up her leg, and he looked her directly in the eyes. She tried to match his gaze but found it difficult. She had been taught to keep her eyes lowered in the presence of a man. The glow in his eyes made her nervous.

What does he want? Am I supposed to do something? Aunt Meu Yuk said to lie still, even when it hurt, and let him put his hands – and that other part – wherever he pleased.

As he pulled her close to him, Chung's hand brushed over the small buds on her chest. He grunted as he fondled both breasts, and then his hand slid between her thighs.

"What are you doing?" Meichen squeaked. Despite her aunt's instructions, the intimate invasion startled her.

"I'm making sure you're a girl, since your chest is as flat as mine."

Meichen covered in the bed as Chung rose and put on his night robe.

"How old are you, Ling Mo's sister? You can't be sixteen."

Panic gripped her. She recalled her aunt's final command. "Remember, you are sixteen." Her mind went blank as she shivered under his harsh gaze.

"Answer me!" He kept his voice low but stern.

What should I say? What will he do if I lie to him? Oh, Aunt, why did you get me in this mess?

She should deny his charge, but she couldn't speak. Her insides shook like congealed pork jelly.

"I'm waiting." Chung folded his arms across his chest.
"I'll be fourteen this New Year." Meichen's voice quivered

"Do you even have your monthly times?"

"Yes, since last year." Her cheeks burned.

"Why did your uncle allow you to marry so young? And why did he lie about your age?"

Meichen spoke in breathy gasps, her words slurred together. "My aunt wanted the marriage because your family is rich. She gave the matchmaker and the fortune teller the wrong birth date." Tears streaked Meichen's cheeks. "Please don't tell your honorable parents about it. If they send me back home, my aunt will sell me to a pleasure house."

Chung struck his forehead with his hand. "I told my father he needs Western spectacles. He saw you when he visited your uncle's house and never noticed you were still a child."

Meichen bristled. "I'm not a child. I can do what's required of me. And you're only twenty. That's not so much older than I am."

Chung glared at her. "But you don't understand. Your brother is my friend. What will he think when he finds out I've taken his thirteen year old sister into my bed? I can't do it."

Meichen rose to her knees. "Do you think Ling Mo would want me to be a prostitute? If you send me away, no one will believe I'm still virgin. I'll have nowhere to go except the brothel. And the owner will put me with men no matter how young I am."

"I must wake my father and ask him what to do." Chung left the bed, headed toward the door with Meichen close behind.

“No, please!” She grabbed his arm as he turned the knob. “I’ll be disgraced, and so will my family.”

His eyes flashed as he pulled his arm loose. “And don’t you think people will laugh at my family when they learn how your aunt tricked my parents?”

“That’s why we must keep this between ourselves.”

Chung shut the door and turned to face her. “But you can’t be my wife. I’m not some jaded Mandarin who seduces young girls.”

“In two and a half years I’ll be sixteen. That’s not so long.”

“Maybe not for you. I didn’t plan to be celibate for the next two years.” Chung paced the room. He saw her robe on a chair and tossed it to her. “Cover yourself.”

Meichen looked down and gasped. She’d forgotten she was naked. She turned her back to him and donned the robe.

Chung settled in a chair, occupied with his own thoughts. Meichen perched on the edge of the bed waiting for him to speak. Or move. Or go to bed. Or do something. Her stomach contracted and acid rose in her throat. She feared she might be sick in front of him.

He leaned forward, his hands propped on his thighs. “My father said I acted without thought when I gave Ling Mo money to go overseas.

You needed him to protect you from your aunt. Now it’s my duty to take responsibility for you.”

“You had to marry me as a punishment?” Meichen’s eyes widened in horror.

“My father insisted on it. When he visited your uncle to tell him where Ling Mo had gone, he saw your aunt slap you.”

“Then you didn’t want me because of my feet?” Meichen asked, as her spirit sank even lower.

“Your feet?” Chung’s brow wrinkled.

“The matchmaker told my aunt bound feet repelled you. That’s why your father chose me for your wife.”

“Oh, that’s true,” he said. “I think the custom is ridiculous and cruel. How can China become a modern country if half its citizens are illiterate and crippled?”

“Chao Chung, I think my brother will understand about our marriage if you write him and explain what my aunt did. He knows how she is.”

“Even if he understands and gives us his blessing, I still can’t have relations with you. It goes against everything I believe in.” He glared at her.

Chung groaned. “And I’ll get very frustrated. I think I’ll buy you a long nightgown like the missionary ladies wear. It comes up to the top of your neck and covers your arms, and it’s white. That should be ugly enough to cool my desire.”

“I don’t think I’d be comfortable in that.” Meichen pursed her lips.

“And I won’t be comfortable if you don’t wear it,” he said.

Chung returned to bed, clutching his robe closed. They lay side by side, neither of them speaking. Chung’s stiff body radiated anger, and Meichen thought it best to let him wrestle with his own thoughts. Eventually, though, curiosity overcame caution.

“Husband, how do you know what Western ladies wear in their beds?”

“Oh ho, it seems I have a jealous wife.” He chuckled. “If you must know, I saw them in an English shop in Canton. My professor had to tell me what they were. I thought they were burial shrouds.”

The uncomfortable silence resumed until Meichen spoke again, her voice meek. “Do you think we’ll have a bad marriage because my aunt lied about my birthdate?”

Chung sat up, resting one elbow on the bed to support his weight as he looked at her. “One thing we must have straight between us. I don’t believe in all those old superstitions. I went through the wedding traditions to please my parents, but I don’t think there are evil spirits, so I’m not afraid of them. Neither your birth date nor mine has anything to do with our future. It’s the evil action of your aunt that’s caused a problem.”

His frown disappeared as Meichen sighed, weighed down with despair. He reached over and stroked her hair. “Now go to sleep. We must rise before dawn to visit my ancestors’ tomb.”

“Husband,” she whispered, “Thank you for keeping my secret.”

He turned on his side with his back toward her. “Let’s just hope no one else finds out.”

Chapter 2

“To move a tree might kill it; to move people may give them new life.”
Chinese Proverb

Chung woke Meichen before sunrise when his head pressed against her shoulder. They had fallen asleep with a proper distance between them, but sometime in the night Chung’s body had rolled against hers.

She lifted her hand to touch him.

Why do I have such improper thoughts? But are they improper? He is my husband.

A voice called them from the courtyard. “Master, Missy, are you awake? The sun is almost up.”

Chung groaned and pressed his arm over his eyes

“Please wait.” Meichen jerked the covers up to her neck. She rolled to her side, brushing her hair over her face. “I don’t want her to see me without makeup,” she whispered.

The maid scratched the door again. “I brought tea.”

“Leave it,” Chung snapped. He stirred beside Meichen and yawned. He realized his body pressed against his young wife and **he** jerked away. His robe, which had come untied, fell open. Meichen averted her eyes, but couldn’t resist sneaking a glance.

His brown-gold chest, devoid of hair, was not muscular, but neither was it too thin. As he straightened his robe, she barely caught sight of his lower body. Supple as a cat, he sprang from the bed. His hair hung to the mid-point of his back, no longer in a tight braid. The front of his head had been neatly shaved when he prepared for the wedding. As Chung opened the door to bring the tea tray inside, he heard the maid laugh with another servant as they whispered about the newlyweds still making the “Clouds and Rain.”

He slammed the door, his lips pressed together. Meichen stared at him, alarmed, but he smiled at her. She was glad she wasn’t the object of his ire.

He poured tea for both of them. Meichen sat up in the bed with the quilt pressed across her naked chest as she held the cup with one hand.

“Will you need the maid to help you dress?” he asked as he turned his back to her and reached for clean clothes draped over a stool.

Meichen’s gaze fastened on his buttocks as he stepped into

My husband is a well formed man. She reflected on her good luck to have such a husband.

He turned to look at her as he buttoned his jacket. “Meichen,” he said again, his voice sharper. “Do you need the maid to help you dress?”

She shook her head as his words registered. “I can dress myself, but I don’t know how to make up my face.”

“I’ll be back shortly,” he said as he opened the door. “Then I’ll see what I can do.”

“Do you know how to paint a lady’s face?” Meichen asked.

“I haven’t tried that,” he admitted, “but I’m very good with the calligraphy brush. I have a steady hand, at least.”

He left, and Meichen rushed to relieve herself and wash. It occurred to her that her husband might have gone off to the privy to give her privacy, and she thanked the gods for his thoughtfulness. There was no need to decide what she would wear. Her aunt had picked a long peacock blue silk jacket and skirt for this special day – the first day she would spend with her new family.

Meichen opened the makeup case her aunt had sent with her bride clothes. She tried to match the different sized brushes with pots of creams and powders. The rice powder settled in an even layer, but her shaking hands produced crooked lines on her brows and lips. She wiped off the paint in despair, and resigned herself to wait for Chung.

He returned with fruit and more tea. “I thought you might be hungry.” He frowned as he looked at her. “Oh, Meichen, you’ve made a mess of your tunic.”

She looked down and saw the fine silk speckled with white powder. Her eyes widened in alarm. “What will your honorable mother think of me?”

“Take it off,” Chung said.

Meichen complied, but crossed her arms over her diminutive breasts.

Chung searched through a lacquered box and retrieved a horsehair brush. “I bought this in Canton to keep lint off my Western suits,” he explained as he stroked the bright silk gently until the powder

disappeared. He threw the tunic on the bed and turned back to Meichen.

“I think it works best if you paint and powder before you put on your tunic.”

“Oh.” Meichen now remembered her aunt had applied the makeup first.

Chung tilted her face up. He studied the almond shaped eyes and delicate cheek bones, considering her face as he would a canvas. With her chin cupped firmly in his left hand, he dipped a brush in a pot and made two graceful arches of her eyebrows. He stroked pale pink in the hollow of her cheekbones, and a dark red over her full lips which opened as the brush caressed them.

Meichen glanced in the small mirror and laughed in delight. “It’s beautiful. You truly are an artist, Husband. Now how do I dress my hair?” She struggled to twist the long locks into a proper bun, but they escaped before she could pin them in place.

Chung smoothed her hair with his fingers. “I like it this way. It’s a shame to hide it in a bun.”

“But I can’t go out like that. It’s not proper for a married woman”.

Chung twisted her hair into a neat bun and struggled to pin it securely in place. “You need a maid of your own. But not that one outside. She’s nosy and gossips too much.” He frowned as he thought. “We need a young girl, loyal to you, who won’t carry tales to my mother.”

“Will your mother agree to give me my own maid?”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ll find a way.” He examined her with a critical eye and nodded. “Now you look like a proper matron. We must go. The sun is rising.”

Questions/comments?

YA also. Submit third chapter. Category called New adult 16 to 20...

Homework. Research agents from those two conferences in my newsletter. There will be a third one this week. Write down their submission requirements. At least 12. Report back here. Agentquery.com querytracker.com reliable sources.

.....

NEXT WEEK, we'll all make comments via Facebook:

No live, on-line class on December 23. Revised works are to be submitted to our facebook page where I'll make comments, along with other Submission Central members.

If you want a jump on self-editing tips and first page revision, both are covered in these tutorials available at [MolliMart](#):

To those of you in our "audience," thank you for joining us.

Give yourself the gift that will keep on giving throughout your writing life. Understanding how to submit your work to agents (and publishers) can help you create a submission package that proves you are the real deal: a skilled writer with a saleable manuscript. When you join Agent/Query Submission Central

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us! [CLICK HERE](#) to read more about the Agent/Query Submission Central program.

Regardless of *when* you join Submission Central, if we're working on the synopsis, but you haven't written a query, no problem. Begin with the query. Use my query template and jump right in. Move through the query, week by week, until you're comfortable with the format. Regardless, if the workshops are focusing on synopsis, first pages, or submission protocol, etc., join in regardless of where your focus is placed.

The query is the document that *must be written first* because it forms the basis for the synopsis and structure of your manuscript first pages.

I'll help you, as will members of the group who have progressed beyond where you may be at the moment.

Thanks to all of you for being here today. Join us next week.

Write on! May the words be with you!

Molli