Vicky’s Secret

A Novel

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to gain insight into the process of writing, illustrating, editing, and getting a book published. Included is analysis of *Vicky’s Secret*, a sample chapter, and synopses of the other chapters. Numerous drawn and digitally edited illustrations are interspersed throughout to reflect portions of the story visually. The practical approach led to a proficient understanding of creating illustrated fiction.
Vicky’s Secret: A Novel

Narrative Theory

The narrative techniques for *Vicky’s Secret* employ first person point of view, reliability, intimacy, inner monologue and setting. This novel is in first person, and the narrator is the central character and protagonist. First person point of view enables the reader to have more sympathy for the narrator, Victoria, because the reader has direct access to her thoughts, motives, and internal desires. The use of limited point of view, made writing the novel difficult at some points to convey action that the main character was not a part of.

The narrator is seventeen, a junior in high school, and an American with European descent. She looks the most Polish out of all those ethnicities with her pale skin and light hair. Victoria has strengths and weaknesses like all characters. One of her weaknesses is her insecure nature. Her insecurities are acerbated when she compares herself to, Crystal, her sister. Crystal is far from perfect, but Victoria views her through rose-colored glasses. Victoria refuses to try activities her sister is already proficient in because she is afraid to come up lacking. Due to her insecurities, she shirks conflict and has difficulty standing up for herself. However, she also has strengths; she is naturally athletic, beautiful, and likeable. She is an exceptionally hard worker, especially when motivated. The authenticity of her friendships is relevant throughout the story, hence her relationships with Paul, Dodie, and Magenta. The combination of Victoria’s characteristics, background, and importance as the narrator define how the story is interpreted; moreover, knowing this information helps the reader understand Victoria’s growth.
Narrative Technique

The character of Victoria is realistic in her predictions, fears, and desires. Throughout the plot Victoria has the impression that Paul is well meaning toward her when in actuality he has mal intent, thus Victoria is unreliable in her judgment. Victoria’s misinterpretations of events and people bring a life-like quality to her character. For example, at the end of the story, the reader discovers that even Victoria’s father was not immune to being misjudged by his daughter. Hopefully, the reader will, at some points, form his or her own opinions and at other times be surprised at being misled by the trusted narrator. In the words of Stuckey-French, “An even greater intimacy is implied if the character’s story is as secret as a diary or as private as a mind, addressed to the self and not intended to be heard by anyone inside or outside the action” (310). Victoria is not telling the reader the events, but rather remembering the events in the quiet recesses of her mind. Victoria’s judgments of other characters indefinitely define the reader’s views. The readers are readily accepting of her judgments because they discover them through such an intimate form of narration, her thoughts.

Setting

The setting is also an important narrative technique: “If character is the foreground of fiction, setting is the background, and as in a painting’s composition, the foreground may be in harmony or in conflict with the background” (Burroway, Stuckey-French and Stuckey-French 168). Settings are often times a mirror of the emotions of the main character. The setting at the end of Vicky’s Secret reflects the budding emotions in Victoria, using these words, “The weather was starting to warm up outside, so I rolled down my window.” This is an attempt to send a message of hope for Victoria’s future through the change in the weather. The changing weather represents the changing climate.
of her life. I sprinkle the whole story with imagery of dreary weather, so the last sentence cements the idea of a happy ending or an ending which is going to be happy. As a writer, it is important to have strong literary technique, not to simply insert description of setting, but to use setting to convey important emotion. It takes place in the present time, in an unidentified town in the United States. The setting has a contemporary atmosphere (2000s), and even specific conveniences, inventions, and appliances. For example, Crystal texts Victoria and asks her to go to dinner at the Olive Garden. Both the restaurant and the cell phone are contemporary conveniences that convey that the story takes place in the 21st Century. Any high school student will be able to place herself into the halls of Olumbury High School and feel at home.

The story follows the traditional Aristotelian pyramid; the initial conflict that eventually leads to the crisis, falling action, and resolution. The initial conflict starts before the book begins with Victoria being spurned by Paul, her childhood crush. The heaviest conflict of the story is early on when Victoria meets the leader of a gang, and he threatens her. Throughout the story there are smaller conflicts that rise and fall. The turning point or “crisis” is when Victoria gets kidnapped. The dénouement includes Victoria’s handling of her captivity, Jesse professing his affection for her, Jesse and Victoria attempting to escape together, Victoria’s father rescuing them, and spending time in the hospital. The action continues to fall as Victoria talks to her family, Jesse wakes from his coma, they attend Paul’s court hearing, and Victoria goes to therapy. This all enables her to reach a pleasant resolution during which she moves past the trauma, dates Jesse, and goes to college.

Creative Strategy
The novel will include certain characters that are stock characters. Stock characters can be instantly understood by the reader and also provide a constant source of entertainment. The distinct characteristics of stock characters allow the reader to discover more about Victoria through her interactions with them. The cheerleaders are great examples of stock characters: they are pretty, flighty, and like to party. Peter is the epitome of a nerd, and Gabe is exactly like an insensitive jock. But as the story unfolds, the depth of the characters expand. For example, Magenta started out as an angry gothic girl, but as the main character gets to know her, the reader finds out that there’s an intelligent, brave, funny teenager underneath the hard exterior.

The character development is driven by dialogue. The conversations use slang, and they reflect the way real teenagers talk to each other via jokes, criticisms, complaining, and awkward silences. All the important plot developments are revealed to the reader through the characters talking to each other.

**Target Audience**

The target audience is girls, ages thirteen through sixteen. At that age, one of the most significant factors that attract girls to picking up a book was what it looked like. Vicky’s Secret will have an eye-catching cover with Victoria holding her finger to her lips. It will look distinctly girly and fun. For example, Janette Allison and Meg Cabot are both popular Young Adult fiction writers, and their covers usually consist of teenage girls accented in various feminine colors. The type of novel it is will also attract female young adults because it is about a girl around their age, imperfect but well meaning, with completely normal problems except for one thing; she’s being stalked by a gang. The added element of danger draws interest. For example, Bella in *Twilight* was a normal teenager except that she fell in love with a vampire. And in Janette Rallison’s book *My
*Fair Godmother*, her main character, Savannah is completely normal except for the fact that she has a godmother! Teenage girls like to be able to relate to the main character of a story but want the character to have a more dangerous and exciting life than they do.

**Novel’s Summary with Cover Illustration and Back Cover Excerpt**

Victoria Martin is a regular high school student who up until recently was best friends with her biggest crush, Paul Gavril. After Paul started dating this horrible girl, Annie, Victoria freaked out on him and everything got a bit awkward between them. It was only then, through an odd assortment of circumstances, Victoria started spending
time with Jesse, Paul’s older brother. Jesse used to be part of a gang, a gang that is not pleased that he is trying to leave them. They came to bother him one night and met Victoria. The gang then starts harassing Victoria, Paul dumps Annie, and Victoria’s dad will not let her go to Prom if she does not get her Chemistry grade up. In a shocking turn of events Victoria gets kidnapped by Paul, who has joined the gang, finds out that the gang is interested in her for a reason other than her friendship with Jesse. The gang wants to use her as a pawn to get to her father, who works for the government.

Chapter Synopses with Illustrations

Prologue – A man, known as Lightning Fist, gets interrupted by an anonymous visitor. Lightning Fist has a wound that was acquired through something he recently accomplished. The visitor starts off by congratulating him and then warns him of a man who knows too much. Lightning Fist loses his temper, the visitor leaves, and Lightning Fist contemplates how he will rid himself of this “man who knows too much.”

Chapter 1 – Crystal does Vicky’s hair, Vicky gets a ride from Jesse, eats Aunt Tam’s chocolate chip cookies, Jenna sees Vicky with Jesse and gets the wrong impression, Crystal asks Vicky to the mall, Vicky gets herself a soft pretzel but doesn’t have enough money and Jesse turns up and pays for it, they talk about Paul and Annie, after eating pretzels they decide to go to Jesse’s house and play monopoly, there is a run in with the gang and she returns safely home and talks to Crystal but doesn’t tell her what happened.

Chapter 2 – The next day in school you are introduced to Vicky’s best friend Dodie and a band geek, Monte. Jesse agrees to teach her self-defense because he is worried about the gang bothering her. She talks to Dodie about her concerns about the gang and Dodie seems more concerned with Vicky
moving on from Paul then she is about Vicky getting attacked by gang members. Vicky
goes over to Jesse’s to learn some self-defense, she also stays for dinner and Jesse helps
her with her math homework. She sees Paul and the exchange was very awkward.

**Chapter 3** – The next day she’s sore from her self-defense lesson, thinks she sees
Lightning Fist, gets a ride to school with Crystal and her boyfriend and accidentally
mistakes the punk new girl for Dodie. She then gets assigned to Magenta as a lab partner,
which ruins her day. And after school she finds a threatening note in her locker, possibly
from the gang. She gets home to find her mother has already bought her shoes for Prom
and wants to take care of finding her a date. Unable to sleep she takes a walk and sees
Lightning Fist. She runs to Jesse’s house, so he calms her down and drives her back home.

**Chapter 4** – During Vicky’s self-defense lesson with Jesse she learns distinctive ways to recognize gang members. Then she goes out to dinner with Crystal and Cole and surprisingly they meet Paul there. Crystal flirts with the waiter, which makes Cole angry and they decide to leave after a tense dinner leaving Paul to take Vicky home. Caleb, the waiter, accidentally saves her from a run in with the gang and drives her home. Caleb and Crystal hang out while Vicky goes to bed.

**Chapter 5** – Vicky apologizes to Paul for ditching him and he flirts with her. Cole convinces Vicky to help him try to win Crystal back. Vicky’s mom’s ‘get Vicky a date for Prom’ has begun with a nerdy guy named Peter. Vicky gets two phone calls, one from Cole and the other from Dodie. Then during dinner her parents decide that she should join the cheer squad.
Chapter 6 – Dodie shares news that Paul broke up with Annie, Vicky tells her about cheerleading and she bets that Vicky can’t make the squad. Vicky goes and asks Crystal for help getting ready for tryouts. Vicky’s mom sets her up with Drew, Zach, and Gabe, which was such a disaster that Jesse ended up threatening Gabe.

Chapter 7 – Vicky tries out for cheerleading, Paul asks her to Prom, Vicky tells Dodie about it and helps Cole plan a romantic evening for Crystal. Vicky asks Jesse to teach her to waltz in attempts to teach Cole how to waltz so that he can waltz with Crystal. Cole picks her up from Jesse’s house all depressed that he saw Crystal flirting with another guy, so they go get ice cream to cheer him up. At the ice cream place Annie trips and threatens Vicky. The cheerleading results are posted and Vicky makes the squad. She then goes to Chemistry and finds out she’s failing and Magenta is passing.
with a 96. When she breaks the news to her family her father forbids her from going to Prom is she doesn’t boost her grade to a seventy.

**Chapter 8** – Vicky finishes her first cheerleading rehearsal and gets invited to Jenna’s party by Penny and Alex (a couple girls on her squad.) Vicky asks Magenta to tutor her in Chemistry and Magenta refuses. Vicky teaches Cole how to dance and he loses his balance and falls on her. Crystal comes in and immediately thinks that he is cheating on her with Vicky. Vicky goes to Jenna’s party later that evening. Crystal gets drunk at the party, Vicky runs into Jesse, meets a guy named Sam, agrees to go to dinner with Sam, Jesse, and Penny. Jesse drives Vicky and the drunk Crystal home.

**Chapter 9** – Vicky takes care of a hung-over Crystal the next day. After that she goes on a date with Paul and runs into Caleb, the waiter.

**Chapter 10** – A jock makes fun of Magenta in the library and Vicky stands up for her. Paul shows up to school with a black eye and acts very cryptically when questioned.
Magenta comes into Chemistry late and volunteers to tutor Vicky. After the tutoring session Vicky and Magenta go out for food and we learn that Magenta’s Dad is in the military. Vicky retakes a Chemistry quiz, cheers at the football game and then goes out to dinner with Jesse, Sam and Penny. After dinner they play cards and Penny decides sleep over at Vicky’s house. She tells Vicky that Sam kissed her.

Chapter 11 – The Martin’s are having a family breakfast on Saturday with the addition of Penny and Cole. Cole talks Vicky into helping him get Crystal back again, despite the horrible disaster from before. Later that day Vicky and her mom are in the house alone and her mom shows her the dress she wants Vicky to wear to Prom. She also explains why Prom is so important to her and why she never went. Vicky goes to another self-defense lesson with Jesse and learns about what he wants to do with his life.

Chapter 12 – Vicky recalls how she met Paul and Jesse. She went over when they hadn’t lived there long and played marbles with Paul. Their mother drove her home later. Vicky goes back to the Gavril’s to talk to Jesse and recalls the second time she met them. She was in school and Paul got put in her class. He got seated next to her and they agreed to play marbles at lunch. Unfortunately he got sent to the principal’s office before lunch and Vicky walked him there. The entire Gavril family was there and they left crying. Vicky then remembers the funeral.

Chapter 13 – Vicky invites Jenna to go rock climbing, she gets her quiz back in Chemistry, the entire cheer squad get scolded and punished for going to Jenna’s party they have to do community service, Vicky meets up with Magenta for their tutoring session and they go to a mechanic’s shop that Magenta likes to hang out at. While at the mechanic’s shop they run into Lightning Fist. He threatens Vicky but does nothing else. The next day Vicky goes to tutor reading after cheerleading with her squad, her pupil is a
difficult child who refuses to read. After tutoring she goes over to the Gavril’s house and hangs out with Paul, Jesse walks in on them hanging out and the brothers get into a brief fight.

**Chapter 14** – Magenta confronts Vicky about Lightning Fist and warns her to stay away from him. Vicky gets a call from Cole about Crystal’s surprise and meets up with him to buy Crystal jewelry. Vicky remembers how she met Cole and how Cole and Crystal started dating. They find a silver necklace for Crystal and the next day Vicky talks Monte’s band into being the live band for Cole’s surprise. The only catch is that Vicky has to get Dodie to go to Prom with Monte. She does this by calling in her favor for winning the bet.

**Chapter 15** – Vicky goes back to tutoring Kevin and this time she teaches him the very basics and brings him treats to bribe him with. Victoria makes plans to go rock climbing and invites both Paul and Peter. After breakfast Crystal drives her to school and Vicky tries to reason with her, Crystal is still hurt and Vicky feels awful. In need of comfort, she runs into Paul and he gives her a hug. Then she takes her Chemistry test and afterward Magenta is waiting for her and shows her pictures of gang members in old yearbooks. Magenta steals a yearbook from the school and slips it into Vicky’s backpack. Vicky is studying the yearbook but when her Dad gets home she takes a break to eat dinner.

**Chapter 16** – Jenna comes over and they meet Paul and Peter at the gym for rock climbing. While Peter is climbing the rock wall, some guys come over and threaten Peter by grabbing the rope. Security comes over and the guys run away, but not before Vicky realizes that they were gang members. Dodie comes over to cheer Vicky up and the girls go to hang out with Magenta. She’s not at the Nail Salon that Magenta’s mom told them
she would be at but at the tattoo parlor next door. After they find her she takes them to a
Greek restaurant to talk. They get followed there but luckily are able to lose their stalkers.
Magenta and Vicky have a very blunt conversation about why Magenta was not getting
her nails done and what happened at the rock wall.

Chapter 17 – Dodie, Magenta, and Vicky were chatting at lunch the next day
when one of the gang members that Vicky recognized approached. Vicky and Magenta
hurried to the bathroom while Dodie distracted him. In the bathroom, Annie sees Vicky
and makes a snide remark. Magenta stands up for Vicky. Vicky finds out her Chemistry
test grade, Penny tells Vicky that Sam asked her to Prom, Vicky tutors Kevin again, and
finds out about the upcoming cheerleading competition. Paul takes Vicky on a date to go
paintballing. She also goes by the Gavril’s house to talk to Jesse and he ends up telling
her his last memories of his father and explaining why he got involved with Lightning
Fist.

Chapter 18 – Vicky sees Annie and Paul talking but can’t hear what is being
said. She goes to Wendell with the squad and gets put in the same room as her sister.
Crystal and Vicky have a long talk and make up with each other. The next day they
compete and place fourth. The following week was uneventful.
Chapter 19 – The day of Prom came, Crystal helped Vicky and Penny get ready. Vicky tricked Crystal into trying on a dress and the cheerleaders kidnapped her. Penny and Vicky left with Sam and Paul, the four went out for dinner and then to Prom. Partway into Prom, Monte and Vicky left to assist the surprise for Crystal. Vicky hid behind a tree and watched Cole talk to Crystal. Crystal started crying and Cole gave her the necklace and comforted her. Vicky met back up with Paul and they went for a ride in his vehicle. Paul parks the car and kisses her right before she gets grabbed by a group of men and knocked unconscious.
Sample Chapter

I woke up in a basement. The only light was coming through a small window near the ceiling. My vision took a little while to adjust but my wrists were screaming in pain from the moment my consciousness returned. Fairly quickly, I gathered that my hands were tied behind my back around a large mental pole that stood ceiling to floor. My head was pounding, which is probably to be expected considering the force that knocked me unconscious. I couldn’t help checking the state of my dress when my vision cleared. The worst of it was a rip in the skirt but the dirt didn’t seem like anything a dry cleaner couldn’t handle. I would have hated to have ruined my mother’s prized dress she made. I wonder what they did to Paul, I thought to myself. Maybe he ran away. I looked around the room more closely now that my eyes were working better and noticed a male body tied to a similar pole, not too far from me.

“Paul?” My voice sounded scratchy, as if I hadn’t used in a long time.

The nearby figure raised his head. “Vicky! You’re alright?”

I blinked a couple times to make sure my mind wasn’t playing tricks on me.

“Jesse? What are you doing here?” I studied his face, covered in bruises but a surprisingly beautiful sight for my aching gaze.

“I told Lightning Fist that he could do whatever he wanted to punish me for leaving if he left you alone. Clearly he wants to have his cake and eat it too.” Jesse looked the angriest I’d ever seen him.

I thought of Jesse willingly bringing himself into Lightning Fist’s clutches knowing full well the evil he was capable of. “You were prepared to die when you gave yourself up, weren’t you?” The realization dawned on me and brought a wave of alarm and humility in equal measure. I felt so unworthy of what he had done.
“It didn’t work.” Jesse shrugged. It was that sentence that finally brought the fear I should have felt when I first felt that guy’s hands on my arms. I realized then what all this meant.

The door swung open and Jesse pretended that we hadn’t been talking. I followed suit and looked down, but I kept my peripheral gaze focused on the door. I recognized Lightning Fist walk in and behind him was a person whom I didn’t get a good look at. My stomach grew tight. I would be willing to go four more days tied up like this if I didn’t have to face Lightning Fist.

“Come Wolf Fang, come look at our prisoner.” Lightning Fist motioned to the guy behind him. I looked up into his face as he came into view. My mouth parted in surprise. Paul?! “You did well,” Lightning Fist continued to say to Paul, “As far as your initiation goes, I say you passed. You are officially to be called Wolf Fang. You earned the title.”

“Thank you.” Paul ducked his head, respectfully acknowledging what Lightning Fist had said. “And what about Vicky? Are you going to let her go now?”

“Let her go?” Lightning Fist laughed. “You think I gave you this assignment for fun? No Wolf Fang,” he said as all semblance of humor vanished from his countenance. “I have other plans for Victoria Martin.” Lightning Fist took his time saying “Victoria Martin” in a way that suggested that he relished whatever his “other plans” were. I shivered.

“Whatever you think is best.” Paul ducked his head again, and this time he looked ashamed of Lightning Fists’ rebuke.

My thoughts were spinning at all the new information. I could no longer hold it in so before Paul had a chance to address me, I burst out, “You snake! How could you do
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this to me? Were you pretending the entire time?” Paul remained silent, which only
angered me all the more. “Obviously I was naïve, obviously I was too innocent but I
think that’s better than being cruel, deceitful, and cold. Like you.”

“Victerina…,” Paul started to say.

“Don’t. Call. Me. That,” I snapped. Then to add insult to injury, Annie walked in.
She steered her haughty eyes towards me before kissing Raul on the cheek and sliding
her long, white arms around Paul’s waist. He didn’t flinch or shove her away; it almost
seemed natural to him. “Well isn’t this interesting. You were dating Annie the entire
time, weren’t you? You never broke up with her. That whole conversation about her
character was crap. Admit it!”

“I’m sorry,” Paul said.

“You don’t have to apologize to her,” Annie smirked at me. Annie wasn’t jealous
of me now; she had won. She had gotten exactly what she wanted. “Come Paul, let’s go,”
Annie slid her fingers between his.

Lightning Fist closed the door after them and finally all his attention was aimed at
me, “It’s so good of you to join us here. And what a pretty dress,” Raul’s eyes traveled
down my body. He came closer, pushing his body against me and pinning me to the pole.
His grubby hands grabbed my hips and his lips pressed against mine.

“Get your hands off her,” Jesse growled. Lightning Fist paid him no mind. I
parted my lips enough to get his bottom lip between my teeth and bit down, hard. Blood
squirited across my face and Raul jumped back with a cry of pain.

“You!” Lightning Fist let out an expletive. “Well, if that’s how it’s going to be…”
Lightning Fist drew his hand back and whaled me across the face. I felt the back of my
head crash into the metal pole. I tried not to cry out but the ferocity of the pain took me
by surprise. Colorful splotches filled my vision and the room blurred before sharpening.

He seemed placated by my obvious discomfort. “I’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Is that the first time a woman’s ever refused you?” Jesse stuck his chin out defiantly. Raul’s eyes turned cold and he spun on his heel. He crossed the room in two strides, opening the door and leaving. The door slammed behind him.

“You’re lucky he left,” I told Jesse. I knew Jesse was angry but taunting Raul would only bring more distress than good in the long run.

“What can he do to me? How can he hurt me more than he already has?” Jesse asked.

“You’re bruised and beaten but at least you still have all your body parts!” I protested. “There are still things he can do, I’m sure.”

“I don’t care what happens to me. I just don’t want to see you get hurt,” Jesse said. I wasn’t sure if he was referring to the kiss or me being back handed across the face. I supposed it didn’t much matter which.

“I don’t deserve your affection.”

“No. What you don’t deserve is being kidnapped, sexually harassed and beaten,” Jesse corrected me. We lapsed into silence. “How was Prom?”

“It had its moments. The best part was probably Cole and Crystal getting back together.”

“They’re back together? Good for them!”

“Yeah, I think we can all assume that her night went better than mine. Her date didn’t help kidnap her,” I said.

“I feel like I could have prevented some of this,” Jesse murmured.

“How?” I asked.
“By asking you to Prom,” Jesse gave me a specific answer to my rhetorical question.

“It’s sad that you have to hypothetically pity date me to prevent my kidnapping.”

“You think this has to do with pity? This has nothing to do with pity,” Jesse responded.

I paused, “What are you talking about?”

“I was planning on asking you to Prom.”

“Why?”

“For the same reason guys usually ask girls to Prom.”

I took a moment to recover. “Why didn’t you tell me that you felt that way?”

“Before or after my brother asked you to Prom?” Jesse asked me.

“I was so blind to Paul, I didn’t even realize that the scar he has is the gang’s symbol. That was also probably part of his initiation too. And even if he had broken up with Annie I was dumb to date him right away. No one gets over their girlfriend so fast,” I said.

“Let’s get some sleep. After some rest we can concoct a plan to get out of here,” Jesse suggested.

“You think we can escape?” I asked.

“Stranger things have happened.”

That wasn’t a rave review but I was willing to grab any speck of hope I could find. I was tired but I didn’t dare lean my head back against the pole because it was throbbing. I let my head droop forward and closed my eyes. As soon as I closed my eyes, I realized how tired I was. Not just physically exhausted and sore from the abuse my body had taken that day but emotionally exhausted. It was hard to turn off my brain as
easily as closing my eyes turned off my vision. I should have been intensely sad that Paul had lied to me, but after the initial flare of anger I only felt relieved and foolish. Relieved that I knew the truth and I wasn’t wasting any more time on him and foolish that I hadn’t figured it out until it was staring me in the face. And who would have thought that Jesse would come to my rescue the way he had? Who would have guessed that he liked me? Romantically. Well, I guess now that I thought about it that was something else I should have figured out. Seeing as though I may die tomorrow, I probably missed any opportunity to be with Jesse, I figured. That was the last thought I had before I fell asleep.

The following morning, I wished I had told my parents something, anything about the gang so that they would know where to look for me. There was no way of keeping time or even knowing how much time had passed in that basement. The predominant sensations that got my attention were my uncomfortably full bladder, my stinging face, and my fingers going numb. Suddenly, the door opened. I was relieved to see that it wasn’t Raul. However, I did recognize the guy that entered. Long Shorts. Or I suppose Dodie found out that his real name was Tuck.

He didn’t talk to either of us right away. He simply went to Jesse and untied him. Tuck placed one hand securely on his shoulder and the other hand held a gun to the back of his head, “I’m taking you to the bathroom, so don’t try anything or I have express orders to shoot the girl.” Jesse nodded and they left the room. I hoped Jesse would wrestle the gun out of his hand and overpower him. I was pretty sure he could, and it was worth a shot. I focused on listening closely for any sounds of a struggle to distract me from my bladder while they were gone.

Unfortunately he came back in, looking exactly as they had when they left. Tuck retied Jesse. Tuck came over to me and untied me. My hands immediately felt like a
million little needles were poking into them. I couldn’t have made them work if I had tried and I seriously didn’t think I could overpower Tuck. I simply walked ahead of him while he directed me to the bathroom with the muzzle of the gun against my back. He let me go into the bathroom by myself; which seems like a small kindness but I was grateful. I didn’t bother putting toilet paper down on the seat like I usually do in a foreign bathroom because I didn’t trust my bladder to hold out that long. I took my time washing my hands, letting the warm water run over my fingers as they slowly regained feeling.

Tuck hit the butt of his gun against the door, “hurry up!”

“I’m almost done, Sweetie!” I called out. There was a small mirror that hanging over the sink. My hair was no longer in perfect ringlets down my back but instead hung in disheveled strands and unmanageable knots. My impeccable makeup from the day before had worn off in some places but my mascara left dark smudges under my eyes. Where Raul hit me was bruised and swollen. There was also a red mark and bump by my hairline where the gang member had hit me to knock me out. I did my best to wash away the mascara without acerbating my swollen cheek. Tuck knocked on the door again and this time I left the bathroom and let him lead me back to the basement room. I took note of a staircase and another hallway.

“Your name is Tuck, right?” I asked him in my friendliest voice. He grunted. So I took that as a “yes” and continued talking. “You’re very nice to take me to the bathroom. I really had to go, you know. I don’t want to pee on myself, so try to come back in more regular intervals to take me.” By this point he was already retying me to the pole. “You are really great. Thanks so much.” He grunted again, but it seemed like a friendlier grunt than the last grunt. He also didn’t tie me quite as tightly as I had been tied before. There was no chance I could escape my bindings but at least the circulation wasn’t being cut off.
in my hands. That was something to be grateful for. Tuck left the room and shut the door without a word. I waited for him to be far away before I turned to Jesse.

“Did you notice the mirror in the bathroom?” I asked him.

“I did. Do you think next time you go you can break a small corner off of it?” Jesse asked me.

“I’ve heard mirrors break before, Jesse. They’re loud. He’ll hear it,” I warned him.

“I don’t suppose the running water will cover the sound?” he asked.

“Probably not.”

“What about the combined noise of flushing and running sink water?” Jesse asked.

I nodded, and my face broke into a smile. “That may work. It’ll be tricky but I will try anything to get out of here.” The two of us descended into a compatible silence.

Later that day the door opened and, as Lightning Fist promised, he walked into the room. Paul trailed after him. “How is everyone doing today?” Raul asked, a cynical smile across his face. I glared up at him with my lips pressed together. Likewise, Jesse let his gaze rest angrily on Lightning Fist. “What’s your Dad’s number, Victoria?” Lightning Fist took out his cell phone.

“I’m not telling you anything,” I said in his direction. Without warning Raul kneed me in the stomach. I lost my breath. Paul’s fists clenched and the veins in his arms jumped out.

“Vicky, breathe out when he hits you, it disperses the energy!” Jesse called to me through the pain. I tried to nod and look stoic but all I could do was gasp.

“Please don’t hit her,” Paul asked of Raul quietly. “You said no harm would come
to her."

"You’re weak, Wolf Fang. These bruises will heal, but the information she has will be invaluable," Lighting Fist retorted.

"He’s weak because he doesn’t like seeing defenseless females getting hit. Is that it?" Jesse spoke up. "Please Raul, I’m here. Your quarrel is with me. Do what you wish to me but let her go. I beg you. Her body is small. She can only take so much of this abuse."

"Are you so arrogant to think that the only reason I hurt her is to watch you suffer? I admit it is a perk to see you so torn up about it but that’s not why she’s here."

Lightning Fist looked from one surprised face to the other. "Oh? So you don’t know. I did a bit of research on Victoria Martin. Made a few phone calls, and dug up some ancient history, and you know what I found?" He paused here, reveling in our ignorance. "Clearly not. I found that her father has been keeping my gang on the run for years."

"My dad works for the bank," I told him honestly. "You have the wrong person."

"Oh, really?" Lightning Fist asked.

"I’ve been to the bank; I’ve seen him work there!"

"Your father is a federal agent. And his last name isn’t Martin. You seem confused about this, which is either a lie or your father has been keeping this from you. I don’t care, you are going to call him and tell him exactly what I tell you to say or I will shoot Jesse. Understand?" Lightning Fist asked me.

"I understand, but why did you kidnap me? It’s not like we’re rich, you can’t get a ransom," I said, trying to stall him and figure out how to proceed.

"Oh, I don’t want a ransom. I want your Dad off my back. And I can’t think of a better way than to use his daughter as bait and then kill him. Fair enough?" he asked me.
“What are you doing with Jesse?” I asked.

“I wasn’t planning on doing anything with Jesse until he came and threw himself into our scheme. But now that he’s willingly handed himself over, I can’t think of a better use than to threaten him if you don’t cooperate. If you try to be difficult Jesse will be the first person you see die in front of your eyes. Is that clear?” Raul was dead serious, and I believed him.

“516-425-8992,” I said, reciting my dad’s cell number. I couldn’t do anything to jeopardize Jesse’s life. I glanced at Paul; he looked as if he hadn’t known Raul’s plan either.

Lightning Fist pushed the buttons on his cell phone and raised the phone to my ear. I listened to it ring twice before my father’s sweet voice flooded the line, “Hello?” He sounded worried.

“Dad?” I cried into the phone.

“Tell him that you’re safe,” Raul ordered me.

“I’m safe,” I obediently echoed.

“Oh honey, we’ve been so worried. Where are you? What’s going on?” Relief edged into my father’s deep baritone voice.

“If you want me to stay safe you’ll meet this man, you know him as Isaz, at the West Tower,” Raul said, indicating I should repeat those words to my father.

I repeated it exactly.

“Victoria!” my father said.

“Meet him today at 10:15 pm. Come alone.”

We needed time to escape! “Meet him tomorrow at 10:15 pm. Come alone.” I repeated him exactly except for one word.
“You foolish girl,” Lightning Fist hissed.

“Sit tight, baby. I’m coming for you,” my father said.

“Tell him today!” Lightning Fist insisted.

“He already hung up,” I lied.

“Jesse will pay for your foolishness,” his eyes had a crazed look to them. He launched himself at Jesse’s bound body, punching and kneeing him.

“Stop, no!” I screamed. Paul turned away.

“Raul?” a little voice called. Lightning Fist instantly backed away from Jesse’s body at the sound of the voice. A small child walked into the room. “Raul? What?” the little boy stopped mid-question as he took in the room, Jesse’s forlorn figure, Raul, Paul, and me. When he looked at me, the light hit his face and my stomach clenched.

“Kevin?” I whispered.

“Kevin, what are you doing here?” Raul reached for him.

Kevin slid out of his embrace and ran towards me, “Vicky! Vicky!” He hugged my legs.

“Hi honey,” I smiled down at the small boy clinging to my legs. Raul couldn’t have looked more shocked than if I’d grown another head.

“Raul? What’s wrong with Vicky’s face? Why does she have a boo—boo?” Kevin turned innocently to Raul, questioningly.

“Vicky will be fine,” Raul told Kevin sternly. Then he scooped Kevin into his arms and carried him from the room. Kevin burst out crying and screaming and calling for me. The noise faded the further they got from the room but his cries seared themselves into my consciousness. Tears came unbidden. And for the first time since I was kidnapped, I cried. I cried for myself, stuck in this horrid place. I cried for my
parents, mourning their child. I cried for Jesse, beaten for a girl. And I especially cried for Kevin, growing up amongst so much evil. He was like a candle amongst the darkness, and it was only a matter of time before they snuffed out his spark and he grew as dark as them.

Paul looked at Raul and then turned back to us. “Jesse? Are you okay?” He asked the frighteningly still body.

Jesse slowly lifted his head, “What the heck do you think you’re doing? These people don’t care about you! Look what they’re doing to me. As soon as you’re no longer useful they’ll treat you the same way.” Paul had no answer; he took the phone from me, hung it up and left without a word. “Are you okay, Vicks?” Jesse asked my crying form after the door shut after Paul.

“That’s the boy I tutor in reading,” I was able to get out in between sobs.

“I see,” Jesse responded.

“I miss my father. When I heard his voice, and then I think of losing him tomorrow…,” another sob wracked my body.

“Why did you say ‘tomorrow’?” Jesse asked me.

“Tomorrow won’t come. We’re escaping tonight,” I said as my crying subsided.

“Yes, of course,” Jesse nodded. “How clever you are.” That day passed without anyone else coming into our cell. The day consisted of naps and Jesse and I taking turns distracting each other. He told me funny stories from his experiences in high school and I told him all about the competition in Wendell. We pushed back the darkness as best we could with jokes, stories, games, and singing. I found out that Jesse’s taste in music is similar to my own. He has a soothing singing voice that started going hoarse from lack of water. After hours, my throat was dry, my stomach was rumbling, my bladder was full,
and my head was throbbing. Finally, Tuck unlocked the door and entered the room. I knew this was our last chance of escape, the following morning our bodies would be too weak to fight anyone off.

Tuck followed the same procedure as before; untied Jesse, kept the gun aimed at his head, and led him out of the room. Not too long after they left, they returned. I did my best to look pathetic as Tuck untied me and lead me out of the room. It wasn’t hard considering my disheveled and bruised appearance. Once in the bathroom, I peed as quickly as possible and washed my hands. I left the water running and wrung my hands under the faucet to get the feeling back into them. It took a lot less time this time than it had the day before since Tuck had tied me less tightly. I used my hands to scoop water into my mouth to drink. I drank until my thirst was quenched.

“Hurry up!” Tuck banged against the door.

“I’ll be out in a minute!” I called out to him sweetly. I undid the strap on the only heel I was still wearing and pried off the shoe. I positioned my toe on the flusher of the toilet and in my hands I clutched my shoe. The water was already running but I needed to break the mirror at the same time that I flushed the toilet. I mentally counted to three before thrusting the heel of the shoe at the corner of the mirror with all my might and flushing the toilet with my foot. The timing worked perfectly but the crack of the mirror was louder than I had anticipated. I hoped that he couldn’t hear it through the door. I broke off a pointy shard of the mirror and Tuck banged on the door again. In a moment of panic I dumped my shoe in the garbage can and opened the door. “I’m done,” I smiled at him. I kept the shard of glass discreetly behind my hand.

He grunted, “Let’s go.”

I walked next to him as he led me back to the room, cheerfully talking to him,
“Thanks for taking me to the bathroom again. I knew you wouldn’t forget about me.” He grunted. I continued. “My daddy is going to come save me, you know.” He grunted again. “I know you don’t believe me but it’s true. He’s just a banker but he loves me.” I walked farther from my pole than I needed to, so that I was close enough to Jesse to slide the shard of mirror into his hands.

“What do you have there?” Tuck barked.

“Nothing,” I raised my empty hands up for him to inspect. His eyebrows narrowed but he tied me back to the pole without another word. The time it took for him to walk to the door seemed to stretch on into eternity. When the door finally clicked shut, I let a sigh of relief escape my lips. “You’ve got it?” I doubled checked with Jesse.

“Yeah. This is perfect, Vicks, you did so well,” Jesse gave me a reassuring smile as he used the shard to saw off the rope.

I waited for Jesse to break through the rope. It took a lot longer than I had expected. He kept apologizing that his fingers were so stiff. I understood and I tried not to let on how antsy I was.

He finally shook the rope off of his hands and started working on the rope around his ankles. That took an infinitely shorter amount of time. He chucked the rope to the side and came towards me. He seemed a bit unsteady on his feet but he didn’t complain. He cut through my bonds, carefully avoiding my wrists. Then he knelt and sawed through the rope that had been restraining my ankles. We both stood facing each other, free from our bonds.

“Are you ready for this?” he asked me.

“There’s something I want to say before we leave this room,” I told him. “In case we die out there and I don’t get another chance to say it.” He waited for me to continue,
“I like you, too. And if we survive this, I would like to go to Olive Garden with you again.” It wasn’t very eloquent but judging from the intensity of Jesse’s blue eyes, he understood.

“I may never get another opportunity, so if you’ll humor me?” Jesse asked. I nodded that I would humor him. He cupped my face in his hands, careful to avoid touching any bruises and slowly brought his face towards me. He stopped right before my lips, as if giving me an opportunity to object. Instead of objecting I bridged the distance with my mouth. My eyes fluttered shut as soon as our lips met. He moved his lips gently and I savored the softness and warmth of his mouth. He pulled away from me slowly his eyes drifting open. “I could do this all day but if we don’t leave….” he let his apology hang unfinished.

“You’re right,” I responded though I was tempted to just stay where I was and let him continue kissing me. He took a step back from me and I felt my head clear a bit. “So we just knock everyone in our path unconscious, is that the plan?” I asked.

“I can’t think of a better one,” Jesse agreed and I followed him towards the door. The door was locked. Jesse pulled a bobby pin out of my hair, knelt in front of the doorknob, and jimmed the lock. Jesse was able to hit the guy standing outside the door over the head; he sank to the ground unconscious before he could react. We definitely had the element of surprise on our side. Jesse started to check the body for a weapon but then we heard some noise and I pulled him away. We hurried to the staircase and hid underneath it. I held my breath as a person walked down the stairs.

“Ryan, Ryan!” the guy who had just came unsuccessfully shook the unconscious body. He then looked up and inspected the doorknob, noticing that it had been jimmed. Knowing we were on the loose, he was about to sound some sort of alarm but before he
opened his mouth Jesse threw the piece of mirror like a ninja would throw a shuriken. It lodged itself in the guy’s back and bought us some more time. He slumped forward and we took that opportunity to ease out from under the stairs and start climbing them. I followed Jesse up the stairs, noticing the difficulty he was having as he climbed. I hoped that he would be okay until we got out of the warehouse or wherever we were.

At the top of the stairs we turned the corner and crept through a dark hallway. We stopped in front of a room and I could hear muffled voices. One of the voices grew louder. “Fifty pounds of pot? Do you know how much….” Jesse pushed me under a small, rickety table in the corner. A man exited the room we had just been outside of and I instinctively held my breath. I could make out his legs from my spot under the table. “That is? Dude, we need to be all over that,” his voice faded as he walked by us. The guy he was addressing passed by our hiding spot without any hesitation.

They disappeared around the bend and I let air expel out of my mouth. Jesse stood up and helped me up before anyone else had a chance to exit the room near us. We made our way down another hallway before we heard the yelling.

“They’re loose! They broke out! Search the building!” were the cries that rang up the stairs. I could hear the thumping of footsteps getting closer to us but Jesse and I hesitated. There were three guys playing cards at a table. How were we supposed to get past them?

“Run, I’ll distract them,” Jesse whispered to me. I ran past the table without a glance at the poker game.

“Justin, what are you doing? Can I play?” I heard Jesse ask as I turned the corner into a large room with two doors. I heard noise from one direction so I rushed through the other door. The sound of footsteps echoed behind me. I saw two guys in front of me so I
ran into the first door I saw. It was a small room. I turned around to see those two guys blocking the entrance. I tried to push my way past them and got shoved back into the room. I swung at the first guy and he dodged my fist. The other guy kneed me in the side. I sank to the ground and rolled away from the guy’s boot. The first guy picked me up by the back of my dress and flung me against the wall. I cringed, waiting for the blow that didn’t come. Instead he lurched forward and released his grip on my dress. I slid down the wall. Jesse stood over the guy’s limp body then avoided the other gang member’s flying elbow. I struggled to stand up. Three more guys ran into the room. The guy on the floor started to stir. I stomped on his face. One of the guys entering the room tried to grab me; I landed a punch and a groin shot on him. Arms and legs flailed for a moment. I was elbowing and jabbing as hard as I could and doing my best to stay out of the way of moving fists. It didn’t take long for one of the guys to restrain me and the other three guys to get Jesse on his knees. I didn’t give up until one of the guys holding me pulled out a knife and positioned it to my throat.
Then I saw Magenta turn the corner.

“Who are you?” barked the gang member who had me in a choke hold. She didn’t respond but merely inched closer. “Get any closer and I swear I’ll kill her!” She stopped walking.

“You can kill her if you want,” Magenta shrugged in her usual blasé manner. She took a step closer. The gang member pressed the blade against my neck. “I just don’t really think that you want to kill her,” Magenta took another step closer. The metal felt cold against my neck and I struggled against the pressure. “I just think if you wanted her dead you would never have kidnapped her to begin with,” Magenta took another step.

The blade broke skin. I caught sight of a man grab Magenta right before the room filled up with flashes of light and smoke. The noise was overwhelming. The man’s arm went slack. I felt myself being grabbed and thrown over someone’s shoulder. There was
yelling. I couldn’t see anything. I felt the bounce of a gait under me.

When fresh air hit my face, I started to make sense of all the stimuli bombarding me. I was hurried to a van and I caught sight of the man who had been carrying me as he placed me into a seat and belted me in. The man was all in black: bulky vest, helmet and goggles. I blinked.

As soon as he left, Dodie’s face crowded my vision. She climbed into the van and sat down next to my head.

“Dodie?” I croaked. _None of this made any sense, perhaps I was hallucinating._

Dodie looked down at me, “Hey, Vicky. I know it probably hurts to move right now but don’t worry. We’re getting you to a hospital.”

“I don’t need a hospital,” I protested. “But Jesse might need to be checked for internal bleeding.”

“I’m taking you _all_ to the hospital. And there will be no further arguing,” said a deep voice from the driver’s seat.

“Dad?” I started crying tears of joy.

“Hey, baby. How are you? I was so worried,” my Dad’s voice softened when he heard the tears in my own.

“How did this happen? How did you rescue me?” I asked.

“Let’s get you checked out first and then I’ll tell you everything,” my father suggested. This momentarily placated me. We got to the hospital not long after that and I found out that Magenta was in the front seat with a gun wound to her upper arm. Dad helped get Magenta into the emergency room, and Dodie, Jesse, and I followed not far behind. Jesse didn’t look so good but he was able to walk into the emergency room with only slight help from both Dodie and me. Usually at the ER people have to wait around
forever, but with one look at the bruises and blood smeared all over Jesse’s face caused
the nurse to jump to attention at once and a bed was made available.

Dodie and I ended up in a room with a sweet nurse who asked me if I was in pain,
if I knew what happened to me, flashed a penlight in my eyes and then slapped a blood
pressure cuff on me. The lady had her light brown curly hair swept into a bun. She got me
a glass of water after I told her I was thirsty. She inspected all my bruising, including my
stomach, and took notes on a clipboard.

“Do you have anyone who you’re afraid of or who wants to hurt you?” she asked.

“Yes. He leads a gang, and I’m not sure what his real name is. I got kidnapped,
you see,” my answer sounded confused even to my own ears. It felt so surreal to tell
someone I had been kidnapped. The nurse’s eyebrows rose but she didn’t comment on
the strange consistency of my tale. The hospital gave me a bed for the night even though I
didn’t have any broken bones, just a minor concussion. They said it was because I had
potential for bleeding inside my skull. They transferred me to the Neuro Immediate Care
unit to be monitored overnight. The doctor gave me permission to fall asleep.

After the doctor left the hospital room, my dad took a seat on the edge of my bed.
Immediately after lying down on the incredibly soft hospital bed I had been fighting

“You just go ahead and fall asleep. Your mother and Crystal will be here
tomorrow and I promise when you wake up I will answer all your questions,” my dad
squeezed my hand.

“Are Jesse and Magenta gonna be okay?” I asked.

“I think so,” my dad responded. And with that, I let sleep overtake me.

I woke up to a nurse leaning over me. “Honey, I need to check your eyes.” I
nodded, and complied with her tests. She shined a penlight into my eyes and I looked in all the directions she asked me to. Eventually she let me doze back off. The nurse woke me up multiple other times during the night and I tried to be a good sport about it. Finally it was morning and a nurse carried in a tray of breakfast food.

“Is that for me?” I asked, remembering my hunger.

“Yes, but take your time eating it,” she instructed me. She then helped prop me up in bed and put the tray of food on the adjustable table over my lap. “I also brought a cold compress for your face,” she said, handing me a jelly-filled ice pack. I used one hand to press it to my cheek and in the other hand I shoveled food into my mouth. “It will help the swelling,” she explained. I was suddenly glad for the lack of mirrors in hospitals. I swallowed some of my orange juice and thanked the nurse. “There are people here to see you. They’ve been very patient but I don’t know how much longer I can hold them off.”

“Send them right in,” I smiled.

Within seconds, my mother, Crystal, Cole, Dodie, and my dad flooded into my room.

“Honey! Honey! I was so worried!” my mother cried. She came to the bed and put her arms around me, kissing the top of my head. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, Mom. They’re letting me out today. I just spent the night because of my head injury.”

“Head injury!” my mother cried.

“It’s alright, Dear,” my father slipped his arms around my mother’s waist.

“Victoria is in one piece.”

“I’m so glad you’re okay,” Crystal came around to the other side of my bed.

“When I found out what happened to you all I could think was how awful I’ve been to
you for the past month. And if you died I wouldn’t ever be able to forgive myself.”

“It’s a good thing I didn’t die then,” I joked. “Will someone please tell me what happened yesterday?” I pleaded.

“We’ve definitely kept you in suspense for too long,” my father agreed. “After our phone call I knew that I needed to do something before 10:15pm the next day. But I knew if they caught sight of any feds you would be dead long before I could break into their hideout.”

“But how did you know where their hideout was?” I interrupted.

“I’ve been gathering information on this gang for a long time, so I had my suspicions but it’s mostly thanks to a man who goes by Uncle Chino. He sells bikes and your friends were able to explain what was going on. He led your friends straight to it. But before I had this information I was debating what to do and I had a rather interesting conversation with Dodie.”

Dodie blushed, “I didn’t even tell you what we were planning on doing!”

“Well she seemed rather sure that you were going to be fine, so I grew suspicious and followed her. She had a group of misfits together, a guy who could break into locked doors, a nerdy guy who was figuring out logistics, and a girl who had lots of holes in her ears.”

“Sarantos, Peter, and Magenta,” Dodie explained.

I continued eating my breakfast as I listened, “So I followed this motley group,” my father continued, “and watched Sarantos jimmy the side door on the building and that’s when I stopped them from going in. You have very loyal friends. I was met with overall hostility at saving their lives. Magenta even ran into the building by herself. I don’t know how she got as far as she did. She’s stupid but very courageous. I called
backup obviously and took off after Magenta.

“I fended some people off, grabbed Magenta, and was able to set off some Flashbang to disorient your attackers. The SWAT guys got there and carried you and Jesse out of there. Unfortunately, it wasn’t quite as easy getting out as it had been getting in. So I was doing the best I could to fight people off with Magenta slung over my shoulder when a gun went off. All this to say, on our way out, Magenta got shot. She took it like a champ though and I’ve already apologized profusely to her parents. They’re not mad, because her dad knows how impulsive she can be. Apparently they were able to do minor surgery last night to remove the bullet. The wound is clotting so they released her from the hospital already. You can go visit her and thank her this week if you feel up to it.” I nodded and my dad continued.

“Anyway, after we got back out to my car I obviously drove you guys to the hospital and Sarantos drove Peter and Uncle Chino home. After that the other agents were able to go back in and capture a lot of the men in that building. That’s basically it. What happened to you two?”

So I told them the whole story, apologizing to my mother for her ruined dress, and downplaying the worst parts. Dad was impressed with my ingenuity for using a piece of the mirror to break free and Dodie gave a very satisfying gasp when I told them about Paul betraying us. I also skipped the part about Jesse and I kissing, though I would be sure to tell Dodie and Crystal about it later. When I got to the part about Kevin, I stopped to ask my mom if we could do something for him. My parents agreed to consider it. At the end of my monologue, my parents both said that I needed to get some more rest.

“Dad?” I called before they left the room. “I didn’t know you weren’t a banker. When Raul or Isaz or whatever his name is told me that I didn’t believe him.”
“I didn’t tell you because I wanted to protect you. A lot of good that did, huh?” my dad smiled wryly at me.

“But he said our last name wasn’t Martin. What was he talking about?”

“I changed our name a long time ago as an added protection. We’ll talk about this later,” my father said, curbing my mounting questions. I sank back into my pillows and thought about Jesse who was in a different hospital room. I need to get better real quick and go visit him, I thought.
Chapter Synopses (continued)

Chapter 21 – Three months later and the day of Paul’s court hearing Jesse and Vicky go to it. Vicky remembers the week after the kidnapping while they wait for the proceedings to start. Paul pleads guilty and gets sentenced to five years in prison. Vicky does not have to testify and with relief she leaves the courthouse. Before she leaves she catches Paul’s eye and realizes that she feels sorry for him. The weather outside gets warmer to signal that a brighter future is coming.
Epilogue – The reader finds out through a phone conversation that the Martins adopt Kevin. Vicky goes to college for social work and rooms with Dodie. Cole and Crystal are engaged and planning their wedding. Vicky and Jesse are still dating, and Lighting Fist gets sentenced to twenty-five years in prison.
Conclusion

After the endless editing, illustrating, and rereading the hope is to have Vicky’s Secret published. Editing and rewriting is a process. This process does not stop. Miller points out, “A writer who is not just willing but eager to rewrite (and rewrite and rewrite) is worth his or her weight in gold” (36). There will be many people who will edit and critic the book: the editor, agent, publisher, and critics; and it is important to implement changes. Miller advises young writers to learn how to take criticism, “the clients we work with best, those who navigate the shoals of publishing most expertly, are the ones who listen to criticism and, in fact, relish it” (37). When self-editing the entire novel, before giving it to an editor, care will be taken to watch out for where emotions are told, not shown. This process has shown this tendency but, “telling your readers about your characters’ emotions is not the best way to get your readers involved” (Browne and King 16). It is better to just show them the situation and trust them to feel the same way as the main character. This tendency will be edited throughout Vicky’s Secret before the story is sent to an agent.

The first step in getting a book published is researching publishing companies or agents, formatting the book, and writing up a proposal. When considering whether or not to get an agent, it is important to realize what agents do. An agent is someone who knows the publishing arena, has greater access to publishers, and can protect a writer’s rights (Seuling 41). Many agents do not charge a reading fee. For example, those who are part of the Association of Author Representatives do not. Usually the only fee an agent will charge is a fifteen percent commission fee (Seuling 42). Katherine Tegan Books is a publishing company who publishes books similar to Vicky’s Secret. Janette Rallison is an
author who got published by Tegan Books, so I emailed her to find out who her agent is. She responded and gave me a website, AgentQuery.com (Rallison n. pag.). AgentQuery.com is a great resource for writers who want to find agents. There are different categories, like Adventure or Romance, which have listings of agents, their contact information, and whether or not they are accepting queries (n pag.). Also she advised reading books in the same genre as Vicky’s Secret, and reading books about writing, even being specific enough to name certain books. Rallison gave examples of how not to begin a book. Rallison also encouraged rewriting, getting others to edit, letting the manuscript sit for a while, and going to Writers’ Conferences (Janette Rallison’s blog n. pag.).

_Vicky’s Secret_ is similar to other novels written for teenage girls. It has the down-to-earth, likable characters of a Janette Rallison novel, the modern feel of an Ally Carter novel, and the dangerous gang element like in Perfect Chemistry by Simon Elkeles. _Vicky’s Secret_ is a teen romance like Perfect Chemistry but without the questionable parts; it’s a more appropriate book for ages as young as thirteen without being boring for sixteen year old girls. _Vicky’s Secret_ does not just have romance but also mystery, action and betrayal. The novel will succeed because it’s a fun, quick story that holds the attention of the reader from beginning to end.
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