

QQQ 4.8 Kristi McManus

[00:00:00] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries, Qualms, and Quirks, the twice a month podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to day of publication. I am your host author, Sarah Nicolas and literary agent, Sarah N. Fisk. Kristi McManus is a registered nurse by trade, but avid reader and enthusiastic book lover all her life.

[00:00:21] **Sarah:** Her debut novel, *Our Vengeful Souls* was released summer 2023 by Camcat Books. When she isn't writing, she enjoys photography, art, and considers napping to be a form of cardio. She lives in Toronto with her husband. So please welcome Kristi to the show. Hello.

[00:00:38] **Kristi:** Hello.

[00:00:40] **Sarah:** We are going to talk today about your journey to publication, and we're going to start by going all the way back to the beginning.

[00:00:46] **Sarah:** When did you first start getting interested in writing and then how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:00:54] **Kristi:** I think my earliest memory of writing was when I was in elementary school. I always liked writing little stories. You know, you take the piece of paper, you fold it in half and you write a little story and whip out your crayons. but the first time I actually wrote something, it was 5th grade, we were told to rewrite a fairy tale.

[00:01:15] **Kristi:** So, I rewrote Little Red Riding Hood from the perspective of the wolf, where he was just the misunderstood character trying to return Red's basket, but he ended up being portrayed as the villain. So I whipped out my mom's old typewriter and my crayons and I completely wrote and illustrated my little story, handed it in and the teachers seemed to like it.

[00:01:37] **Kristi:** They, ended up publishing a copy for the school library and they even read it during assemblies. So that was my first real taste of kind of what writing made me feel like. I was excited, I was thrilled with the outcome and it was really fun for me.

[00:01:53] **Sarah:** Awesome. It was, uh, So how did you learn more about the publishing industry? Like how it works, how to query, how to go about everything.

[00:02:00] **Kristi:** Um, a lot of trial and error, to be honest. Um, I started out writing fanfiction on Wattpad. So that was a lot of just getting stories out. I wasn't really sure about craft or publication or all the rules that come along with that. I had several friends who were in that transition from Wattpad to publication.

[00:02:23] **Kristi:** They shared their experiences with me, things that they had learned, which was really, really helpful. and also Google. You gotta admit, Google knows everything. So while there are a lot of misleading sites and information on Google, taking the time to really go through what agents are asking for, follow guidelines, um, look at sample queries, look at sample synopses.

[00:02:47] **Kristi:** All those options are readily available online. And I just took the time to really kind of go through everything that was available, ask friends, really connect with people in publishing to try to learn from everything that they've done and It was a long process. I'm still learning.

[00:03:05] **Sarah:** All right. So then what happened? Can you break down for us your journey from getting serious about publication to signing your first book contract?

[00:03:14] **Kristi:** I think I started getting serious about it around 2015. Um, like I said, I was writing on Wattpad. and I got a lot of good feedback from when I was writing. granted the audiences were very different. publication requires something very different than just general online audience.

[00:03:30] **Kristi:** So, I will admit, when I jumped into the query trenches, I was not ready. Okay, my books were not properly edited. I had horrible pacing. I didn't know the difference between how to craft novels. So, of course, the rejections came in, just in a flurry. Which was also very difficult, because that's your first real, uh, reality check with the difference between online writing and publication.

[00:03:56] **Kristi:** I broke every single rule there was, um, I kept writing other stories, uh, trying to learn and improve as I queried and piled up even more rejections. as much as the rejections were hard, I kept learning what did and didn't work from some of the feedback I got from agents. I did have some very

positive feedback from some. And that really helped me kind of figure out what worked, where was I dropping them? Where were they losing interest? Pacing was something that I really needed to learn, as well as info dumping. Info dumping is not your friend. And I was horrible for that. It was really hard, but I did keep at it, kind of working to focus more on craft, than just banging at more stories to throw in the trenches.

[00:04:39] **Kristi:** Take a story that you really like, and try to perfect it. And I think that took me a while, two, three years to really learn. It's not how many you throw out there and hoping one will stick. It's taking one and really trying to make it work. So take that time, slow it down. You're gonna have to learn patience in publishing.

[00:04:59] **Kristi:** That's another thing I'm not great at. So being patient and really putting a lot of the effort on craft into a story has a better opportunity of getting it out there and having a more positive reaction. So, in 2018, I threw another story out there, and this one actually got a response. Six months later, after sending the initial query, I got a response from a mid publisher, and they offered me a deal.

[00:05:26] **Kristi:** So I was really excited, I thought, this is it, I'm finally going to get somewhere. I queried a few agents saying I had this deal, and in turn I ended up with my agent. So everything seemed to be going really great. I was working on waiting for the edit letters for that book while working on another, but time kept going on and I wasn't getting my edit letter.

[00:05:48] **Kristi:** Things kept getting pushed back. I wasn't having the path that I thought came with publication. You know, you get the PM announcement, you get your edit letter, you go through revision, you get cover options. And they had given me an estimated publication date. And within two, three months before that so called publication date, I still didn't even have first round edits. So I decided that this wasn't really working for me and my agent and I, she was amazing. We got along really, really well. We just didn't have a good match professionally. So there is a big difference between having a great personal relationship with your agent and then not necessarily matching professionally.

[00:06:32] **Kristi:** I want very much editorial feedback, tear it apart, tell me what I'm doing wrong and I can fix it. I don't pick up well on vague. So I really needed a lot of feedback, which unfortunately I didn't get. So as hard as it was in 2019, I left both my agent and the deal. And I started all over again with new books back in the trenches, more querying.

[00:06:57] **Kristi:** It was definitely hard. I had to take some time to think. Is this really what I, what I want to do? Because this really sucked. It was a lot more difficult to go through that I expected, but I just couldn't stop writing. I kept coming up with different ideas. And then eventually in, um, 2020, I started writing a new book. It was locked down and not much else to do and I saw this meme and I decided, you know what? I can't get this out of my head. I'm gonna try to write this book. So I did and it ended up being my first pub deal

[00:07:32] **Sarah:** All right. So you got a deal directly with the publisher that time.

[00:07:36] **Kristi:** Yeah, so I don't still don't have an agent so I went small pub on a recommendation from a friend that I made online who also writes, Had submitted to them and was really happy with my book Their process, the attention she got, um, and really encouraged me to give it a try. So I threw it out there, and not long after I got a response that they wanted to pick the book up.

[00:07:59] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your successful query letter for us?

[00:08:05] **Kristi:** So this was the query letter for my debut, Our Vengeful Souls. Um, it is a YA villain origin story for The Sea Witch from The Little Mermaid. And the query is actually what ended up on the back cover. So it went directly as the back matter. When Magical Mermaid Soraya saves her little sister and overshadows brother and rightful air Triton the position of next ruler of the sea in question.

[00:08:28] **Kristi:** Determined to keep his throne Triton, curses Soraya, transforming her into a human and stripping her of her magic. Vanishing her from their underwater kingdom, he gives her a final warning. If you should return, you will become a monster. Left for dead, Soraya washes up on the shores of Atlantis, discovered by a kind merchant with a tragic past.

[00:08:46] **Kristi:** Patient and charming, he helps her build a life on land, leaving her realizing everything she was taught about humans may have been wrong. But legends are powerful forces, and mermaids are burned for their magic by humans who fear their power. Soraya is forced to keep her true identity a secret, even as her feelings for her savior deepen. her skill with a blade, she finds a place within the ranks of the Atlantean army, finally giving her a chance to become the respected warrior she always desired. During her training, however, she discovers the legend of a trident of equal power to her father's exists.

[00:09:16] **Kristi:** And is within her grasp in Atlantis. With a way back to the sea, in her grasp, she wavers between the pull of revenge and the possibility of love on land, all under the hateful eye of a vengeful enemy within her ranks. But when the fate of a friend is in the balance, she must make the hardest decision of all.

[00:09:33] **Kristi:** Be burned at the stake as a witch or turned into a monster should she return to the sea. In line with the classic fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen and the mythological adventure *Lore* by Alexandra Bracken, *Our Vengeful Souls* takes you on a journey of loss, love, and vengeance into the life of one of fairy tale's most famous villains.

[00:09:50] **Sarah:** Awesome. Thanks for sharing.

[00:09:52] **Kristi:** Thanks.

[00:09:52] **Sarah:** How has your experience been since signing that first contract, especially let us know what surprised you along the way.

[00:09:59] **Kristi:** I think the biggest surprise for me was how much work was still involved after signing. Um, you really have to love the book that you wrote and that has been signed because you will read it over and over again until it haunts your dreams. I swear to God, if I have to read it one more time, I will cry. I know it basically by heart.

[00:10:16] **Kristi:** and the most surprising thing for me, I think was I used to hate revision. I loved plotting and writing first drafts and getting the idea out there. But when it came to revision, I hated it because I didn't know what was working, what was not, everything I changed, should I have kept it in, but actually working with my editor, I learned how to pick out those few things, the filler words, all those things that I didn't understand at first that made me hate revision.

[00:10:44] **Kristi:** I was slowly learning through that process and now I actually love it. another big surprise was how much marketing is involved. Whether you're big five, small press, indie, self pub, marketing is a whole other realm that always plays into publishing and it's another skill you have to develop. And it's difficult to navigate sometimes, but that was another big surprise.

[00:11:08] **Kristi:** A

[00:11:08] **Sarah:** All right. It is time for our quick round. I call it author DNA. Are you a pantsier or a plotter?

[00:11:17] **Kristi:** bit of both. A friend of mine calls it panty lining.

[00:11:19] **Sarah:** Okay. Um, do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:11:24] **Kristi:** Uh, again, a little bit of both. I do tend to info dump sometimes in first drafts and then peel it all back in revision, or I don't give enough and then have to go back and add more. So, a little bit of both.

[00:11:35] **Sarah:** Do you like to write in the morning or at night?

[00:11:38] **Kristi:** Night all the way. I hate mornings.

[00:11:40] **Sarah:** When you start a new project, do you typically start with a character or a plot or concept or something else first?

[00:11:47] **Kristi:** Uh, depends on the project. Usually concept, but my upcoming novel was actually just the title, and then I built everything around that.

[00:11:53] **Sarah:** Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:11:55] **Kristi:** T.

[00:11:56] **Sarah:** When you're writing, do you prefer silence or some kind of sound?

[00:12:00] **Kristi:** And it has to be silence.

[00:12:02] **Sarah:** When it comes to the first draft, are you a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?

[00:12:08] **Kristi:** Get it down for sure. I can fix a bad draft, I can't fix an empty page.

[00:12:13] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:12:16] **Kristi:** I have a notebook on my desk that I sometimes jot little ideas down, but for the most part I use just word and I break it down by chapter.

[00:12:23] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:12:26] **Kristi:** I kind of already answered this one before it was drafting, but now I think revising for sure.

[00:12:32] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:12:34] **Kristi:** Sequential order for sure, because sometimes the idea I had in my head isn't actually where I end up, so if I hop around I might have to rewrite what I wrote.

[00:12:43] **Sarah:** Final quick round question. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:12:46] **Kristi:** Introvert all the way.

[00:12:48] **Sarah:** All right. Now we're going to talk about the second Q. What were some of the qualms or worries that you had on your journey and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them or how did they shake out?

[00:12:58] **Kristi:** I think they changed as things went on. My biggest worry at the beginning would be that I would never get published. It's something that, in reality, is completely out of your control. We can write a great book, but it has to find the right agent or editor at the right time, and we really don't have any control over that.

[00:13:14] **Kristi:** Control over that once I realized that, and I just started enjoying the writing and the experience of creating the characters in the world. A lot of that pressure lifted. We write because we love it. And then the end to me, that should just be enough.

[00:13:26] **Sarah:** Now it's time for the third Q. Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:13:34] **Kristi:** I don't think there's anything necessarily unique. My biggest quirk is I need silence to write. Any little distraction, I can't really focus and immerse myself in the world, even if I just hear the TV in the other room, it's really distracting. I used to lock myself in the bedroom to find some peace and

quiet while I would write and tell my husband, unless the house is burning down, do not bother me.

[00:13:54] **Kristi:** So he would be very tentatively knocking on the door, asking me questions every now and then, but it's probably the biggest thing is I, I need quiet. And now that he's made me a little desk area to work that no interruption rule still in place, he's always kind of hovering at the top of the stairs, scared to interrupt me.

[00:14:11] **Sarah:** When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, whatever that was for you, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:14:18] **Kristi:** I think the lowest part of my journey was probably when I walked away from my deal and my agent both at the same time within like a month of each other in 2019. I knew it was the right decision, but I was still terrified it was the wrong choice that I would never have another chance. I ended up taking a long break from writing and querying to kind of get over those feelings.

[00:14:37] **Kristi:** kind of lick my wounds per se. Eventually a new story idea came along and I just couldn't not write it. It nagged at me until I sat down to write and I kind of wiped away the bitter taste of that experience. Just getting back into writing for myself, even if no one ever read it, was the way that I kind of lifted myself out of that experience.

[00:14:56] **Sarah:** Do you feel like you made any mistakes along the way that you like to share with listeners?

[00:15:01] **Kristi:** I have made every mistake. I can guarantee I have made every mistake. Um, I queried first drafts before they were ready. I knew nothing about craft or character arcs or info dumping, filler words. I queried too much too fast, burning through my options instead of taking the time to revise with the feedback I got.

[00:15:23] **Kristi:** I wasted a lot of opportunities by not being patient with the process, which is Biggest lesson in publishing. It is really, really slow. So patience is a must. And it's never been one of my qualities, but it's definitely something I had to learn in this. so looking back now, I still kind of cringe at some of the things and the opportunities that I wasted, but everything is a lesson and you always end up where you're supposed to be.

[00:15:50] **Kristi:** So as much as I still cringe, I have made every one of the mistakes, but in the end, I still ended up with a book on the shelf.

[00:15:58] **Sarah:** All right. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:16:04] **Kristi:** probably be patient. Publishing is really slow and as painful it is as it is, you need to learn to take the time and make your work the best it can be before you toss it out there. You only get that one first impression. you may get an R& R, but you may not. So really take the time to make it great.

[00:16:22] **Kristi:** It's the best you can. That doesn't mean it has to be perfect, just as perfect as you can make it. another thing that I learned probably later than I should have is. Just the skills of writing show versus tell, um, GMCs, character arcs. They're what really pull your reader into a story, make them care about the characters relate to them.

[00:16:42] **Kristi:** It's a really vital part of craft that I took ages to learn. But when I did, my stories really started to change for the better. And I think the final thing that I learned was a big five deal isn't the only measure of success. There are a million different ways to be successful in publishing. Only you can actually decide which one is right for you.

[00:17:02] **Kristi:** When I went small pub, I actually was really happy with the decision because I got the attention and support that some of my big five colleagues were lacking and I'm really glad with the choice I made.

[00:17:15] **Sarah:** All right. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. Who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:17:24] **Kristi:** I'm really, really lucky that I've had some friends who've been supportive even through my absolutely horrible story period. Um, still read my work when it was literally terrible. Erin, Sherry and Helen have been my sounding boards for about 10 years. We met on Wattpad and they've been a really big influence, my biggest cheerleaders.

[00:17:45] **Kristi:** They were the first people I told when I got my book deal. And honestly, I couldn't have done it without them. Also a friend that I made online through Publishing World, Morgan Shamy. She is the one who recommended I go small pub and recommended my publisher and encouraged

me never to give up. She is one of the most positive, uplifting people you will find.

[00:18:05] **Kristi:** So if you can follow her on social media, you won't regret it. She literally. inspires everybody every day with reminders of how hard this business can be, but it can take 10 years, 15 years, whatever, you will eventually find some measure of success.

[00:18:20] **Sarah:** All right, before you go, can you tell us about the book that you have coming out this summer?

[00:18:25] **Kristi:** So my sophomore book is How to Get Over Your Best Friend's Ex. It comes out June 11th, and it is a YA romance with all the best tropes. If you like love triangles, friends to lovers, broken friendship, and coming of age. It's a quiet girl has to help her queen bee best friend get over her recent breakup, while also trying to get over the boy in question, only to find out that she was the reason for the breakup.

[00:18:48] **Sarah:** All right, cool. Kristi, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:18:53] **Kristi:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:18:55] **Sarah:** Yeah, I know we've been talking about having it on for like over a year, so I'm glad we finally made it happen.

[00:19:00] **Kristi:** Yeah, thank you so much.

[00:19:02] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries, Qualms, and Quirks.

[00:19:05] **Sarah:** You can find the text of Kristi's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books. If you enjoyed the show, I'd appreciate if you'd help me find new listeners by leaving a review, telling your friends, or sharing this episode on social media. If you're interested in supporting the show, go to patreon.com/sarahnicolas. That is Sarah with an H and Nicolas with no H. And if you're a published author interested in being a guest on the show, please click on the home base link in the description or go to sarahnicolas.Com and click on the podcast logo in the sidebar. Thank you so much for listening.

[00:19:38] **Sarah:** I'll see you next time.