

Dear readers,

Back in September while I was out of town with my family, accusations were brought against my book, *For the Summer*, and then soon after – that *Everything Changes*, *Waiting for You* and a few sentences from *Happy Hour*. These accusations were that I had taken pieces of my stories from other fan fictions on fanfiction.net.

I would like to clear some things up here.

The first being, did I ever write fan fiction? Yes. I did. Back in late 2009 I had previously posted, *Happy Hour*, *Everything Changes*, *For the Summer* and *Waiting for You*, on that fan fiction site. None of my stories were complete on there, and in any event, got very little attention. I pulled them and began working on original versions of the stories. My reasoning for joining fan fiction was to see if anyone enjoyed my writing style. Some did, some didn't. And I moved forward from there.

As I was out of town when the accusations originally came to my attention, I had to wait until I got home to remove my stories. I removed them immediately, Amazon did not, and I began speaking with a copyright lawyer and running every story I had through a plagiarism checker online at Grammarly.com.

It's taken me a while to discuss this with anyone for the simple fact that I didn't know what to say. And anything I did say at the time didn't matter. Everyone has their right to an opinion. I'm not going to tell anyone not to. But I also have the right to tell mine. Never throughout this entire process have I published any derogatory remark about anyone involved. And I never would. That's not me at all.

Some want to know, how did this happen?

I will start by saying that nothing we do or say is 100% original. Even some exact combination of some of the words I write here have probably been written somewhere, by someone, in the vastness of history and time.

For example, take a given sex scene from a book, and read other sex scenes from other books. Certainly, common sense says some aspects or elements of that sex scene will be found in another book, written somewhere, sometimes. Take a given character from a book, and common sense says some aspects or elements of that character will be found in another book too, somewhere, sometime. Nothing is 100% original. How could anything we write be 100% original, given that we share similar experiences as human beings and use common language so that we can communicate our emotions and ideas?

As I understand from my lawyers, the kinds of similarities I refer to above are not copyright infringement in and of themselves. And rightfully so. Otherwise, authors could no longer write in the same genres as others without constant fear. Copyright infringement requires “copying,” not just similarities. Copyright infringement also requires certain types and amounts of copying. For example, if you were to read the WIKIPEDIA definition for *Scènes à faire*, it references that some elements in stories are common and not protectable. In particular, it says, “*For example, a spy novel is expected to contain elements such as numbered Swiss bank accounts, a femme fatale, and various spy gadgets hidden in wristwatches, belts, shoes, and other personal effects. These elements are not protected by copyright....*” My stories I’m sure contain certain elements similar to other stories, but my overall composition are unique and my sequence of events are unique as far as I know.

Over the past few months I’ve been emailed and tweeted, talked about, cursed, stalked, you name it, it’s happened.

Do I write my own grocery lists? Did I write any of my stories? Did my editor know about it? Did my cover designer? Did my publisher know about it? Did my agent?

And I wanted to speak out when it first happened. I wanted to defend myself. I wanted to tell each and every person who were shooting off lies about me that they weren’t correct but if I said anything, I would be wrong. To them.

I wanted to tell them what a good person my editor was and that she would have never kept something like that. I wanted to tell them what a talented cover designer I had and how sweet she was to me in those first few hours when this all broke through.

I was also never published by anyone and sure as hell not by Simon and Shuster, one of the biggest publishers out there.

The morning after this all unfolded, my editor cut all ties with me, as did the cover designer, my agent sent an email ending our agreement and then the emails from readers poured in telling me what a despicable human being I was. And then the fandom got involved and posted pictures of my innocent daughter online with the words “Future Plagiarist” under her face. She’s a child. A child! It was over for me when I saw that. And soon after that came the one with “Sh***** Mother” and another photograph of my innocent child. I was done.

Everything I had worked for was gone in a couple hours. The invasion into my personal life started, remarks to my family, harassment, you name it and I was experiencing it. At some point I began to wonder if this was a personal vendetta against me from the fandom. What hurt most was their way of involving those most precious to me.

So when does it end? Do people keep pushing boundaries, degrading everyone and beating a person when they're down to the point when they're feeling like nothing and at the point that maybe if I wasn't here, they would stop?

It comes to that. I assure you it does.

They told me to kill myself. As harsh as it sounds, I received tweets and emails telling me this. Imagine what I thought in those moments.

In the face of everything, sometimes it feels like the only way out because all this, the posts, the blog articles, the tweets saying what a despicable person I am, a horrible mother, a shitty wife, whatever you want to say, I've heard in the last few months from not only the authors I thought were friends, the authors accusing me of stealing their words and their supporters. I've heard it from everyone to the point where I did wonder if the people in my life would be better off without me.

And for a while, I believed it.

But I'm not any of those things they have said I am and my family is the most precious piece of my life.

I have people who know me. They know everything about me, the good, the bad and the extraordinary. The things that make me who I am. You can say what you want but you'll never change their feelings about me. I believe everyone has extraordinary aspects about them. Everyone. If you can't see it, you're not looking hard enough or you yourself refuse to see it.

My stories came from my heart and whether you want to believe that is up to you. I'm not asking anyone to. It's not my place.

Some people feel I can't write and that I never could. I was never part of any writing crowd and not a lot of people took me seriously. But I didn't care. I was doing what I loved. Writing. In my heart I know my ability. I hope that I can move past this. It did take me a long time to write this for the simple fact that, as stated, nothing I said mattered at that point. I was threatened with being killed on more than one occasion by members of the fandom, wished to be found in a dark alley to be beaten up and asked if they could steal everything I had. Did I deserve that?

In their eyes, yes. And that's all that matters. Again, people see and believe what they want.

Good comes from everything, I believe that, and something good came from this too. Sometimes you don't see it, realize it or even refuse to embrace it but sooner or later you'll see the light in it and I did. And that's for me.

The accusations that surfaced from my previous editor on my work were ridiculous. It was simply her way of stirring the pot. She had no right to get involved yet she did. She went as far to say the current editor I was using at the time of *For the Summer* knew about it. As did the cover designer.

Had someone pointed out specific similarities to me, or to the editor I was using at the time when *For the Summer* was being edited, I would have changed them immediately. My intention has never been to profit from someone else's work. Ever. And the editor I was using would have never allowed it.

For my old editor to say that I refused to change the similarities is a lie. She never pointed them out besides the name, Evan Masen.

Her statement that I refused to change them so she was forced to remove her name, also not true. She wanted her name removed because she felt that because I had hired a proofreader who made changes to the manuscript, she couldn't ensure the changes she made were the same. Therefor she asked that her name be taken off. Here's what was said:

And something else I have to bring up that you can choose to handle however you want. Your main character's name is Evan Masen. This is incredibly close to Edward Masen from Twilight. You also have Coach Dwyer and Bella Swan's stepfather's name was Phil Dwyer. With the fame of Fifty Shades of Gray, a lot of Twilight Fanfic authors are turning to publishing their fanfics and names like that are a dead giveaway for people that are very anti-publishing. I just wanted you to be aware of it.

This was what I was warned about. So I left Evan's name because in no way was that novel related to Twilight. I didn't feel the need to change it. I did however change Coach Dwyer's name. Maybe there was more similarities she wasn't telling me about but I have the email and that's all it says. Had she warned me about a specific scene or sentences striking a similarity, I would have never published the story and would have addressed them. Had she pointed out to the new editor I had chosen, SHE would have pointed that out to me. I guarantee you of that. She would have never let me go through with it knowing that.

Once *Delayed Penalty* was finished, I hired a proofreader to look over it – something I hadn't done with my previous novels and had been advised to do. Well apparently I didn't chose who she wanted. At the time I had only hired the proofreader to do a spit shine.

We had some misunderstandings about the editing process in the beginning. I thought if you hired an editor, you were good to go. Well there's this thing called a proofreader too. And after releasing *Everything Changes*, I found that out when the poor reviews rolled in.

Then I was handed a letter indicating I was in breach of a contract so I removed her name based on this:

“The services provided, as defined by the aforementioned language, is editing, as you know. It has come to our attention that you have solicited the services of a competitor [REDACTED]. Accordingly, you are in violation of the spirit of the contract you signed with [REDACTED] in that the aforementioned competitor has altered and or changed any and all work previously performed by [REDACTED]. These changes are unauthorized edits of the contractually completed manuscripts and as such misrepresent The [REDACTED] as listed as the acknowledged editor. We formally request that you Cease and Desist all written claims that [REDACTED] are the acknowledged and accredited editor for the various published works of Shey Stahl.”

I signed the letter and removed her name like she requested. Could I have published her name in this letter? Sure. Why not? She published mine. She gave out my information to anyone who requested it.

But that’s not me. I’m not doing this letter to out anyone. I’m simply telling my side. I never intended to speak about our interactions together. Something I have every right to do. It shouldn’t have been made public knowledge but she made it news to everyone when she started posting on Goodreads. This left me no choice but to explain my side of situation.

You can say what you want to say and frankly, it doesn’t matter anymore. I never meant for anyone to think I would have taken from someone else. I’m sad that this wasn’t handled maturely and that everyone thinks that if they bitch publicly, it will make it all right. Instead people decided destruction and humiliation was the answer. Is that ever the answer?

We’re not setting good examples for our children regarding bullying. Instead we’re teaching children and others that this is how you react. You’re upset, tweet about it, make a Facebook post defacing that person. Even if the person in question is guilty, freedom of speech allows you to do and say what you want. Is it justifiable to destroy their life? Would you want that done to you, or your children or your loved ones?

It doesn’t matter what I say, what I do, or even how I feel in all this. You hear what you want from it, take what you want, and believe what you want.

People hear things and they make their own assumptions and their own spin on the matter. As what's happened now. As soon as the story broke out, people spoke out as to what they felt they could get away with.

Some people asked the question, why disappear?

Wouldn't you if you had message after message, hateful remark after hateful remark and no answers? Wouldn't you disappear if they threatened your family?

If I defended myself, I was guilty. If I defended myself when a reader sent me a photograph of my daughter with the caption spread over it that said, "Worst mother of the year!" I was guilty. So they would think.

If I responded to the one where a reader told me, "I bet your husband wishes it was you who broke your neck and died, not him. I bet he regrets being alive now and having to deal with your bullshit." It didn't matter to them that yes, my husband was critically injured in a dirt bike accident and nearly died. They didn't care. It was ammo to them. A way to make me feel even worse about myself.

To them I was guilty, the scum of the earth, a lying snake, I need to go away for good and never write again.

If I said nothing, I was guilty.

Honestly, you didn't want an answer. You wanted someone to blame and that's just what was done.

So I hired a lawyer. Bam. She's guilty for seeking advice.

I don't hire a lawyer. She's guilty because she's not defending herself.

See where I'm going with this?

No?

Well you should but everyone, no matter who they are, will see something different.

It's coming from my heart when I say that I truly am sorry for all the readers who felt I deceived them but my stories were my own. And I'm truly sorry to the author's involved. If and when I write again, just know that every measure possible to avoid such circumstances in the future will be taken.

And though every writer out there will take inspiration from somewhere, never had I meant to make these authors – who put their own hearts and souls into their work – feel like I was

profiting from it. I never meant for readers – who spend their hard earned money on books – to feel like I had mislead them.

I worked for four years on Jameson and Sway and for people to say that I took them from another author, means I took myself from someone else. They are real people. And details and events in those stories are from my own life. If you know me at all, you know how true that statement is. I talk and communicate exactly how I write. Those that have ever talked with me or spent any time around me know my personality and that I'm inside of every book I write. If you know me, you'll know that there's pieces of me and my friends and family in every character and situation I write about. The book *For the Summer* played out to summers a close friend of mine had. The book *Waiting for You* had exact scenes from my own experience right out of high school. Dancing on the hood, bar fights, all exact situations that played out to my own life. So did I steal my experience from someone?

And to say I took those experience of my friend in *For the Summer* means I took her real life situations from another author. Could it be people just have some of the same ideas?

Well I know you won't believe that, but it's true.

I will continue to write my stories. I will finish the *Racing on the Edge* series and *Crossing the Line*. Will people ever take me seriously as author again?

Probably not.

But for myself, I will try. Some think because of this I should never be able to write another word again. I can't *not* write. I've been dreaming and writing since I was a little girl. And you can't stop me from living a passion. You can take my pen, my paper, my computer, whatever I have, but I have my dreams. And they're mine. I believe in something and no one can ever take that from me.

Will I be more cautious? And will I second guess everything I write in the future?

Of course I will. I will constantly think to myself, is this similar to something else? Have I read this somewhere? Have I seen this somewhere?

I've ran every story I have through a plagiarism checker. And I will continue to do so in the future. All similarities that were pointed out to me have been removed and I will put my stories back up as I do have some readers who still want to read the journey's my characters were on. I had planned sequels to many of my books and I will release them eventually.

Maybe my dream will never go anywhere because of this but I can't say I didn't try. Trying is all I have left.

For those of you have gave me a chance and stuck by me no matter what happened, thank you. True friends never leave your side and I am surrounded by some of the greatest people the world has to offer. I have people who love and support me unconditionally. That's all I've ever wanted.

I wish the authors involved in this every bit of success they deserve.

Thank you.

Shey Stahl