

## *#WednesdayWIPReport*

**ever wondered what it's like to write a book?**

One of the questions I get asked most often is "How do you write a book?" I normally offer some sort of stammered, unhelpful reply like, "Um, y'know...I just kind of...do...it." So when I started "Undeclared," I decided to do a weekly WIP (Work In Progress) Report detailing my progress (and sometimes lack thereof).

It's not just about writing, it's also about the pieces of publishing a book, since "Undeclared" is self-published. It's my second time self-publishing, so it talks about what I learned from my last experience and what lessons I'm applying to this book. If you've ever been curious about how people write (or self-publish) books, this is your definitive answer. (Okay, it's not that definitive.)

Enjoy.

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 1**

Started writing “Undeclared” on July 1. In the morning I actually just made the title page so I could post a screenshot sharing the title, as promised. Then I lazed away the day and eventually started writing around ten o’clock, as fireworks exploded outside. I’ve said I hope to have this book out before Christmas, and though six months may seem like a long time, it took me about nine months to finish “Undecided,” so I need to get cracking.

I’ve had the opening sentence in my head for a while. It mirrors imagery from the first book, so I think it’s clever. Normally when I start I have the major story beats plotted out, then let the details fill themselves in. I had no idea Crosbie was into magic when I started “Undecided,” I just liked that illusions line from “Arrested Development” and wanted to use it. (I pretty much love all the lines from “Arrested Development.”)

So far I have googled the following things: gonorhea symptoms men; Sports Illustrated calendar Bar Rafaeli; San Francisco Giants home field name. How did people write books before the internet? Did they...use other books?

Apparently I need to do a better job of keeping track of my writing expenses so I can claim them on my taxes. I’m going to make a list.

I made signed paperbacks available on my website and now Canada Post has threatened to go on strike. Well.

I meant to type the word “signalling” but wrote “signally” instead. Word did not flag this as an error so I googled and it turns out it means “notably; conspicuously.” Growing up I looked up words I didn’t recognize in the dictionary and was an excellent speller.

I have to fact check things like the summer temperature in southern California. This means googling a place like LA, zooming out on the map and making note of a name that’s farther inland (this is Kellan’s hometown), then googling the annual temperatures in that town. I drove through southern California once and after oohing over the desert for six minutes, I promptly felt very, very depressed.

So far I’ve written 9749 words.

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 2**

My softball game was rained out. When I have a whole night free I always picture myself diligently writing thousands of new words. What actually happened is I went shopping for a bit, then came home and watched Big Brother, then brainstormed an intro for my release day newsletter for “The Good Fight.” For some reason I’m really struggling with this one. I’m very anxious about this book’s release. I love it, but it features a difficult heroine, and I’m anticipating lots of griping which has been weighing on me.

Woke up to find a squirrel in my bedroom. Almost died.

When I write, I finish whatever I’m writing, then immediately read through it to smooth out any obvious errors. That way the next time I sit down I can read it again for the “experience,” not distracted by typos or poor word choices. I always use too many words the first time through, and a lot of my edits involve taking out words. Little words like an unnecessary “and” or “the,” or extra adjectives or adverbs. Or sometimes failed jokes. Lots of times failed jokes, sadly.

Am writing the first sex scene. This is exciting and nerve-wracking because it has to set the tone for everything that comes after. Okay, Blue Jays have two on and none out. I need to press pause on the writing until this inning is over.

I’m reading a book that talks about Blue Pearmain apples, which are said have a blue-ish tint to them. I googled this and it does not appear to be true. Lies.

Before I start writing I have a few key scenes in mind. I generally don’t let myself write them in my head before I put them on the page because otherwise I’ll try to shoehorn in certain moments or phrasing I came up with but can’t get to flow properly when I get around to writing it. Anyway, I just wrote two of those scenes and I’ve gotta say...the second one was meant to be funnier than it is. Now it’s just really sad. I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or not. Will wait and see how I feel later.

Saw the complete front & back cover re-design for “Undecided.” It’s very different from the first and I have high hopes for it. But now I’m worried that if I think it’s a nice cover that’s a dead giveaway that the general consensus will be that it’s awful. I guess I’ll find out in a few days, right?

I have written 19,610 words and the squirrel has not returned. Success!

### **#WednesdayWIPReport 3**

I've never really written a proper sequel in which the characters in previous books played a part, so "Undeclared" is my first attempt. It always kind of annoys me when people spend too much time recapping the earlier plot, but it seems like at least some of these details are necessary. I guess I'll just wing it. If I read it later and it annoys me, I'll take it out.

I've gotten to a scene where I know it's not finished, I just don't know how to actually finish it. I'm not someone who can just type "figure this out later" and move on. I've been stalled on this scene for several days. Normally when this happens the fix is something super swift and simple, but I can stew over it for an eternity. I think I was stuck on the opening to the party scene in "In Her Defense" for a full month. Because I've declared that this book will be ready by December (see what I did there?), I don't have a month to dwell. Must fix. Or watch an episode of OITNB since everyone says this season's really good.

Last night I wrote until 2 a.m. I normally write late at night, but I work 9-5, so very rarely do I see two o'clock. When you're on a roll, however, you have no choice. Re-reading those pages now with non-bleary eyes, I'm feeling good about them. Relief.

Other writing things I've been doing: preparing my release week FB posts for "The Good Fight" (I can't believe it comes out on Monday); trying to make sure I remember all the places I need to change the cover for "Undecided"; trying to thank/favourite/like everybody who participated in the cover reveal; mailing out signed copies of the book, which is always exciting and flattering; staring at my website and thinking I don't like the design but I really don't want to do the work involved in redesigning it; answering some tour questions for "The Good Fight." This is a small tour, and if you are someone who got in touch before (or didn't) about doing some sort of TGF blog post, do get in touch again. I am happy to help!

The squirrel attempted re-entry, but I caught him at the window. He looked guilty, as he should. The book will be out in December, you jerk. No cheating.

Just had a mental breakthrough. I've been trying to determine how this sex scene should start but I couldn't decide between two ideas, and then it hit me: THEY'RE THE SAME IDEA. Yes, that's super vague, but I promised no spoilers. Just know things are going well.

I have a favourite pair of slippers with a hole in the toe. I've delayed throwing them out because I love them, but today a peanut fell into the hole and I think that's the sign I've been needing.

So far I've written 32,234 words.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 4

Sometimes when I'm writing I'll have a vague idea about a thing I know is important (ie: there'll be a big awards thing and then someone will make a speech and someone will win something!) but that's all I know. Then sometimes I'll randomly introduce a character that ends up becoming important. Then that character makes the speech at the awards show. I like this kind of development. I feel like my brain is on my side, even if I can't always tell. It gives me the confidence to write stuff I'm not sure about and trust that it'll either work out, or I'll know to scrap it. Either way, it's progress.

Last night I wrote a bunch, and this morning I finished the scene while it was still fresh in my mind. I already know exactly what's coming next, and I love that feeling because I think it adds urgency to the pages. If I'm trying to figure out what happens next I think it shows on the page and the writing slows down and becomes clunky. I can normally identify these parts when I'm reading through later on, and I have a heavy editing hand when it comes to those scenes. Often there's no tweaking, it all gets cut.

Just finished writing a really good chapter, but I know the very end is missing something, I just have no idea what. Normally the "issue" is that I wrote about three more sentences than the scene required and I just delete them, but so far that hasn't helped. Will leave as-is and see how I feel when I do my first read-through. The scene in "Undecided" where Nora sees Crosbie with the girl in the library and goes home and flops into bed and ends with, "I mean, WTF?" took me forever to finalize, even though it seems obvious now.

Got an email from someone saying she would like to read Kellan's story. I put a line at the back of "Undecided" asking people if they would be interested, and it's always so motivating to get these messages, especially when I'm dawdling. They light an inspirational fire under my sometimes lazy butt.

I like this scene I'm writing, but I know it's not building up the sexual tension enough to have a satisfying pay-off later. Will give it some thought.

Hmm. This moment I thought was going to be the mid-point is actually going to happen quite a bit later... I don't like it when my plot structure needs to be adjusted. And not just because I don't like to be wrong, but because it opens up the possibility that I'm bumping things because I'm overwriting the earlier things. I guess we'll see how the page count works out when I'm done this first draft.

Me: Time to work on "Undeclared!"

Me: \*looks up funny lists on BuzzFeed\*

I have written 45,621 words. This is very fast. (For me.)

## #WednesdayWIPReport 5

Writing a scene where the H & h play a video game. I had to flip through a paperback copy of “Undecided” to remember the names of the games Kellan and Crosbie played last year, then give them updated names for the new season. Last year’s game names were “Target Ops: Fury” and “Fires of Vengeance.” I am going to make these sequels and I am trying to think up the worst possible titles. I don’t play video games myself, especially the first-person shooter games. I find them terrifying. I tried to play once but a zombie Nazi killed me right away.

I was going over some of the themes for the book this morning, and really cementing how they would be expressed through the plot, and realized I’d kind of forgotten about some of them. They were my initial ideas and they sort of faded away, and I like that they’re coming back stronger than before. You know when you’re like, “Oh, that’s a good idea!” then a few seconds later you’re like, “Oh...that’s my idea from before...” That’s me. Better than when I’m like, “That’s the same crap idea you had last week. Try harder!”

I bought “An Ember in the Ashes” when it was on sale a couple of weeks ago. I’m reading it now and I love it. Interestingly (or ironically or unfortunately) I have kind of burned out on the “sameness” of reading romance, so I need a palate cleanser. I convinced a coworker to start reading it too, so I have someone to talk to. I also need Cara McKenna to hurry up and write a book that’s not ménage so I can read it. I love her writing but I don’t care about threesomes. I will also pretty much never read a book that’s about a baby/pregnancy, and, after a few too many MC titles, I am done with that storyline as well.

Normally when I’m working on a book I am absently brainstorming ideas for whatever book will follow. Right now the idea that’s coming most strongly is a very easy pitch (meaning it can be summed up succinctly when describing it to someone) BUT it’s not the next book in the Burnham series. From a business perspective I think it’s a bad idea to put out an unrelated book in between Burnham books...but I don’t know if I will have a third Burnham idea ready. What do you think? Do you want an author to put out a series one after the other without interruption, or do you not care if the stories aren’t cliffhangers? I personally don’t care about series very much, I just want a book that interests me, so I cannot weigh in here because my response is a shrug. Feedback welcome!

I have written 52,925 words.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 6

When I started writing this scene, I \*swear\* I had a point. But now that I'm halfway through, I can't seem to remember it. If I don't write something with an intention—either a clear end goal for the scene, or the scene itself sets up something for later on—that lack of urgency translates into the story and makes for a boring scene. What on earth was my point?

Does anyone watch The Great British Baking Show? I am obsessed, even as I think, “I wish I could do that!” I'm thinking, “There's no way I'm doing that.” And to quote Tina Fey, “I want to go to there.”

I'm getting concerned about my pacing here. I'm a plotter, not a pantsier. (Plotter being someone who plots out the story before she writes; pantsier being someone who plots by the seat of their pants as they go along.) It makes me antsy. I like the way Kellan's character is developing, but I'm getting distracted by my page count. When I wrote “Undecided” I actually wrote half, stopped for several months to work on “The Good Fight,” came back, re-read it, decided it had potential, and resumed. I think it might be time to read what I've got so far and try to focus myself.

I hope Mary-Anne wins the Great British Baking Show.

I think I'm going to force myself to write some semblance of back cover copy to make sure I've got the basic story structure in place. I know I have some awesome scenes, but I'm not sure there's enough story momentum. Then again, it can be hard to judge that stuff when you're in the middle of the book.

My sister raved about float tanks so I decided to try one. I went today and I did not like it. Or maybe it's better to say it just wasn't for me. I don't have a problem with water, the dark, or confined spaces, but I did not relax for a single second. I just...waited. And waited. And waited. I tried to brainstorm back cover copy for “Undeclared,” but kept getting distracted by the waiting. I even looked for fake constellations in the fake stars overhead. I saw a pterodactyl, a cowboy, and a firework. That took twelve seconds.

Mary-Anne has made it to the finals! I'm so happy.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 7

Because I am my own editor for the self-pub books, I'm responsible for making sure things are consistent. For whatever reason I have a mental block when it comes to remembering the name of the fraternity to which Kellan and Crosbie belong. It's called Alpha Sigma Phi, and in "Undecided" I think I called it a hundred different things (before editing). I finally settled on Alpha Sigma Phi because the initials spell ASP, which I could remember. Growing up my mom made random and inane rules about what words we could or could not say, among them "hate" and "screw," along with regular curse words. As a result my sister and I got creative, and used to say "asp" instead of "ass." That's how Alpha Sigma Phi got its name.

I've decided that my initial plan for the mid-point was correct, and I need to really cut back my opening scenes to get things back on track. The hard part with that is that as I re-read those earlier scenes I objectively know they are not doing much for the plot, but then there'll be a line so lovely that I think maybe it's worth 1000 unnecessary words just to include it...but it's not. I know that, too. Snip, snip.

I am vacillating between thinking I have written a bunch of words that are really just "research" and not "story," then I read a part I like and think, No, no, you're on the right track, stop hyperventilating. The thing that calms me most is that I felt like this through 90% of "Undecided," and that turned out all right for me.

This is a pretty bad season of Big Brother. I mean, stop bringing people back. When you're evicted, stay evicted.

I have deleted the first seven chapters. That's how many I wrote before Kellan actually got to Burnham to start his third year. That's way too much. My goal is to get it to just one chapter, approximately 7 pages. I chose that 7 arbitrarily, but I think it sounds fair. That's way too much to pare back and things will get lost in translation if I do, so I'm just going to start with a blank page and rewrite that whole opening. I think I'll keep the first line, but will re-type it for posterity's sake.

If this sounds alarming, don't worry about it. A big part of writing is deleting, and I always write way too much.

Does anyone else watch Veep? That show is amazing.

After deleting, I am down to 36,492 words.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 8

I'm still working on the first chapter. I don't know what's taking me so long. I've just been procrastinating. Opening, re-reading, obsessing over word choices when I should be writing new words, then deciding it's time for bed. Historically I haven't done a ton of writing over the summer months. My apartment gets really hot and uncomfortable and I feel guilty sitting at a computer when I should be outside enjoying the sunshine. Confession: I kind of hate the sun, like a vampire. I burn in ten seconds flat and spend the entire time seeking out shady patches. In any case, that's the excuse I'm using to explain my slow writing pace: sunshine. Fortunately this week's weather forecast is non-stop rain, so I should be able to get a lot more writing done. Or generate a new excuse.

I'm getting paranoid about my writing timeline. My original intention (I suppose it's also still my current intention) was/is to have "Undeclared" out by Christmas. Ideally I'd like to have it up on NetGalley (a review request site, for those who don't know) for one month before release, to hopefully generate some reviews and/or buzz. That means I need to have a decent ARC ready by mid-late November. Assuming this book only requires light edits (I will be the one editing it, so I will be the one determining that), that should take about two months. That includes sending it to some friends to read, which, if I plead enough, can hopefully be done in a couple of weeks. That means I need a decent first draft by late September. Today is August 28. Oh God.

I want the new fall TV season to start. The only thing on my PVR is Big Brother and episodes of Intervention that always make me cry.

I'm a very good speller. This is one of my few natural abilities. But I cannot remember how to spell piranha. Ever.

Okay, I just re-read the stuff I wrote last night. I went to bed without reading through, and opening the file is always kind of nerve-wracking. You're convinced it's going to be garbage. But...it wasn't. Relief. And that first chapter—first chapter, again—is nearly done. I think we're getting back on track.

I don't know if you guys are fans of Cara McKenna, but you should be. She recently got her rights back to some earlier stories and republished them, one of which is "Willing Victim." When it came out everyone was asking if she'd write a sequel and she said no plans...but she just announced she's working on it! THEN she said she thinks it will come out around Christmas. HOW IS THIS HUMANLY POSSIBLE??! As a reader I am thrilled; as a writer I am perplexed and envious.

In writing news, I have finished chapter one. Again.

Word count: 42,662

## #WednesdayWIPReport 9

People often ask me how I deal with bad reviews. Honestly? I just kind of shrug. I mean, what can I do about them? There are different types of bad reviews, too. The kind that simply didn't like your book, say so, and move on. Then there are the type that the reviewer has obviously spent a lot of time on, adding gifs and pictures and bold and italics. I might skim a short bad review, but I won't read a long one. What's the point? I don't read lengthy reviews, period. (Good or bad, for my books or others.) It's kind of summed up in the star rating. And after a certain word count, the review stops having anything to do with the book and everything to do with the reviewer. I can sometimes glean insight into how to write better books from a bad review. I've said before that the consensus for "Just Once" is that it gets off to a slow start. Fair enough. But something like, "The hero reminded me of my ex so I didn't like it..."? What can I do with that? Answer: nothing. So I shrug and move on. I can't delete a bad review anymore than I can make a good one materialize, so I worry about the things I can control, like my work in progress, my hair in this rainy weather, and channelling positive thoughts toward the Toronto Blue Jays' post-season efforts while wearing my Kevin Pillar shirt.

(To further underscore the subjectivity of writing, the same day I got my Carina Press contract for "Time Served" I got a second rejection for that book from an agent I had only queried once and who had already rejected me. Why the second rejection? Beats me. They were both the same form rejection so it wasn't like she was being emphatic. Maybe to teach me a life lesson about not taking this stuff too seriously? Message received.)

Okay! I have found a plot that is really just working in all ways right now. I'm going back to thread it in through some of the earlier pages but...I think this is what I've been missing. I'm working to underscore the "Undeclared" theme of this story and this is a not-at-all-subtle exploration of that idea.

Randomly discovered that "Just Once" has been newly uploaded to a pirate site. I've previously sent takedown notices to both of the places it's been uploaded, but it's still tedious to go through, find my old message, update the download link, and submit. I hope the people who pirate write glowing reviews.

Got an email from Carina Press this week saying Kobo is launching a new device that will be available at Costco and they would like to preload it with some books by Canadian authors, and "Time Served" is one of those titles. Would that be okay? Of course it's okay! How flattering. Also worth noting: this will mark the first time any of my books have ever been available in stores. Yes, I will be creeping Costco on release day.

Current word count: 42,264.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 10

Okay! Things have finally—FINALLY—clicked. I know how this whole first half is going to flow, and I'm loving it. Scenes I knew needed to be included finally slotted themselves into the right places (in my mind) and I'm feeling so much better about this. Sometimes unexpected things happen, too. Right now I'm finishing the scene that's sort of the equivalent (plot point-wise) to the bed building scene in "Undecided" and it's really going well, but turning out to be very emotional. Not what I expected, but sometimes when it flows, it flows in the right direction. I also like the idea of reversing roles—for example, Kellan interrupted that bed building scene with his typical untimely arrival, and this time Crosbie is going to show up at the most inopportune moment and get a bit of unintentional cock-blocking revenge. Hehe.

In an effort to try to deal with my bout of writer's block, I dug out this annoying book of "fun" writing exercises I got when I was in school. It's one of those books that shows you a picture of a moustache and asks, "What is this man thinking?" and then you're supposed to set a timer and write for ten minutes. For the last little while I've been kind of whimpering inwardly each time I sat at my desk, because until the paragraph above, a lot of this book has been a struggle. I just wanted to write without pressure to remember why I love making up stuff and then writing it down. I flipped open the book and randomly picked an exercise. It was two columns of nouns, and you had to close your eyes, pick one from each, and write for ten minutes. I picked "a cracked mirror" and "a feminist." Yep. So I wrote. And I remembered why I liked it.

I keep track of the books I read on Goodreads, but I don't give bad reviews/star ratings to many books, mostly because I know how it feels and I don't want it to look vindictive. I just mark those books as "read" (or, if they really enraged me, delete them altogether). But what this means is that Goodreads is then like, "Because you read Book A, you might like Book B," and I'm like, "I hated Book A, I WILL NEVER READ BOOK B. YOU DON'T KNOW ME AT ALL GOODREADS!"

Word count: 30,823. This is down from last week because I deleted a lot of stuff, but should now only continue to grow because I have finally figured out what my point is and I know what the next ten-ish scenes are and they're all great. This means a) faster writing, and b) a better flow to the story because it's all being written with a purpose.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 11

So...I thought I already knew what book I wanted to write when this one was done, but recently another idea burst onto the scene and will not stop churning out plot points! This is good but also kind of annoying. You know when you're at the store and someone accidentally jumps the line and you're like, "Should I tell them or just let this happen...?" That's how this feels. Should I be like, "Back of the line, buddy?" Or if it really wants to be first, should I just let it be first? Anyway, if this story provides enough details, I think I'll probably end up writing it first, and hopefully fast. My goal is to write three books a year, but that might be more than I can manage. Two might be the max. Two and a half.

"Undeclared" is still barrelling along nicely! I've finally gotten into it enough that I'm actually excited to sit down and open the file each night because I know what scene is coming up and I can't wait to see how it develops. Typically I try not to overthink the scene or I'll be like, "Ooh, that was a great line of dialogue!" and try to squeeze it in when I'm writing, whether or not it actually fits. I write down those lines anyway, then skim them from time to time to see if they're usable somewhere.

I have a box of copies of "Undecided" at my feet (I didn't know where else to put it) and at first I thought it would be annoying, but it turns out it's very helpful. I keep having to fact-check this story so I just reach down to my feet, pull out a paperback, and flip through. Note: it would appear I cannot remember any details from "Undecided." With each page I'm like, "Really? That happened? Hmm."

I saw "Bridget Jones' Baby." I loved the books, loved (and still love) the first movie, and once stood next to Colin Firth in an HMV but lacked the nerve to say anything. (He smelled fantastic.) In any case, this movie cracked me up. It wasn't the strongest plot, but the whole theatre was laughing, beginning to end, with one five-minute stretch where I don't think any breathed they were laughing so hard, and I had to get a tissue to mop up my tears. Worth it if you're looking for a break or a reason to eat popcorn.

Interesting thing I just realized: that new book idea that just took over my brain? The seed for it came from the major moment of conflict in the book. The rest of the story just sort of rolled itself out from there, kind of like playing a movie backward. Maybe this is how I have to come up with ALL story ideas. I'm going to write this on my white board alongside the rap lyric I have no use for but think is so great I will keep forever.

I'm rooting for Paul to win "Big Brother," and Vic for America's Favourite. You?

Word count: 39,816.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 12

Writing along merrily, scene's going great...then I realize I forgot to include a hugely important chunk of dialogue. Now that it's dawned on me I can't continue and simply pretend it's there, I have to stop everything and go back and fit it in. When I was younger I took piano lessons and I was that student who, when/if she made a mistake, had to stop and start over from the beginning of the line. I couldn't just fumble and carry on as though I hadn't. It used to drive my teachers nuts. It turns out I am the same way with writing. It's just my thing, I guess.

Here's a question I (and, I imagine, every romance writer) get all the time: what's it like writing sex scenes? The unexciting truth is that it's like writing every other scene: sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's not. The primary difference between romance and erotica is that in romance the sex scenes need to be more integral to the plot of the story, whereas in erotica they're largely the plot itself. When I'm writing them I think about a lot of the same things I normally think about: should I eat some chocolate, are the Jays winning, is it time for bed yet? And then I consider basic writing ideas: what is the point of this scene? What am I trying to accomplish here? (Besides the obvious.) Am I repeating myself? The scenes still have to advance character and plot, maintain the voice of the story, and achieve whatever tone I'm hoping for at that particular point (sexy, funny, sad, sweet, etc). I just wrote a four-page sex scene—single-spaced—that I then deleted. It wasn't even over when I stopped writing it, and that's a huge sign I was on the wrong path. Lengthy sex scenes are okay for erotica, but not for this. And while I normally favour a longer first sex scene followed by shorter scenes later, that was still too long. It was also losing the energy I wanted that scene to have, so I hit delete (actually, I copied it into a new file I made called "deleted scenes" in case I later realized I'd made a huge mistake) and started again. Two pages later, scene done. Oy.

The writing is really flowing now, but I don't think I'll be able to meet my self-imposed Christmas deadline. Early 2017 is more realistic. We shall see.

I'm reading a book called "The Girl With All the Gifts" by M.R. Carey, and so far, so great.

Word count: 47,709. (As a reference, "Undecided" is about 90,000 words. I'm going to have to trim some of the opening of this book—again—because I haven't reached my mid-point scenes and I want them to be pretty close to the 45K mark.)

### **#WednesdayWIPReport 13**

One of the most common pieces of writing advice is to write what you know. Then, just as you're nodding along to the wisdom of that adage, you hear, "No, don't write what you know! That's boring! Write what you don't know!" So essentially you can't trust anyone but yourself on this.

I just wrote a scene in which someone discovers they've been robbed. In China I lived by myself in a second-floor apartment in a shady complex with bars on the windows. (That was standard.) The person scaled the back of the building, sawed through the very ineffective bars, and entered through the bedroom window. When I came home I found my whole apartment in disarray. The police came and their "repertoire" of crime solving tools was a flashlight and a roll of packing tape, which they used to gather fingerprints and footprints from the embarrassing layer of dust on the floor. Needless to say, the culprit was never caught. It wasn't a big deal because they didn't steal anything, mainly because I didn't have much worth stealing. Now, ten years later, I'm using those feelings of shock and fear to write a book, so who's the real winner?

I'm at the mid-point in the story now, a series of scenes I've really been excited to write and which have turned out to be unexpectedly hilarious. If you follow my "On Writing" posts, you know I consider the mid-point to be an emotional shift as well as a plot shift, and this is no exception. It's a really exciting moment because the story takes on a new dimension and energy and I feel like that translates really well into the writing voice.

If you're a newsletter subscriber, you got last week's newsletter celebrating my first time ever reaching the 100-reviews-on-Amazon milestone. (It could be that I am the only one who calls this a "milestone.") The newsletter included a giveaway of a signed copy of "Undecided," and to enter all you had to do was reply to the email saying whether you preferred the original or new book cover. The results are in, and the votes wound up decidedly in favour of the new cover. Thank you all so much for your feedback—it's very much appreciated! (And congrats to the winner, who has been notified.)

Book rec: I just finished reading "The Girl with All the Gifts" by M.R. Carey and it's probably my favourite book of the year. Strong recommend.

Word count: 56,223

## #WednesdayWIPReport 14

I often find that I end scenes too late. I'm aware I do this, so instead of deleting and retyping and rephrasing the end of a scene (normally the chapter ending, actually), I start back a page or two, re-read, and find my real ending. It tends to be about half a page above where I stopped writing, and in hindsight, it's pretty obvious. I just did this with a scene where the two MCs are talking (keep in mind this book is called "Undeclared" and that's a big part of the theme) and one has the opportunity to say something significant, but doesn't. Then they continued talking about other stuff. I knew the scene wasn't ending in the right spot, but couldn't figure out why. Then I re-read it, got to the part where it's like, "I should say blah blah blah and blah blah blah... But I don't," and...remembered the theme. I deleted everything that came after and now it ends at the right place. It took me forever to understand what theme meant, but it's really key in keeping my books and brain focused.

Today I was trying to explain to someone how this WIP is progressing and after a bunch of mumbling, I realized it was exactly like that "Friends" episode where Rachel tries to make a dessert trifle but the cookbook pages get stuck together so she accidentally makes half a trifle and half a shepherd's pie. If you look at it like Joey, it's great. "What's not to like? Custard, good! Jam, good! Meat, good!" But put all those things together and the result is...mixed. So writing "Undeclared" has kind of been like that. I like so many of the pieces, but until I get that first draft finished and go back and read through, I honestly have no clue if it'll be a hit or a miss. If only all readers were like Joey, hmm?

I've been able to picture Kellan in my head all along, but I couldn't find a perfect match for an inspiration picture...until I saw someone review Emily Giffin's "Something Borrowed." (This reviewer said she loved the movie but didn't like the book and I was like, I think you might mean the opposite because that movie was blah.) Anyway, that's when it hit me! Colin Egglesfield for Kellan. Now I will google for pictures and lose an hour of my evening doing so.

Is anybody watching the new show "Pitch?" I'm a huge baseball fan so I was equal parts curious and leery, but I have to say—it's awesome. (Also awesome? The Jays heading to the ALCS!)

Word count: 57,640

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 15**

I'm writing another Halloween party. Of course this one will have to turn out completely different than the last, but it's been lots of fun researching puntastic Halloween costumes for the characters. There are some really clever people out there! I don't dress up for Halloween anymore, but one of the bosses at my office likes to tell all the new people that they have to dress up and we're forbidden from telling them otherwise. Last year the new guy came dressed as an air freshener. It's an actual costume you can buy shaped like a pine tree. No scent, unfortunately.

I'm of two minds about this story. "Undecided" is my first really plot-based book, which is to say the plot came to me first (reformed bad girl determined to be good moves in with campus heartthrob; surprise, she falls for the best friend instead; uh-oh, heartthrob has to track down previous sex partners and she's kinda sorta on that list), then I came up with the characters. Typically I come up with characters first. I think that's actually quite a bit harder, because then you have to find a great story for them, when I'd rather be hit with a lightning rod awesome story idea. Anyway, that's not really my call. For "Undecided," however, Kellan already existed, and I have been trying my best to work out his story. The thing is, Kellan's character really has a long way to go, so I'm concerned that this story is becoming more of a character exploration than a well-plotted masterpiece (my standards are high) and that makes me worry that it will feel meandering. Of course I can't see the forest for the trees right now, and I vacillate between thinking it's really insightful and interesting (and, if I do say so, hilarious), and unfocused and unhinged. I guess I'll know in 30K words or so.

Word count: 66,950

## #WednesdayWIPReport 16

Still vacillating about whether or not this story is any good. I've actually written complete (or nearly complete) stories and abandoned them before, and I don't have any consoling "but I learned so much from the experience" platitudes for you, it was mostly just a waste of time. The positive part of this is that I think the writing voice, the tone, and the humour in this story is really great. The character development is solid. But I'm not sure if it's romantic enough. That's really nagging at me. That's something that's so hard to see when you're buried in it, though, like when you enter a dark room and start feeling for the wall you're sure is right beside you but it's actually seven feet away. So I won't know until I'm done and I read through the whole thing, and at this point I still plan to finish.

One of the great things about writing a college book in the fall (this book starts at the beginning of the new school year) is that the atmosphere outside is the same as the book. Fall is my favourite season and I'm lucky enough to live in an older neighbourhood with lots of old trees with gorgeous colourful leaves. It's also timely to be writing about Halloween in October, because there's tons of inspiration for that as well. In honour of the holiday I dug up this old picture my sister sent me. That's me, maybe age seven or eight. I have absolutely no idea what my costume was supposed to be, I think I was just really excited to have so much face paint on.

I read "Pines" by Blake Crouch in two sittings. It's the first book in the Wayward Pines series, on which the TV show is based. I never watched the show, but I thought the book was pretty awesome. It's one of those stories where the protagonist wakes up in a town that's a little too good to be true, no clue how he got there, and no clue how to get out. That's the "mystery box" plot element at work—you must know what's going on, so you keep turning the pages until you find out. And find out you do... It's a pretty good story for this time of year, and I highly recommend it. I'm already reading book two. (Interesting fact: Blake's bio says he lives in Durango, Colorado, which is the town I used as inspiration for the setting of "Just Once." I was once trapped in the WalMart vestibule there.)

Word count: 73,415

## #WednesdayWIPReport 17

There's a light at the end of the tunnel! It feels like story pieces are falling into place, I can visualize the upcoming scenes better, and, perhaps most importantly, I think I now—finally—know what the “dark moment” is. Interestingly enough, it ties into a plot point I'd really been vacillating about, so now I think that's here to stay, too. I mentioned in a previous post that I think I've learned (all too recently) how important it is for me to write with that “dark moment” in mind (basically the thing that happens in the last quarter that makes all seem lost so we can make it all better again), and I didn't do that with this book. There have been a number of times where I worried the story was meandering and since I like to write (and read) with a lot more focus, I think this revelation will really help streamline things from now until the end, as well as when I start rewriting.

When I wrote the first book I knew I wanted Kellan's most redeeming quality to be the fact that underneath it all, he's a really good friend. He's innately kind, even though it's unexpected and doesn't always appear that way. That said, he's also kind of a self-absorbed dolt who's led a pretty charmed life and never really had to struggle. This story has been about breaking down some of those perfect walls so we can rebuild them in a realistic—but ultimately more satisfying—way. Walls broken? Complete. Rebuilt? Working on it. Satisfying? Up to you!

I've had a couple of conversations recently that really made me want to clarify the difference between “genre conventions” and “predictable.” I thought I'd do that here, but then I started writing and it got kind of long (and kind of ranty) so I'm polishing it up for a website post which will go up soon. I think this is an important thing to recognize both as a writer and as a reader (interesting how those two things are so tightly intertwined) and it was good to get those thoughts on the page.

I absolutely loved Blake Crouch's Wayward Pines series. I read all three books in record time and each one was different and awesome. Strong recommend. At the moment I'm reading “Illuminae” by Amie Kaufman. It was a Daily Deal so I bought it, then I started reading reviews that said not to read the e-book, hard copy only. Well...too late. Also, 50 pages in, I totally understand that warning.

Word count: 77,752

## #WednesdayWIPReport 18

“Undeclared” is coming along well. I feel like a lot of the pieces I was tentatively building are slowly moving together. Sort of like when Pangaea formed and unformed—that took millions of years, too, just like this freaking book.

I’ve vacillated a lot about writing these posts—when I first came up with the idea I thought it was a good way to keep myself active (once weekly) on Facebook, since I am clearly not great at social media. Before my first book I had zero social media accounts anywhere, and I only started them because I had to. Writing these posts often feels like a confession, admitting to you that writing is hard. Because not all of my books have been this difficult. “Just Once” and “Going the Distance” I wrote pretty quickly. “Time Served” took longer, but that’s because it’s a longer book and I overwrote the first draft by about 20,000 words. “In Her Defense” was very difficult, and I think part of the reason is because I had to write it, because “Time Served” was acquired as part of a two-book deal and when I signed the contract, I had never considered writing a follow up.

“Undeclared” is kind of like that, except \*I\* wrote the contract and then I signed it and now these posts are kind of like the lawyers reminding me I’ll be sued for everything I have (Take it, suckers! Joke’s on you!) if I don’t produce something. The plus side is I really love “In Her Defense” and I probably would have bailed on it if I hadn’t been obligated to finish, and I see so many of those hopeful sparks in “Undeclared.” I think I’m making this harder on myself by feeling pressure to make sure it’s as good as “Undecided.” (In my own opinion.) I can’t control what anyone else thinks, but I’ve never put out a book I didn’t wholeheartedly believe in, and when this one is up to those same standards, I’ll publish it. Right now I’ll tell you this: it’s super funny. And it’s definitely putting Kellan through the wringer. One of the things I always want to do is put the protagonist in situations that challenge and change them, and poor Kellan is definitely getting his turn.

So that’s where we’re at it. Really funny, everybody’s growing up whether they like it or not, and I’m at 82,513 words.

No writing last night. Just stared at the television in shock and horror.

## #WednesdayWIPReport 19

I just went back to re-read an earlier scene so I can recreate it now, and guys—it was so good. I forgot what I had written (just remembered that someone was dressed like a Mardi Gras chicken) so it felt totally new to me, and it was just as emotional as a Mardi Gras chicken confrontation can be. Sometimes the effort of writing feels very emotionally wrought, but that doesn't always translate to the page so it's only with some time and distance that you can really experience your own writing the way a new reader would. Fortunately that scene totally hit the mark. Now if all the others would just follow suit...

Things are really coming together, story-wise. It's at that point where instead of sitting there with my chin resting on my hand muttering, "What now... What NOW??" it's like, "Then this and this and this and this did I say this oh yeah this too hahaha no, not that, that's dumb, but this and this..." If you've read any of my books you know that I'm very big on character arcs, and I think "Undecided" had a less significant character arc than my other books. (That's because I came up with the plot first and characters second.) Kellan was obviously the story starter for "Undeclared," and as such it's a much more character-based book, and (in my mind, anyway) his character has transformed SO MUCH and I love it. I love it the way I love Caitlin from "In Her Defense." Like, who knew?

Here's something I've been learning as I go along: sometimes people can't read my mind! They can't simply intuit my good intentions. In hindsight I wish I'd spelled things out a bit more in some of my earlier books. I've seen enough reviews where someone felt like something didn't make sense and I spent some time debating if it's just because I'm SO SMART that no one can understand me, or if maybe I didn't do a good enough job explaining. One of the many things I learned when teaching in China is that if an entire classroom of kids don't get what I'm saying, it's not their fault for not understanding, it's mine for not teaching better. So when I wrote the big reunion scene in "Undecided" I didn't initially have Crosbie explaining stuff, like how the Halloween costumes were a metaphor (Nora was a woman on the run, Crosbie was a regular guy dressed like a superhero) and how their first kiss was at that park, halfway between their two homes/lives, since Nora was trying to hard to find a sturdy middle ground. After thinking about this, I decided to go back and use Crosbie as a big blinking arrow to point out these things. If you read the book, what did you think? Was that explanation too heavy-handed? Just enough? Not enough? Totally meh? I ask because I haven't actually figured out what my big reunion scene is going to be in "Undeclared" and I'm wondering if I should take a similar approach. Thank you. ☺

Word count: 88,632

## #WednesdayWIPReport 20

In one of the many iterations of my opening chapters for this story, I had a scene where Kellan helped the heroine apply makeup. I'd had this scene in my head before I started writing, so I included it earlier and...it just wasn't working. Not just the scene, but the whole beginning (if you've been reading these posts, you know the tragic tale). When I restarted the story that was one of the scenes that had to go. I was disappointed, but I'm not particularly precious about my writing, so if it's not working, it's out. Imagine my delight, however, when I kind of stumbled into that scene again, much later in the book. Much more organically, much sweeter, much funnier, much more plot-focused. Now it's back and better than ever, which is kind of a theme in this story.

As you can see from the word count below, the story is already too long. I imagine it'll be another 10,000 words before I type "THE END" (and collapse into a bedraggled heap), then I'll need to cut about 15-20,000 words to get it to a more manageable length. I'm not quite as stressed about that as I am irritated, because I generally work out all the unnecessary stuff in my head before I start writing so I don't have to do so much deleting when all is said and done. But hindsight is, as they say, 20-20, and it's only as I reach the end that I see the core of the story and am better able to hack out everything that's getting in the way.

There's a screenwriter named Noah Baumbach whose process involves writing a whole script he's never going to use. Through that he sees what the characters are and what they need, then he writes a new script using what he's learned. That's horrifying to me, because I'm annoyingly efficient and I hate the idea of writing thousands of words knowing I'm never going to use them. As it turns out, I've kind of done that here, though minus all the good, artistic intention to do so. Well, maybe it'll be a good thing. Noah was nominated for an Oscar, after all. We're probably the same.

Word count: 94,016

## #WednesdayWIPReport 21

So I know how the book is going to end. I mean, it's romance, so you kind of \*know\* how it's going to end, but I finally know what that scene(s) looks like. Except I'm not there yet, and though some writers are comfortable writing out of order then moving things around and filling in the blank spaces, I'm not. I write straight through, no exceptions. I might jot down notes for future scenes, but I don't write them until I've gotten there. (This is mostly because on the rare occasion I've written a really good scene for later use, by the time that scene rolls around so much has changed that it needs to be tweaked so many times it no longer resembles itself, and I've done more work changing it than I would have had I just written it all over again.)

Anyway, I'm at the "dark moment" now, and I've been putting off writing it. I just keep editing the scene before. And it's not that I don't want to write the dark moment—I do. Those are my favourite scenes. I LOVE a good fight scene. I like them in the books I write, and I like them in the books I read. It's just...this one. I know what it is, I just haven't started writing it. Maybe because it's so pivotal I know it has to be great. Or maybe because Kellan has come so far that seeing him get knocked down (by his own asshat-ed-ness) is going to be painful. Or maybe because I keep thinking I should make chocolate bark and getting lost in the black hole of recipes... In any case, that's where I'm at. (It's Saturday.)

Now it's Tuesday night. I'm halfway through the dark moment...just setting up all the groundwork. I'm hoping to get the rest of it written once I finish this post. After that there'll be a brief wallowing period, some sage advice, the big grovel/grand gesture, and the final scene I'm super excited to write. I generally know what all this looks like in advance, but for "Undecided" I had no idea and I rewrote the ending about half a dozen times (starting with Crosbie showing up on New Years until the last word of the epilogue). This time I know all the parts (there will be no epilogue—some people love them, some hate them, I just go with my gut) and I AM SO FREAKING EXCITED TO WRITE THEM DOWN.

Later Tuesday: Scene: complete. Hearts: broken.

Word count: 99,570

## #WednesdayWIPReport 22

Sorry for the late post! Here is my excuse:

When I first came up with the idea to write these posts, it was for a few reasons:

- 1) To semi-answer the question of how I write books
- 2) To have something to put on Facebook each week so the page didn't look abandoned
- 3) To hold myself accountable for writing this book, since updating people on my progress would be less embarrassing if I was actually making progress instead of taking naps.

Well, that third point has really been effective this week. I knew after last week's post that I would/could have this book finished by the following (ie: this) Wednesday. And I was well and truly on track for that, until Sunday night. On Sunday night I got a hankering for blueberry tarts, so I started the filling, came up with the great idea to chop up some ginger, and instead chopped off half my fingernail. The pain, people. The pain. Also, the blood and the chunk of nail left on the cutting board. All very gruesome. More to the point, this was the index finger on my left hand, the finger that types the letters e and r and f and g—or at least, it used to. I type approximately 120 words a minute, and now it feels like 120 words an hour is ambitious (and painful). Still, I wanted to get this book done. I wanted today's WIP Report to include the words "FIRST DRAFT DONE" and since I had the day off work and lots of bandages, I sat down and started typing. (I took a break to make peanut butter balls, but that was necessary.) And now, at 10:52 p.m., I'm happy to say...first draft done! FINALLY!

I'm thrilled and relieved and nowhere near finished. Now it's time to start editing. I'm going to read through this monster, trim off the obviously unnecessary parts (ideal word count is near 90K), and make notes about the things I like, don't like, and those that confuse me, just to get started. It normally takes me a few months to edit, so I'm going to begin. Tomorrow.

Word count: 108,104

## #WednesdayWIPReport 23

### ROUND ONE EDITS – PART 1

Everyone writes differently, and everyone edits differently. I knew going into this that it took the story some time to find its legs but that it eventually did, so reading the earlier chapters and muttering, “This can go, this can go, oh, this can definitely go...” is to be expected. The only other book I had this particular experience with is “In Her Defense,” and it ended up with a really strong beginning. What this means now, however, is that I have to start reading with a mind to the plot points I later introduced, abandoned, or changed completely, and add, cut, or adjust them in the opening pages as needed. Otherwise I’ll fix any major errors as I go along and make notes about things that jump out at me, but this first pass (there will likely be 6-8 passes) is just to make sure the basic structure is there so I can keep fine tuning on each read-through, and eventually get to the point where I don’t want to make any additional changes. Then I’ll send it out to some reader friends and make more changes. Welcome to editing!

I’m about 80 pages into my first pass, and here are some things I’ve made note of:

-I realized I’ve named three new characters names that start with a C/K sound, including the heroine (this is in addition to Crosbie and Kellan) so I’m brainstorming new names for her now

-I write down the number of pages in each chapter so I can keep them relatively consistent. It’s not such a big deal in ebooks, but I don’t want to have a five-page chapter followed by a twenty-page chapter. I generally like them to be about 8-10 pages, single-spaced (in a Word doc)

-A big thing I look for is unnecessary dialogue tags. Dialogue tags are things like “I said,” “she replied,” and “he yelled.” I always overuse them the first time through. You can generally convey that type of thing with surrounding action, which is better because it’s showing, not telling. An example of a dialogue tag would be: “What are you doing?” I asked in confusion. As opposed to: I frowned at her. “What are you doing?”

-I keep an eye out for any words or phrases I overuse. This changes from book to book. I become aware of a bad habit, but merely swap it for another one. For some reason I’ve said the word “sweat” a lot in this story. And people have been plucking their T-shirts away from their sweaty bodies non-stop. Cut cut cut.

Word count: 104,963

## #WednesdayWIPReport 24

### ROUND ONE EDITS – PART 2

As I edit now, I'm definitely looking for the major technical issues, but some of the less concrete things I look for are just things I feel. And not just things like do I feel bored/confused/interested, I'm looking for things to feel smooth. If I'm reading along and get snagged on a sentence or plot point, that's because there's something wrong. I can't always tell what that something is, so sometimes I try a fix or sometimes I leave it (I re-save each round of edits as a new document so I can always go back to the earlier version if I make a change and later realize I've made a huge mistake) to see how I feel the next time through. I'm very wordy in my first drafts, and I go back and take out a lot of little words, a lot of asides, a lot of things that seemed funny or poignant the first time through but now just feel forced. Those are things that interrupt the flow of reading, and while I may not know how to fix it right away, making a mental note and letting the issue percolate generally results in a solution.

Oh, the Oxford comma! I'm so torn on this one. Growing up we learned you should always use it, in film school absolutely not (largely because you had such limited space to work with that every character counted), then I worked at a magazine and the editor was adamant it be used, then I started getting published and the publishers didn't want to use it... Now I don't know how to feel! My general rule of thumb is less is more. If the comma isn't imperative to making the sentence clear, I take it out. But on each read-through I find a billion weird commas I swear I didn't put there, Oxford or otherwise.

One of the major things I'm sorting out right now are plot points I wasn't sure I would keep so I didn't do enough set-up for them early on in the story, and now that I'm in the last 20% they're appearing out of nowhere and they're pretty major. A lot of my notes involve reminding myself to work in mentions of these things earlier (and throughout) so they don't come out of the blue.

My general feeling right now is that I love Kellan's growth and arc; if you know me you know that's really important. And once I seed in those earlier plot points, I think the plot will really be on track as well. Probably one more draft to get that all organized, then it will be down to the fine tuning! (But that will be like, three drafts, too. Haha)

Only 15 pages left in this first pass! Editing is hard, but I still like it.

Word count: 103,529

## #WednesdayWIPReport 25

So...with travel, holidays, and not having my usual workspace, I haven't even opened the "Undeclared" manuscript this past week. To be fair, I tried, but as you can see below, my sister's very hairy and very affectionate dog, Jelly, got in the way. It's his fault. Honest.

To feel not entirely unproductive, I have made some headway on the back cover copy and I sent the cover mockup and stock photo to my friend (a designer) to prepare. Hopefully I'll have both of those finalized by mid-January. It's a relief when the BCC starts shaping up because it's very alarming when you try to write it and you're like, "Hmm...what's this story about?" and you can't come up with any answers. Basically I start writing something, anything, and with each new iteration I cut away the parts I don't need so the pieces that keep recurring prove themselves useful and eventually a brief but enticing blurb appears. I used an editor to help polish the BCC for "Undecided" and will most likely get help again with this one.

The cover, for those who are wondering, is going to look very much like the second "Undecided" cover. It's not the one I envisioned originally, but the covers need to be cohesive to indicate they're part of the same series, so that's what I'm going with. I saved my original inspiration pictures (which are part of why I was so reluctant to part with the first "Undecided" cover despite the feedback) and I'll share them in the release day newsletter, if you're curious about my original vision. (There's a newsletter sign up tab on this page somewhere...I'm pretty sure. There used to be.)

Otherwise I have officially changed the heroine's name to Andi, braved the mall on Boxing Day and came away only with some overpriced (but delicious) hot chocolate, and made a pavlova because I saw someone make it on TV. I think it turned out all right.

I hope your holidays have been wonderful and I promise to have some actual progress to report next week. I'm tentatively aiming for a late February 2017 release date, so I must get cracking.

Word count: unchanged (blame Jelly)



## #WednesdayWIPReport 26

### ROUND TWO EDITS – PART ONE

Now that I have a better overview of the story, this round of edits is about officially cutting out all the big(ish) things that don't need to be there. I've mentioned before that I'd like the final word count to be around 90,000 and I knew the first draft of this story was way too long, so I've been reading with an eye for deleting, and there's been plenty.

So far this draft I've deleted a chapter and divided a long chapter. Lucky for me the long chapter had a natural chapter break fall right in the middle, so it wasn't hard to decide where to split it. I'm at a chapter now that I really just don't feel like reading...and that's both a good and bad thing. It's good because if I don't want to read it, readers won't be interested in it either, and that's an indicator that it can go. It's bad because I have to do more work to remove it and replace it with something better (and, ideally, shorter). That's what I'm working on now. The pre-Halloween scene at the second-hand clothing shop was one such (new) scene in "Undecided," and the that scene is one of my favourites, so even though it's a lot of work, the pay-off can be really rewarding.

In each book I find a new phrase/thing to repeat. In this one I'm now noticing that a lot of people's mouths fall open when they're surprised. When I have an issue like this I normally go back to the beginning, do a "find" to count how many instances there are, and, if it's an appalling number, I make myself go through and remove nearly all of them. I might choose an arbitrary number (for example, if there are 24 gaping mouths, I might tell myself I can only have three), and work toward that. Then the next time I read through if I don't notice something's missing, I know I made the right call. It's also important to try to delete them instead of simply reword them because if I replace "gaping mouth" with "slack-jawed" I might miss that two sentences earlier I said "slack" and one sentence after I said "jaw" and I'll have repeated words to fix later.

Anyway, things are going well! I love Kellan (a subtitle for part of this story could be "Kellan McVey's Very Very Very Bad Day"), and I think you will too. We're still on track for late February. No update on the cover, and I haven't progressed on the back cover copy. I can't figure out the last paragraph, the part where you end on some sort of hook like, "And if he doesn't speak up now...he'll lose the girl...FOREVER!" But we're getting there.

Happy New Year!

Word count: 95,068

## #WednesdayWIPReport 27

### ROUND TWO EDITS – PART DEUX

I hired an editor to help with my back cover copy. I'm using the same person I used last time, because I thought she was really fantastic, and this time is no different. The thing is, you work so hard to get a draft you aren't embarrassed to share, and she returns it with literally EVERY LINE needing a change. And the worst part? She's right! The even more worst part? The sobbing. Just kidding—it's doing the fixing. Because boiling down your story to its core components and really analyzing and asking "Are these good enough? Is this interesting? Is it original? Is it compelling? And if so (and if not) how do I make it sound like it is?" is SO HARD. Some people make it look easy and they write this jaunty blurb that makes everyone throw money at them, but I really struggle. My stories tend to be more about characters than concept ("Undecided" is the exception to that rule) so I find it difficult. I'm also not much of a salesperson (mumbles "Do you want this?" then runs away) so I dread it, too. That said, when I got her notes this morning I did what I normally do: read them, hung my head in why-are-you-so-bad-at-this shame, let it percolate, and came home tonight to revise (ie: start all over again). Even though I haven't sent it back yet, I know my half-finished revision is already better than my weeks-of-effort original draft. Ah, editing. The necessary kind of torture.

Okay, I just finished reading through for the second time. The ending kind of makes me misty, and I'm definitely not a crier, so there's that. This pass definitely confirmed that I need to go back and plant some MAJOR seeds for plot points I'd been waffling on when I wrote the first draft but ultimately used in some really important ways. Right now they still feel like they come out of nowhere, so I have to go back and do some more work setting them up. Then I'll read through again to see how my additions feel and be a bit more nitpicky about the actual writing.

We're getting close on the cover. If all goes well I should have the cover/BCC ready to share in a week or two!

Last but not least: "Undecided" made a number of best-of lists for 2016, and seeing the lists and getting feedback from new readers has been super motivating as I work on these revisions. I love that the title (and theme) of the new book is "Undeclared" and there's a little bit of life imitating art as the more people speak up, the harder I work. Thank you!

Word count: 94,868

## #WednesdayWIPReport 28

### ROUND THREE EDITS – PART ONE

I write my first drafts in Word, single spaced, Times New Roman, size twelve. After a few read-throughs you get kind of blind to everything, so that's when I double space it. I also write the early drafts in Canadian English (which is mostly like American English except for some spellings, like we use a U in words like colour, and words like travelled have two L's instead of one) and at this point I change the dictionary to U.S. and start fixing those spellings, too.

On my last pass I focused on working in earlier mentions of plot points that would later become important, so this time I'm going to pay attention to those moments and see a) if there's enough, b) if they feel natural and not jammed in, and c) if there's too many. (Update: I'm halfway through and so far so good. I can feel the story building as opposed to having those later moments come out of nowhere.)

Seeing things in a new format, even a change as simple as double space, makes a lot more stand out. I'm noticing a lot of times when I used an adjective combined with an action that said the same thing. The most recent example is "She gnaws anxiously on her lip as blah blah blah happens, then exhales her relief when it doesn't." The anxiety is implied by the rest of the words in the sentence, so "anxiously" can go. This is my third read-through (100<sup>th</sup> if you count how many times I re-read parts of the MS) and I'm only just now spotting it. Another example a few pages later is, "She shoots me a grateful look and says thanks." Well, thanks and gratitude are similar, so no need to say both. While I'd generally argue in favour of showing vs. telling, in this case I'm going to delete the action line since I think actually saying thank you would be more natural.

I do get more and more finicky the more times I read through, but it's natural to notice more things after so many viewings, and I'm naturally obsessed with this sort of thing anyway. I'm also someone who really hates to be told stuff I already know, so when I finally get this ready to send to some friends, I want them to point out stuff I didn't catch on my previous ninety-nine reads so I can keep improving instead of cursing myself for missing a typo/homonym/random character name change. (Guilty.)

Overall status update: Cover is ready. Back cover copy (blurb) is 98% done. Should have both ready to share by the weekend, which is so exciting because everything is finally starting to feel real. "Finally" sums up how I feel about this story. Like, OMG FINALLY.

Word count: 91,577

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 29**

### **ROUND THREE EDITS – PART TWO**

I'm really trying to go back and emphasize more of the "undeclared" theme. I keep forgetting it and it often turns out that when I'm looking for a way to improve a scene, reminding myself of the theme helps me find my focus and make sure the scene is essential to the story.

I've rewritten one whole scene and I need to rewrite one other. I keep putting that off, but I'll get it done this week. That should be the last major thing. I have a whole list of words I've used an absurd number of times and have gone through and painstakingly removed. (44 grabs, 81 smiles, and somehow, 205 heads!?! ) Once I get that scene written, I will read through once more, hopefully be satisfied enough to send to some readers, and start formatting.

Otherwise this week I've been doing some book housekeeping. This involves getting ISBN numbers and making website, Twitter & Facebook banners. I still can't afford to pay people to do this for me, so I do it myself and it takes me FOREVER since I have no idea what looks good and just fumble around until I settle on something. Then I think I've gotten everything on the website ready and realize I've forgotten nine links and everything directs visitors to the wrong page.

Up next: Write that new scene, read through again, this time keeping an eye out for problems but also for an excerpt scene and teaser quotes. Here's where I really need your feedback: what kind of teasers do you like to see? Sweet? Funny? Romantic? Sexy? I try to find a variety, but if one type is better than the others, I'll make sure to find more of those. Please tell me in the comments!

Word count: 88,056 (still missing a scene, though)

## #WednesdayWIPReport 30

### ROUND FOUR EDITS – PART ONE

I was scrolling through looking for that scene I had to rewrite when I found another one I'd deleted and needed to replace. That explains the previously low word count. Fortunately I made good notes about what needed to happen in this new/revised scene so it was a quick and easy rewrite and way better than what I had before. The original section was three separate scenes that took up 4K words. This new scene is 1500—much better!

I have now read this MS 5 full times, not counting all the miniature re-reads I did of certain parts. This morning I pulled out a scene I think I'm going to use for my excerpt and upon re-reading found two very basic, very obvious errors. Sigh.

The story reads much faster now, which is a great sign. When I'm reading and see something that needs fixing, I stop and dwell on it. The fact that I'm breezing through...well, I don't want to jinx myself, but fingers crossed! Once this read-through is done I'm going to send it to my friend for the first read (should be by Thursday or Friday). While she's reading (she's pretty fast, hopefully it takes her a week to ten days?) I'm going to start formatting. I have to format it three times: once for epub, once for Amazon, and once for paperback. I'll do them in that order, because the epub is what I'll use for NetGalley and I want to get that done first. Amazon has its own formatting requirements, so I'll do that next. It doesn't take terribly long once you remember how to do the formatting, and the reason I do it myself is because I'm a sort of a mistrusting control freak about this stuff, and honestly, once you see how fast it is to format, it's kind of like, why would I pay someone to do this? Plus I'm terrified that I'll get back a file I can't change then I'll want to make changes then I'll have to pay them again... So I do it myself. The huge downside to having three files (they're still Word files) is that when you see a change you want to make, you then have to make it three times. Every time. And it's super annoying. Anyway, I can't just wait until everything is finalized and then format all three because a) NetGalley, and b) you can't set your book for pre-order on Amazon until you upload the document (you can change it before release date, but you have to give them something). I'm hoping to have the epub formatted on the weekend. I still need to write the back matter, but that should be quick. Once I have an actual book on an actual e-reader, I'll make the release date official. I'm starting to get excited!

Word count: 90,014

ps: I was looking for a picture of Jessie Spano's "I'm so excited" moment, but all the pics I found just showed her looking devastated, so I picked this one because if I was a cheerleader, this is the cheer I would suggest. Then I would no longer be a cheerleader.

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 31**

### **ROUND FIVE EDITS**

I had an unexpected snow day last Friday, so I had three straight days to do little more than work on this book. I did all the things that come with preparing the book for release, like setting it up for pre-order and updating the website and making the teasers and preparing posts for FB and Twitter and making the digital files and finding my Kobo and recharging my Kobo and checking the file on my Kobo to make sure the epub is okay to send out to vendors. (For now. I will submit a better, polished version before release.) I don't even know if I spoke to anyone besides the cashier at the grocery store on Sunday. Even then I just mumbled, "Undeclared undeclared undeclared" until she gave me my receipt.

I also sent the book to my wonderful friend for her feedback, and she provided it in record time. Let's take this as a good sign: you don't read a book super fast unless you like it, right? RIGHT? So tonight (it's Tuesday because I forgot to do this WIP Report because I forgot tomorrow was Wednesday) I'm going to incorporate her feedback. Once that's in I'm going to bite the bullet and re-upload the epub and get it submitted for NetGalley. I'd like it to be available for review for as long as possible before release day to hopefully generate some positive buzz. Word of mouth is what really helped me with "Undecided," and I've got my fingers and toes crossed I get the same positive response.

Once that's out of the way I'm going to work on the paperback. I've decided to do that first instead of the Amazon file because I will have to get a proof sent to me, read THAT, note any changes, get my other friend to read a copy and make her notes, and hopefully after all that there will be no changes left to make to the Amazon file, I can just format and upload it. It has to be sent to Amazon a few days before release, which gives me about 2 ½ weeks to complete this. It's doable.

In addition to the #WednesdayWIPReport I have decided to do #TeaserTuesday and #FunFactFriday. I have a grand total of one fun fact ready.

In unrelated news, the fingernail I chopped off in December is nearly completely grown back, but after wearing a bandage for two months, that finger has warped nerve endings and everything feels like sandpaper.

Word count: 89,728

## #WednesdayWIPReport 32

### NETGALLEY & PAPERBACKS

So... "Undeclared" went up on NetGalley last week, and now I am truly wracked with nerves. For those who don't know, NetGalley is a site where (for a large fee) you can make your book available to reviewers who request it (as opposed to going around to individual reviewers to ask them if they'd like to review). After that you basically sit around and hope someone a) requests, b) reads, and c) reviews. Ideally, reviews positively, enthusiastically, and widely. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Getting someone to read your book is already super difficult. When my first book, "Just Once," came out, I really had very little guidance or help from the publisher with marketing. I wasn't familiar with book selling, even from a reader's standpoint, because I wasn't on social media, following the authors I liked, and seeing what they did. And believe it or not, people didn't magically discover my book and read it! So after that, slowly but surely, (and still slowly but surely), I started paying attention and trying to do the (affordable) things that successful authors were doing. I'm very lucky to have an author friend with more means to invest in her marketing who very generously tells me what worked for her and what didn't. Then I copy her. Or other people. Like an ape.

I spent the entirety of Saturday formatting the paperback. It was both torturous and interesting, because I like this sort of work, but I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm someone who can figure out how to do most anything, so I loathe hiring someone unless it involves terrible things, like yard work. So formatting took awhile. Then, when googling an answer for something, I visited a forum in which someone inquired about Drop Caps and of course I was like, WHAT ARE DROP CAPS? And googled that, and learned I couldn't live without them. (They're the large first letter of a first chapter you see in some books.) I couldn't make it work in the digital books (it just joined up with the chapter name for some reason, so if the first word of a chapter was "when," for example, the chapter was called, Chapter One W, which is not what I was going for). Anyway, I put them in all the chapters for the paperback, then I became obsessed with fleurons (the little things that distinguish between paragraph breaks, often just \*\*\*) and I picked a cool one, now when my proofs get here I'll see if it all worked.

Once the proofs arrive I'm going to give one to a friend and read one myself, make any changes, and incorporate all those changes into the .epub files and paperback files, then finally make the Amazon file. Then I guess I just keep waiting.

People often ask me what it's like to write a book. It involves a lot of waiting. Less so, if you self-pub because then you set the schedule, but then you publish it and...wait. And cry a little bit and have highs and lows, like every other person on the planet. Except maybe you're a bit more neurotic because you did, after all, spend two hours on those Drop Caps and not one review has praised you for your efforts.

12 days until release day! If you're not signed up for my newsletter, you should be...  
[www.juliannakeyes.com/newsletter.html](http://www.juliannakeyes.com/newsletter.html)

## **#WednesdayWIPReport 33**

### **HOUSEKEEPING**

I hate housekeeping. My sister got all the manic cleaning genes and I got a Roomba. When it comes to publishing housekeeping, however, I have a long list of almost-ready tasks that I keep partly in my head, partly on a whiteboard, and mostly on random scraps of paper.

I proofed the paperback and input those final changes into all three files, then generated a .mobi file for my Kindle, checked it, and found random errors. The Amazon file is tedious because you have to upload the file to Amazon, wait for it to “process” which, as I learned having done it five times tonight, is a process that varies in length from 5-30 hair-pulling minutes, email the device to my Kindle, delete the old book, open the new book, and find that for some ungodly reason, the formatting error on page seventeen IS STILL THERE.

This whole process is nerve-wracking and exciting, and, at times, frustrating, for obvious reasons.

Otherwise, I have drafted next week’s release day newsletter (there’s still time to sign up...); added an excerpt from “Undeclared” to the end of “Undecided” and re-uploaded all of those files; put “Undecided” on sale for the week before release so more people can find it; made sure my website is up to date; pondered the fact that the second most number of website referrals I get seem to come from a Russian porn site; tried to be more active on social media while simultaneously attempting to avoid reading any reviews/comments on the book so I can focus on making it great... I’ll take a picture of one of my to-do lists. (The “gonorr” in the upper corner is the only way I can remember which spelling of “gonorrhoea” Amazon prefers, because Word suggests I spell it differently.)

For each book release I prepare a week’s worth of release week posts, and I’ve been coming up with ideas for these posts. My ideas so far are: epilogues, supporting characters, expectations, and my favourite moment from the book. (Feel free to weigh in if you have something you’d like to see discussed.) Next Wednesday will not be a #WIPReport because there is no longer a work in progress. There will, however, be a W.I.P...but you will have to tune in to see what that the acronym stands for. ;)

We’re nearly there. Thanks for sticking it out this long! Only five more days to go...

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