



*Kimmery Martin*

## 201: Revising Your Book, and Getting It Right

**Gabriela Pereira:** Hello, and welcome, word nerds, to DIY MFA Radio, the show that will help you write more, write better, write smarter. I'm Gabriela Pereira, instigator of DIY MFA, and your host for this podcast. Now, let's talk writing.

Hello. Hello, word nerds. Gabriela here, and welcome back to DIY MFA Radio. Our show notes, today, are over at [diymfa.com/201](http://diymfa.com/201) because, OMG, it's Episode 201.

Today I am interviewing author Kimmery Martin about her debut book, *The Queen of Hearts*.

Kimmery Martin is an emergency medicine doctor, born and raised in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky. She's also, like me, a lifelong literary nerd. She reviews books, interviews authors, and works extensively with the library foundation in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she resides with her husband and three children.

Her debut novel is *The Queen of Hearts*, and that's what we are going to be talking about today. So, welcome, Kimmery, it is so great to have you on the show.

**Kimmery Martin:** Thank you so much. I am thrilled to be here.

**GP:** You know, I feel such a-- Like, I feel like we're kind of in parallel lives; like we're both moms, and we're both like literary nerds. So, as I was reading your bio and prepping for this show, I was so excited because I felt like; OMG, we're like in the same zone, I love it.

So, I am totally digging your debut book; and I was hoping you could share with us a little bit of context around it, the story behind the story, as it were. Can you tell us, what inspired you to write this novel in the first place?

**KM:** Absolutely. Well, probably, unlike some of your guests, I did not have a writing background. As you mentioned, I'm a physician; so, for me to write a novel is really going out on a limb, but I am a reader, first and foremost. I love reading books; and I probably read two or three a week, when I can.

And after a while, so many people were asking me for book recommendations that I started my own Book Review Website. And as I was writing reviews of other people's books, I realized how much I enjoyed writing; and, in general, I love language and I love words.

And so, I got to the point where I thought I would try to do the thing that I admire the most, which was, you know, being an author; and sat down and started writing one day, and quickly realized how compelling it was.

**GP:** I love it. And I'm guessing also that the medical themes in this book, obviously, are drawn from your own experiences in medical school and as a doctor. Can you talk a little bit about that, like translating real life experience into the fictionalized world of your novel?



**KM:** Right. So, what's the number one piece of advice given to all authors? You know, particularly all debut authors? They tell you, "Write what you know." And I know the medical world, and there was never any question in my mind that I would set my novel in a medical setting.

I couldn't learn to write and learn another industry or subject. And plus, it's interesting, you know, people are always fascinated by medical stories. Medical TV shows are so popular; and I think it's because, first of all, everyone has some familiarity with that industry, we all know what a doctor does.

Like when I tell people I'm an ER doctor, they have no trouble understanding that – unlike, you know, somebody in Arcane financial field or something. And secondly, you know, doctors see so much of the human condition. We, as I say; we're there when you take your first breath and we're there when you take your last, and we see the highs and the lows of people's lives.

And so, it really makes for, you know, excellent fodder for a novel. And then, plus, having an understanding of the technicalities of something when I read a book myself, my favorite kind of books are those in which you're kind of a fly on the wall, seeing some specific topic really in depth. So, it was fun to apply what I knew about the world of medicine to a book.

**GP:** You know, it's interesting also like what you were saying about like the world, right? Because a lot of times, people think of world-building, like writers think of world-building as something that only happens if you're writing like super sci-fi or like, you know, fantastical Lord of the Rings-esque – you know, George R. R. Martin Game of Throne style Fantasy, right?

And that like, we forget that there are worlds within our normal, everyday contemporary worlds that are also very unique and different; and that if we kind of look inward at our own experience, we might have a little micro world that is sort of unique and that other people would want to kind of have a view into.

**KM:** Yes, that is absolutely true; and that is one reason that, for me, beta readers or critique partners were so important because it's kind of like you don't know what you don't know.

And when you're talking about an industry that uses a lot of lingo [laughs] and a lot of acronyms, it was really helpful for me to have other people read this world – this fictional world that I created that's based on a real one – so that I had a sense of how much technical stuff is too much, where do you lose a reader by going too deeply into jargon. So, I had help toning it down a little, in that respect.

**GP:** You know, speaking of worlds, like even aside, the medical world apart, there's that opening scene in *The Queen of Hearts* where like, it took me a few beats. Like it took me about three pages to figure out, or two pages to figure out that like we were not in some board meeting room; and you know, spoiler alert for people.

I mean, it's the literally the first two pages; they're in a preschool PTA-style meeting. And as a mom, it clicked together and it was such a picture of the typical, kind of, Hotty Toddy preschool, which my kids – you know, for better or for worse – attended; and just kind of that same vision of like the same world that I had been privy to. And so, for me, that's like another world, right?

**KM:** Yes.

**GP:** Like people who are not in that world, and haven't had a preschooler in a school like that, don't know what that's like about – but, OMG, it was a perfect snapshot.



**KM:** Yes. I mean, I'm a little bit of a smart-arse; and haven't suffered through 10,000 meetings – and I hate to pick on the preschool, but because every single meeting you ever go to is the same way. And I'm like-- I'm just like, why do we have to have so many meetings?

**GP:** And you know, I love the preschool that my kids attended. It's a wonderful school, but still like there is that humor. Like I totally get it. And like, you know, you see movies like *Bad Moms*, for instance, that like totally make fun of the whole PTA scene.

And so, there is a world, like even worlds that we think are ordinary like the PTA or, you know, what it's like to be at a meeting at your kid's preschool; that's still a world. And I think a lot of readers don't realize, or a lot of writers don't realize the wealth of like world-building they have at their own fingertips.

**KM:** Oh absolutely. We all have these different facets of our lives that are useful to pull into fiction.

**GP:** Exactly. And shifting gears a little bit to looking at your characters because both Zadie and Emma, the two primary characters, are so compelling. Can you tell us a little bit about how you developed these two personalities, where these characters came from – and, sort of, how you brought them to life on the page?

**KM:** For me, writing a novel was intensely character-driven. I actually didn't even have a plot in mind as I started, other than I knew I wanted it to be about a group of friends and medical school.

And so, my novel – just to give a little background – is set in two Time Periods. One in the Present Day, where my two protagonists are wives and mothers and practicing physicians. And those chapters alternate with the past, when they were in their third year of medical school.

And since I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to happen, I focused a lot on who the people were. So, I have one character is Zadie; she's a cardiologist, she has four children. The other main character is Emma, who is a Trauma Surgeon with one child.

And Zadie's voice came to me really easily, she's the primary protagonist; and Emma is a point of view character, but just slightly less prevalent throughout the book than Zadie is. Emma's personality arose more as a foil to Zadie's as a contrast to hers.

Zadie is lighthearted and funny and a bit goofy. Emma is more meticulous, and shy, and awkward – but they share many things in common; they're both very smart, very driven people with similar senses of humor. And the more I wrote them, the more they came into being – and developed their own quirks and foibles and, you know, aspects of their personality.

**GP:** You know, it's interesting also what you touched on that Zadie is sort of the protagonist, the true protagonist – and Emma's a very prominent supporting character because that's a question that I grapple with a lot; and I've asked a lot of authors who've appeared on this show, sort of who the protagonist is in the story. So, it sounds like Zadie is the protagonist in this story. Is that the case?

**KM:** She is the primary protagonist, yes.

**GP:** And so, as far as like Emma's role, and then all the other supporting characters in the story, how do you see their roles relative to like the development of the character of Zadie in this story?

**KM:** Well, it's interesting because I actually almost enjoyed writing the secondary characters in the



book more than I enjoyed writing the protagonist; I had a lot of fun with all the other ones. And as a matter of fact, one character in my book gets much more attention than any other character does in reviews on Goodreads, and Amazon, and that kind of place.

And that's a very minor character, which is funny to me, that people see so much on this one, you know, smaller character. But I think all of them do revolve around Zadie, in some fashion. You know, she is definitely the nexus of the novel.

**GP:** And so, can you talk a little bit about, how these little, like how you brought these minor characters to life? Like for me, one of the minor characters-- There were two that really jumped out at me.

One of them is the daughter, Zadie's daughter that we meet in the first chapter – and who sort of pops up, and, sort of, just the way she talks and her language; I mean, I could see my own daughter who's now almost four when she was maybe two-and-a-half or three speaking in the same kind of verbiage, and it just felt very real to me.

And the other character that really jumped out at me was Emma's husband, who I just thought was hilarious and just such an interesting quirky character. And like, he felt very real to me even though like, you know, we see him in just little snatches here and there, but it just, he felt like a very real character.

Can you talk about how you brought characters who might appear only in little bursts in the story to life, and really like made them feel well-rounded and real?

**KM:** Well, you absolutely nailed it because those are the two characters that get mentioned a lot.

**GP:** They're just such great characters, right? I love them. They're both wonderful.

**KM:** Yeah, they are lovable, and people love a lovable character. I mean, I think it's fine to have a protagonist who, you know, veers toward the evil or the unlikeable, if you can pull that off. But I think you do need some characters that people are going to just adore.

And in my book, the one that really fulfills that function is the three-year-old Delaney. And, I'm not kidding when I say; I have looked through my reviews, and at half of them talk about her--

**GP:** Yeah.

**KM:** -even though she's only in a handful of scenes. Ironically, she is also the only character who was really based on a real person, [laughs] and that's because my daughter was three – when I was writing the novel – and provided me with just such excellent force material all the time, that I was able to just pull from reality to create that character.

And I thought, 'Wow, this is fine, she's illiterate – and there's going to be no fallout from this and that.' Now, of course, she's learning to read; and she keeps trying to read the book.

And why it was an amalgamation of several people I know in real life with little fictional bits thrown in – as, actually, I must admit many characters are. And I would suspect that that is true of all writers.

You know, you pull little snatches from things that you've seen or experienced – but I think the key with both of them is that (A) they're kind of funny... and (B) they're flawed, but in a funny way; and they seem real. So, I think the key to getting people drawn into your secondary characters is to give them a distinct personality that people can like.



**GP:** You know, I mean, what I thought, for instance, with Delaney that was really smart was that, you know-- Because the tendency with a three-year-old with like the adorable token three-year-old, is to have this character who basically just shows up and looks like Shirley Temple-esque... and adorable, and smiles, and says the cute thing, and then they disappear.

But yet, we meet her because she's in the principal's office because she just bit another kid. And so, that is a very visceral experience that as a mom who has had a child who bit another kid at one point; like that is a very visceral response that a mother has when her kid is like the one being called out.

You know, like right away, we feel both empathy for the mom – but then we're also like, you know, we can't help but love this kid who's going, 'Honey, Dear', to her own mom. And like, you know, she's so adorable; and yet, she's just bit someone – like, that's not okay. Like she's three, she was being aggressive.

So, like there's that, like you said, she's flawed in her own three-year-old way; and yet, she's so adorable. So, like the two things kind of are in the same package, and that counterpoint is what makes the character interesting.

**KM:** And when you think about it, what are the things that we love about three-year-olds? You know, they are filter-less. They say what they think. You know, they're intensely curious; and therefore, they're often getting into what we would consider to be, you know, ridiculous troublesome situations.

But to them, they're just exploring, you know? It's kind of analyzing what it is that makes a given age or a given type of person unique, can help you think of some quirky and illustrative ways to display them in a book.

**GP:** And I think what makes it interesting also is kind of the way that character – like the three-year-old, sort of, not just what she's doing and kind of what's happening, you know, the little conflict that we're seeing within that one character, but then sort of the ripple effect that it has on the mom.

Like the fact that this child has just bit another child; and it's not just any other child, it is the child of like the mom's archnemeses at the meeting that we were just at.

So, it's sort of like compounds all the tension that's been building up that would've been different if it had been any random kid she had bit – or like, you know, I don't know, the teacher or whatever, it wouldn't have had the same significance and meaning that it has when we find out exactly what had happened, you know, the biting incident, what that entails.

**KM:** And not only is Zadie a cardiologist, but she's a pediatric cardiologist.

**GP:** Yes.

**KM:** So, she's trained in pediatrics, so, you know, of course, her child is the one misbehaving.

**GP:** Exactly. It's kind of like, yeah, it sort of adds all the pressure; like it keeps piling on, on top of Zadie, all that extra pressure. So, can you talk a little bit about that? Because I think that first chapter especially is almost like a great example, like a sort of a little micro masterclass on how to build tension around a character.

Can you talk about how you continuously piled on more pressure to Zadie until we get to the end of the chapter – and we sort of see like, oh my gosh, this thing, she just gets this news, and ah!



**KM:** Yeah. So, she's balancing several things at once. There's almost a micro thread going through this first chapter because what she's focused on is a text that she just got from Emma referencing this very uncomfortable time period in their lives that they just don't ever discuss with each other.

So, she's unnerved by that, and she's dipping back into some recollections trying to figure out what the heck is going on with this text. But in the meantime, she's in a, you know, a kind of a high-pitched tense meeting with a bunch of other women; and then she's pulled out of the meeting to say that her daughter has bitten someone. So, I didn't--

I feel like kind of a fraud when I talk about the techniques of writing because when I wrote that I didn't know the techniques of writing, I didn't think to read a book on how to write a book as I was writing a book, which I should have done because my approach led to, you know, 20 kinds of revision.

But now that I've looked back on it later, I realize, 'Okay, yes, that's exactly what you want to do in fiction is create micro tensions throughout.' You know, you have your big storyline and your big question that your protagonist needs to answer, but in every scene, you want it building towards something... and some little obstacle popping up.

**GP:** So, you referred to the revision process. So, it sounds like a lot of this was instinctual, right? That you, kind of, did it and then had to revise it out. So, how much revision-- Like, how did you go through and revise it to build that tension in that way?

**KM:** Well, it's possible that this is the most revised novel in the history of novels--

[laughter]

**KM:** -because it was a lot. I truly didn't have a clue how to write when I wrote it. And to give you an example of that, I mentioned that, you know, almost half the book is set in the past. And I actually sat down and wrote all of those chapters as a standalone novel, originally, thinking, 'Okay, this is going to be about a group of friends in medical school.'

And I got nearly finished with that; and I thought, 'This is so medical, and maybe it's boring a little bit to be, like every scene is set, basically, in a hospital.' And I thought, 'Wouldn't it be interesting if we saw these characters a few years down the road when they've matured some, and they have children and husbands and jobs, and there's this tremendous secret hanging between them?' Wouldn't it be interesting to see how that affects them then?

So, I started going back and writing scenes set, you know, 10 years later; and interspersing those with the original ones, and I have a tendency to be wordy. I probably wound up ultimately excising at least 100,000 words from the novel after, you know, I started with beta readers and critique partners, and then I hired a local editor.

And then after I signed with Penguin Random House, they wanted a big hunk of the novel rewritten with a different plot line that someone in their, I don't know, publicity or marketing or some other department thought of. So, I really wound up with a huge amount of revision, which it needed, most definitely.

**GP:** So, let's talk about that also, like getting feedback from people, like you got a lot-- It sounds like you got a lot of different feedback from people; and at some point, you have to-- I have to imagine that maybe you didn't agree with every single piece of feedback you received because that's a natural response from most writers, right?



So, how did you handle it when you got feedback, and it wasn't, you know, just spot on, 'Oh yeah, I totally should do that?' How did you sort of process the feedback - and then decide whether or not to apply it, and how to do so?

**KM:** Well, I definitely checked my ego because again, I wouldn't claim to be an expert writer. So, when people that I considered to be, you know, fairly authoritative on the subject, said, "This needs to go," I was mostly okay with it. Now, there were some times that I pushed back.

There was a scene in the hospital where it's Zadie's first day on the ER rotation, and she goes in to see a patient who completely derails her; she's supposed to get in and out kind of quickly. And, this guy has been--

He's got an ankle injury, and he takes up like four pages of just like wasting her time; and therefore, kind of wasting the reader's time because he didn't invent the plot at all, he was just funny.

And so, that would've been an obvious scene to cut; and I think my editor did want to cut that, and I said, "No, listen, I want to leave the scene." First of all, this scene is freaking hilarious; and it is sort of illustrative, in a way, of what happens to doctors because they're under all this time pressure - and, you know, people are going off on tangents left and right.

And so, it's kind of like an inside wink that my book went on a tangent when the point of it was that patients go on tangents; and they wound up letting me keep that scene because I felt strongly about it - and, you know, I picked my battles, and let a lot of other things go.

Now, in terms of the big rewrite; the one that my publisher asked me to do where I changed the whole second half of the book, and added another plotline, and changed the ending - that one was probably six months of work that they asked for because, as you know, you change something, anything in a book... and it has threads throughout the book that you have to go back and make sure are still consistent.

So, to change everything that much in the second half of the novel required changing quite a bit in the first half of the novel too; and it was a lot of work, and I don't-- They didn't give me a whole lot of guidance on how to achieve it.

They just said, "Let's have this happen, let's have this happen." And my editor was wonderful and always available if I had questions, but I had to figure out on my own how to do all that. Having said that though, I think it worked; I think it made the novel better.

**GP:** So, in terms of the mechanics of like, how you actually reworked and then kept track of all those threads, like how did you keep - essentially yeah, keep track of everything, like all the little moving parts as you were completely overhauling the second half of your book?

Like, did you have any, like, down in the weeds, down in the trenches, tips or techniques that you can share with listeners on how they can do it, if they have to, if they're faced with a scenario like that?

**KM:** No, I want somebody to share those with me.

[laughter]

**KM:** I tried-- I tried Scrivener because I thought, how great would that be - to be able to, you know, bot back and forth between chapters when I'm changing so much stuff and to flag things; and I could never master it.



I spent about four days trying; and ultimately was, you know, nearly homicidal because I could not get it to do what I wanted it to do. And I gave it that, but for the people that can use a program like that, I would think that that would be hugely helpful.

So, what I did was I memorized certain passages in the book; and that wasn't a big effort, I kind of knew them. But then I would just type into the search function. I wrote in Pages because I have an Apple, I would type into the search function like a little snatch of a phrase; and then I could go back and forth very quickly from scene to scene.

But obviously, that would not-- That would not be ideal for people. I also had printed out a copy and used Post-its, and I tried making myself some, you know, diagrams and flow charts, but I turned out I selected that too. [laughs] I may be giving you the worst answer you've ever had here.

**GP:** No, but this-- I love the honesty here because, at the end of the day, it's, you know, there's no perfect process; and this is the process that worked for you, and that produced this awesome novel.

So, at the end of the day, I think it's great for listeners to hear that there are different ways to do it; and maybe someone else is also out there cursing Scrivener and saying, "Dagnabbit, why can't I figure this out?" And then they might be able to pull from what you're saying, and be able to apply it to their own process. So, I love this.

**KM:** Yeah, I agree. I mean, everybody's got their process.

**GP:** So, talking a little bit about juggling those points of view. So, it sounded like you had things pretty much just in the past; and then you added the whole like, you know, juggling the two timelines. Did you have the dual point of view from the beginning or was that something that you added in the process of writing the book as well?

**KM:** I think the earliest drafts of the book were in third-person.

**GP:** Oh my gosh.

**KM:** So, I wrote the whole book in third-person; and I was not getting anywhere with my querying, which I'm sure will come up in a minute. And so, I started tinkering with the thing, and I was like, 'How can I make this a better book? Nobody's even wanting to look at it.'

And I switched to the first-person for a chapter and, right away, I felt like that was a better voice for this novel because these women are very accessible; and really the key to it is that you get into their personalities.

And so, it worked so much better as a first-person's story that, you know, I literally manually went through – and changed every verb and every pronoun and, and, you know, did it all to switch the whole thing to first-person.

I think once I started getting into the first person, I thought, let's make Emma a first-person character as well, so you can really see what's going on in her head since she's so central to the conflict of the story.

**GP:** I love that. So, tell us a little bit about that process of the querying process – and like, you know, how did you navigate that if you were hearing Nos... and then, when did you make that decision? Like what told you, "Okay, it's time to, to go back and revisit the novel"?



**KM:** I did exactly what everyone tells you not to do; and gleefully, joyfully queried, with no idea what I was doing, and way before the book was ready. You know, I finished it, and I was like, 'Yep, that's ready to go.'

And I started querying; and boy, my queries were just god awful. I think they were making people stab themselves with a fork in the eye every time they tried to read them. So, mostly I didn't get even answers. Occasionally, I would get formal rejections.

And about that time I was like, 'Oh, well, I guess maybe my book is not ready.' And, I started-- I got a local editor to help me look at it, and she was fantastic; and I rewrote the query, and still got nowhere. I sent the query into Janet Reid, the Query Shark, I'm guessing a lot of your lessons are familiar with her.

**GP:** She's been on the show.

**KM:** She said it's terrible.

[laughter]

**GP:** Did she-- Did the Shark review your query?

**KM:** She did. At the time, she had some kind of, I think, it was called the Chum Bucket or something. It was something where she would review queries every so often just out of the goodness of her heart, for struggling little writers.

And I sent mine in thinking that she might like it and then she was like, 'This is just-- This has got to be completely redone.' And I did, and I actually started to get a lot more traction after that. So, definitely, you know, you can listen to her if you're trying -- but the real breakthrough for me with querying did not happen until I changed the title of the book.

So, what happened is I went to a writer's conference in North Carolina; and I paid extra to have a sit down with an agent who was going to critique the first 20 pages of the manuscript.

And I intended, it was a man who represents a lot of, you know, Science Fiction, and the book I had written was women's fiction. So, I sent him in the first 20 pages of a biotech thriller that I was also working on because I just went off on a tangent, and I love science.

And so, I sent him those pages, but there was some mix up I had sent in my other pages for another part of the conference; and they wound up giving him the ones from the Women's Fiction novel instead. And he actually really liked it. He was really useful, but he said, "Listen, you have to change the title of your book because your voice is kind of light and funny." And, the title I had at the time was Trauma Season.

And I thought, 'Okay, he's right, I need to somehow reflect some humor in this.' So, I changed it to Trauma Queen; and again, one of the protagonists is a trauma surgeon. Right after I did that, I had six full requests from agents.

**GP:** That is really powerful information, right? Because like the power of just a working title and having the right-- Even if it's not the finalized title -- obviously, the title of your book is now The Queen of Hearts. But just having Trauma Queen that is tied -- like, obviously, I can see the connection there; and I can probably even reason why they would've changed it to The Queen of Hearts from that.

But like, it makes such a difference, right? Like clearly, all of a sudden, boom, just changing the working title made a huge impact in just getting your foot in the door.



**KM:** It did. And who would've known? I mean, it's a catchy title; it implies a little bit of humor, it gives you some sense of what the book might be about. And I know they say titles aren't terribly important in the beginning, but just, in my case, it happened to be a lot more eye-catching.

**GP:** Absolutely. I think it also tells us like even, you know, both of the titles, the current one and then the interim – you know, Trauma Queen title – I think it captures the feeling of the book better than Trauma Season, which probably, would've implied something. I don't know, much more like heavy

**KM:** Grim.

**GP:** Yeah, grim, sort of like, kind of like the difference between Grey's Anatomy and ER when they have one of those like really melodramatic like, you know, everyone is about to die episodes, you know what I mean? Like it kind of like-- It's a different feel, right? Like heavier feel.

**KM:** Yeah. Yeah. And, they didn't want Trauma Queen-- The publisher did not want Trauma Queen as the title because they didn't want the word 'trauma' in the title at all, and I see their point there.

**GP:** And I think also the fact that Zadie is the cardiologist, it makes sense that it would be The Queen of Hearts if she's the primary character. Like trauma is Emma's thing, so then it almost like moves the focus into Emma's camp if Zadie's really the protagonist. So, it totally makes sense.

But I love getting a window into the process of where the title came from because I think, you know, like you said, it might not mean-- It might not be the deciding factor for many writers in the query process – but clearly, it had an impact for you. And that's a really valuable insight, I think, for other writers who were in the trenches trying to make it happen.

**KM:** Yeah, well not only that, but Zadie was not a cardiologist in my manuscript – as we came up with the title Queen of Hearts, she became a cardiologist.

[laughter]

**GP:** Oh, that's amazing.

**KM:** She was a pediatrician. Yeah.

**GP:** That's amazing. That's so-- Again, when you made that decision – obviously, that had a ripple effect, you had to like follow the threads, but what was sort of the deciding factor in shifting her from just a pediatrician to a cardiologist?

**KM:** Well, I turned out to be just an absolutely god awful title generator too. I thought of about 500 that no one liked. And I can't remember if it was me or the editor, but one of us said, "What about The Queen of Hearts, if she was a cardiologist?"

I guess it must have been me, my editor probably wouldn't have done that. I had this image in my mind of an anatomical drawing of a heart, as a cover image. And I thought, 'Well, that would kind of tie things together in an interesting way – the artwork, and the title, and the character's career.'

So, since I'm a doctor-- I mean, I'm not a cardiologist, but being a doctor, I had enough familiarity with cardiology to make the change without too much trouble. It took me probably some days to go through; and be sure that there weren't any, you know, references that were wrong or whatever.



And I'm not saying I got all the medicine right. Some of it I changed for creative reasons and some of it I probably just made mistakes on. But I talked to some cardiologists too to be sure that most of what I was getting down was accurate, and I thought it did find that making kind of a neat little tie-in.

**GP:** And I mean, and now, you know, for people who have seen the-- You know, if you look on the show notes, you'll see the cover of the book. Like, it kind of all ties together, right? Like you've got that drawing of the heart and The Queen of Hearts title.

It kind of goes to show that there's a lot that goes into figuring out and tying together the whole package that becomes the book. It's not just, let's slap a title on this, you know, kind of, let's throw a book cover on it. Like it all has to tie together in order for it to work.

**KM:** Yeah, because you're selling a complete package. You're selling a-- You're marketing. And the thing that's such genius about the cover of this book is that the cover gets a enormous amount of attention on social media.

They really knocked it out of the park with the design of it. It's very beautiful, it's very eye-catching; it has a ton of hidden symbolism and it makes you look twice at it, but it does tie very neatly into the whole package.

You know, you're trying to compete with all of these books in a bookstore and online just to get a glance at the book. So, I'm certain all your listeners know how important a cover is.

**GP:** And it also kind of goes to show that like in order to make all of this tie together, there was still editing work that had to happen, right? Like that you then, when you figured out The Queen of Hearts, and you had this idea like, 'Oh, an image of a heart,' and then you had to go back and edit the book to make it so that she is a cardiologist so it all kind of packages together. So, it kind of shows that like the artistry and the craft of the book is tied inextricably with all of the other elements of marketing and packaging it all together.

**KM:** Yes, that's true. I mean, we would like to think that we have this artistic purity, and can write for the sake of writing, but you're also writing for the sake of an audience that can't know about your book unless somebody brings it to their attention. So, all of these things do matter.

**GP:** I love it. I'm a total marketing nerd. So, this, like, tickled-- I'm tickled pink just by looking at the cover and hearing all the little behind-the-scenes insights.

So, before we wrap things up, I just wanted to get an idea of like the process, because I'm guessing that a lot of listeners really resonate with the idea that; you are a doctor, you are a mom, you're also writing, you wrote this book – and like, clearly, you'd had to juggle a lot.

And I know what that's like because, you know, between DIY MFA and being a mom and writing it, there's a lot of juggling involved. How did you manage to carve out that time? Because I have to imagine, it must have been incredibly challenging.

**KM:** Yes, I get that question all the time; and my initial answer is, I did it really badly, because I don't like the myth that we are, you know, superwoman and we do everything beautifully, and that, you know, you can achieve everything.

You can achieve many things, but some of them, you know, sometimes got to give. And so, for a while, for me it was, you know, like hygiene; I didn't shave my legs for a while, I was not sleeping very much, my house was a wreck.



You know, I kind of gave up on some stuff, but as I became more and more convinced that I wanted to finish the book, I was finding it so compelling. I was dreaming about it, and waking up thinking about it, and thinking about it while I was exercising.

And as I started to realize that this was something I legitimately loved doing, then I started restructuring my life to make it happen. So, I gave up on some volunteer commitments; and then, serendipitously, I was offered this job.

I almost hesitate to tell this story because people are going to hate – but I was offered this job in an office building in a big downtown skyscraper in my city, which had a lot of financial institutions in it.

And they had an allergy clinic in the building, and the financial guys would go in there and get their allergy shots so they didn't have to leave downtown. And they wanted an ER doctor to sit in there, in case anyone had an anaphylactic reaction to their shot.

So, I was getting paid to sit in a little room – see, now you see why I'm saying don't hate because writers hate that. They're like, you got paid to write. But it worked out so that I could finish this novel, and I decided to put the ER on hold. I stopped working in the ER, I switched to the allergy place.

I got some help with my kids, you know, because I have three kids and they all have sports at the same exact time, and I can't do all of it. So, I got in 20 carpools and I hired some help and I took the allergy job; and I just changed things around so that I could do it. Writing is not easy.

**GP:** You know, and while you say that, like, 'Oh, I think people will hate this.' Like, you know-- I don't know. I resonate with that because I think, at the end of the day, it's about making choices.

And I have to imagine that, you know, if your love was emergency medicine, that taking this other position might have, like, there might be a part of 'doctor you' that maybe was a little sad about that.

So, like, I see it as making choices; and at the end of the day, it's like, you know, what made sense for you was choosing the allergy clinic. But yeah, this is why, a lot of times, I get a lot of pushback from some of the word nerds in the DIY MFA community because I'm often a little bit forceful in saying that you need to just--

It's not about like finding time, it's not like time is loose change you find in the couch; you just have to do it. Anyone can make that time and carve it out if they, you know, set their mind to it and make choices accordingly. So, I think it's like, 'Yeah, it's wonderful.'

It can seem glamorous to say, "Oh, I'm getting paid to sit somewhere and write." But at the same time, that was a choice. And I think people need to sort of think about, in their own lives, how can they make choices as well?

**KM:** Yes. It's not finding time, it's prioritizing time. And I did have to give up a career that I really like, that I really love, to be able to write full-time; and I had to give up, you know, money too.

**GP:** So, it's about choices, I think. And at the end of the day, people need to weigh out the different choices to make it work in their lives, to make it work for them. And at the end of the day, it's not, no one way is going to work for each person. Like the choices you might make might be completely different from the ones that I make.

I remember trying to juggle writing and, you know, attempting horribly at being a perfect mom, and failing miserably at it, to the point where I literally one day forgot my kid at school. Like that was how



bad it got. Like, I was just such a basket case that suddenly I get home; and I'm like, 'Wait, where's the kid?' And I'm like, oh. Yeah. And so, like--

**KM:** I know, I've done that.

**GP:** That was the moment where I was just like, 'All right, Gabriela, like you've really got it, you got to get it together and figure something out because it's not going to go any further.' So, I think, yeah, it's about making choices. So, what's next for you? Do you have any other projects that you would like to give us some teasers, give listeners some teasers about?

**KM:** Well, yes, I still want to publish that biotech novel, at some point – but I'm working now on, not really a spinoff, but my next novel is going to be about one of the minor characters in a *The Queen of Hearts*. She was a med school friend in Georgia, she's now a urologist; and my next novel is about her.

**GP:** Ooh, I'm excited for that. And I always like to end with the same question, what's your number one tip for writers?

**KM:** Well, I bet you can guess what mine is going to be.

[laughter]

**KM:** I am going to say, "Read – read, read, read." I never would've started writing had I not had the words of other people flowing through my head in this sort of inspirational montage.

And when you-- Like, when I get stuck when I'm writing, I just quit. I go to my shelf where I keep like my 10 favorite books; and I'll open them at random, and read something by, you know, I don't know, Bill Bryson, who I love because he never writes anything boring.

And I'll read his sentences for a while, until I'm feeling really fired up and inspired. Or if I'm at a different kind of point in my manuscript, you know, I'll pick a different writer with a different feel, but reading other people's stuff really engages me.

**GP:** I love it. And that is such great advice; and it brings us full circle, right, because that's where we started out at the beginning, and you shared how much you love to read first. So, I love how it just all ties together in the end. This has been so wonderful, Kimmery, thank you so much for being on the show.

**KM:** Thank you for having me. I am so honored.

**GP:** All right, word nerds. Thanks so much for listening. Keep writing and keep being awesome.

