Allison Hunter

Trellis Literary Management

Crafting a Query Letter

REMEMBER TO INCLUDE: THE HOOK, THE BOOK, AND THE COOK

THE HOOK: 1-2 line "elevator pitch" selling the book.

- This could be a brief description of the plot, if it's very high concept – "A queer romance between two female NASA astronauts in the 1980s"
- This could include comps – "THE NEST meets Knives Out"
- This could explain who the audience is – "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE for the TikTok generation"

The goal of the hook is to entice a reader, without knowing anything else about the book.

THE BOOK: A few paragraphs of plot description

- You want to make sure the agent knows what happens beyond the beginning of the book, but you do not need to give away the ending or any big twists!

THE COOK: Your bio

- This should not be longer than one paragraph
- If you've been published anywhere before, include that here, but there is no expectation you will have been. The same goes for a degree like an MFA.
- If you are writing nonfiction on a particular topic, you will want to include your relevant background. For instance, if you're writing a book about plants, and you're a botanist, the agent needs to know that!
- If you don't know what else to write, include personal things like where you live, who you live with (spouse/family/pets), hobbies, etc. The goal here is for the agent to get to know you.

SAMPLE QUERIES

Dear Allison,

The Family Stone meets Emma Straub's *All Adults Here* in *[TITLE]*, a 90,000-word women's fiction novel with multiple POVs centered around the chaotic, loving (and only *slightly* dysfunctional) New York Italian Marcantonio family:

Theresa Marcantonio thought that she was heading to LaGuardia to pick up her youngest son and his new girlfriend, but it turns out her son missed his flight so it's just the girlfriend—alone. (And she's *definitely* not Italian.) But that's just a hiccup! It will all be *fine*. Theresa has been planning this year's holiday gathering of the extended Marcantonio family for months and absolutely *nothing* is going to go wrong.

Of course, things are about to spiral wildly out of Theresa's perfectly manicured grasp, and no amount of expertly fried arancini can stop it.

Over the course of a week together, the Marcantonios must navigate everything from an unexpected loss to an equally unexpected pregnancy announcement and a whole host of family secrets as they decide what's more important: being the perfect family, or just being family?

As a storyteller, my background as a former journalist (*St. Augustine Record*) who has spent more than a decade working on marketing teams in publishing (HarperCollins, Scholastic, Macmillan) cemented my belief that everyone has a story to tell, whether they're an overlooked figure from history or a modern-day family from Long Island, like mine.

I'm enclosing the opening pages below and would be delighted to provide the completed manuscript should you wish to get to know the Marcantonios better. Make sure you come hungry! Theresa won't rest until she serves you second helpings.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

[AUTHOR]

Dear Allison,

Given your interest in relationship-based fiction and secrets as well as Lucy Foley's writing, I am submitting my debut novel *[TITLE]* (87,500 words), a story of family history, buried secrets, and ambition pushed to its extremes. An upmarket mystery, the story blends the status-driven characters of Adam White's *THE MIDCOAST* with the family dynamics and humor of the film *KNIVES OUT*.

Alexandra Davenport's housewarming weekend is supposed to be her triumph. On the cusp of selling her tech startup, she plans to show off her success to her parents Elizabeth and Peter and older siblings Nick, a consultant, and Molly, an internet-famous chef. Yet her family arrives on Friday night with their attention elsewhere. Each is looking for favors from Richard Hayes, the family's oldest friend and the man who has always solved their problems. But when Richard arrives, he steals Alexandra's moment by announcing his decision to retire to France, and the end of his time as the family fixer.

On Saturday morning, his friend Carolyn Archer knocks on Alexandra's front door expecting to join Richard for the weekend. Instead, she finds him dead and the family in crisis. Carolyn quickly realizes Richard's death was no accident despite the family insisting otherwise. With emergency services delayed by storms and tensions rising in the isolated mansion, Carolyn must figure out which family member will do anything to win - even kill the man in their way.

My writing has appeared in *Chicago Literati*, *New York Magazine's Vulture*, McSweeney's, Points in Case, and other publications, and I am a reviewer for *Booklist*. When writing, I drew on my experience with the lives of consultants, lawyers, and academics coupled with my fascination with the *Bon Appetit* blowup of 2020 and scam culture of the late 2010s. I am also working on a second project, *[TITLE]*, a suspense novel about old friendships and betrayal at a destination wedding in Greece.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon.

All the best,

[AUTHOR]

Dear Allison,

[TITLE] is a contemporary romance, complete at 95,000 words. It features a strong voice and a blend of emotion and wit like YOU DESERVE EACH OTHER, with themes similar to DON'T YOU FORGET ABOUT ME, and a sporty setting like Hannah Orenstein's HEAD OVER HEELS.

Chronic job-hopper Annie Radford needs to stick with her new gig long enough that interviewers stop writing "Flaky?" in the margins of her resume. Unfortunately, that new gig is the last one she wanted: her old position as videographer for her alma mater's basketball team. Worse, on her first day she learns that layoffs are looming, and she'll have to outperform her college coworker, Ben Callahan, to make it past the end of the season.

Annie can't afford another short-term stint in her work history. But data whiz Ben has dedicated his life to Tiger basketball. He's annoyingly wholesome, hot, and clinging to a grudge against Annie for abandoning him senior year when she quit her internship. They fight to prove themselves indispensable, and Ben is intent on freezing her out. Literally, he's a thermostat tyrant. She plays dirty too, even though hurling his phone number at every telemarketer on the Internet distracts her from work – work she's starting to love again.

Inconveniently for Ben and Annie, this is a team sport, and they're on the same side. Which means spending enough time together to realize (a) why they keep finding excuses for their elbows to touch, and (b) that they misjudged each other. Getting close to Ben means being honest about why she really left the first time, and Annie's afraid to tell him the former coach he still cluelessly idolizes is actually a predator. But they call it March Madness for a reason: Anything can happen on the way to a national championship. If Annie and Ben can find a way to trust one another, they might be able to save both their jobs, win a title, and build something special together.

I live in New Jersey with my family. I'm a lawyer now, but I wrote a sports column for the student paper at my basketball-obsessed college. This would be my debut novel.

Thank you for considering my submission. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[AUTHOR]

Dear Allison,

To be born at the Siege of Leningrad is unlucky. To be abandoned at birth unluckier still. When the Soviet state rescues twin sisters Maya and Natasha from starvation and deposits them at the prestigious Vaganova Academy of Ballet, their luck appears to improve. It will be years before they learn that the state expects repayment.

Now seniors at the Vaganova, all Maya and Natasha want is to dance with the Kirov Ballet, like their late mother, and to join the company on its tour to America next year. Both sisters have sacrificed everything–their childhoods, their bodies, and more than a little sanity–for this opportunity. Natasha longs for the material comforts of Western life. Maya hopes to find their estranged father, who may or may not be the choreographer George Balanchine.

Then a new law from the Kremlin upends Maya and Natasha's lives: family members may no longer travel abroad together. The Kirov can only accept one of them.

As the stronger performer, Natasha takes her success for granted and falls in with a crowd of reckless dissidents. Maya, long accustomed to her sister's shadow, accepts her bitter fate–until she is partnered with the boy she has loved from afar. Suddenly, Maya dances with a passion unseen at the Vaganova since her mother haunted its halls. For the first time–and at the cruelest possible moment–the sisters are equally matched.

As graduation looms, Maya learns that Natasha plans to defect if accepted by the Kirov. Maya must decide where her loyalty lies: with her sister, or with her dreams–and the state that saved her life. Soon, both girls will learn that the state has loyalties of its own.

Set in the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, [TITLE], a historical novel, is complete at 116,000 words.

I am a graduate of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and an Elizabeth George grantee. My fiction has appeared or is upcoming in the Cimarron Review, Image Journal, and the Cincinnati Review, who in 2019 nominated me for the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers. I am also married to a Greek Orthodox priest who is not Greek, which is as delightfully bizarre as it sounds.

Thank you for your consideration,

[AUTHOR]

Dear [EDITOR],

I couldn't be more excited to share 2025's next big book club novel, **[TITLE]**, a debut set in the fascinating world of Cold War Soviet ballet by author **[AUTHOR]**.

Maya and Natasha are twin sisters born in the midst of the Siege of Leningrad in 1941 and immediately abandoned by their mother, a prima ballerina at the Kirov Ballet who would rather die than not dance. Taken in by their mother's best friend at the Kirov, the girls are raised to be dancers themselves. The Vaganova Academy of Ballet—and the totalitarian Soviet regime—is the only world they know.

In 1958, now seniors at the Vaganova at the height of the Cold War, all Maya and Natasha and their classmates want is to dance with the Kirov, and to join the company on its tour to America next year. Both sisters have sacrificed their childhoods, their bodies, and more than a little sanity for this opportunity. Natasha longs for the material comforts of Western life. Maya hopes to find a connection to the mother she never knew.

Then a new law from the Kremlin upends Maya and Natasha's lives: due to fears of defection, family members may no longer travel abroad together. The Kirov can only accept one of them. As the stronger performer, Natasha takes her success for granted and falls in with a crowd of reckless dissidents obsessed with the West. Maya, long accustomed to living in her sister's shadow, accepts her bitter fate, until a new dance partner inspires her to dream bigger and practice harder. For the first time—and at the cruelest possible moment—the sisters are equally matched. And then one sister betrays the other, altering their lives forever and splitting them in two, though neither will stray far from each other's orbit.

As one of the twins pursues her ballet career and experiences a world outside Russia for the first time, the other is cast in an epic film adaptation of *War and Peace*, produced and financed by the Soviet State (based on real life history). As the Cold War heats up, Maya and Natasha must confront their loyalties: to East versus West; to the government that saved them versus their dreams of freedom; and, always, to each other.

This assured, beautiful, incredibly well researched novel is steeped in the same ballet world of Maggie Shipstead's *Astonish Me*, and is sure to captivate the millions of readers of *A Gentleman in Moscow*. Ultimately, though, in the tradition of bestsellers like *The Vanishing Half* and *Hello Beautiful*, it is a story about the bond between sisters – competitive, complicated, but never broken.

[AUTHOR] is a graduate of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and an Elizabeth George grantee. Her fiction has appeared or is upcoming in the *Cimarron Review*, *Image Journal*, and the *Cincinnati Review*, who in 2019 nominated her for the PEN/Robert J.

Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers. She lives in Michigan with her husband, a Greek Orthodox priest.

CATALOG COPY:

This stunning debut novel set in the fascinating world of Cold War Soviet ballet follows the fates of twin sisters whose bond is competitive, complicated, but never broken.

Maya and Natasha are twin sisters born in the midst of the Siege of Leningrad in 1941 and immediately abandoned by their mother, a prima ballerina at the Kirov Ballet who would rather die than not dance. Taken in by their mother's best friend at the Kirov, the girls are raised to be dancers themselves. The Vaganova Ballet Academy—and the totalitarian Soviet regime—is the only world they know.

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