

YVONNE PRINZ

on writing

IF YOU'RE LUCKY

***If You're Lucky* is my third YA novel. It came to me in fits and false starts and middle-of-the-night epiphanies and endless rewrites.** Some days it felt like the book was a beast that was haunting me, bullying the story out of me. Creating this story was a completely different experience from anything else I've ever written. My first novel, *The Vinyl Princess*, was a much quicker write for me because it was inspired by the world I live in as the owner of a record store. It really only took me a summer. *All You Get Is Me* is about a city girl whose family moves to a farm. Since I'm a passionate family farm advocate, the research—including a summer spent talking to farmers and reading about farmworkers' rights—was easy and fun.

My inspiration for *If You're Lucky* came from a different place: a classic episode of *The Andy Griffith Show* called "The Stranger." In it, a man arrived in Mayberry from New York, and he seemed to know just a bit more about the town and all the people who lived there than the residents were comfortable with. The stranger's unexplained familiarity sparked paranoia in the town folk and they reacted with hostility until everything was sorted out. I was intrigued by the idea of a small town reacting to a newcomer, but I thought,



Sloane Morrison

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“What if everyone fell in love with the stranger instead?” Everyone, that is, except for my main character, Georgia. Georgia suffers from a mental illness. She’s an unreliable narrator. She struggles with the side effects of her meds, with processing the loss of her brother, and with her unsteady relationships with her neighbors. I was very interested in how grief affects a young person struggling with a mental illness, especially within the confines of a small town.

I paired this spark of inspiration with something that’s intrigued me for a long time—the isolated foggy hamlets on California’s North Coast and the people who live in them. A certain type of person thrives in these places, which are home to communities of artists, musicians, and craftsmen and their children. As night closes in along Highway One and the fog descends, traveling becomes dangerous, so most people stay put. The towns seem to pull into themselves. It was the perfect place for my fictional creation, False Bay.

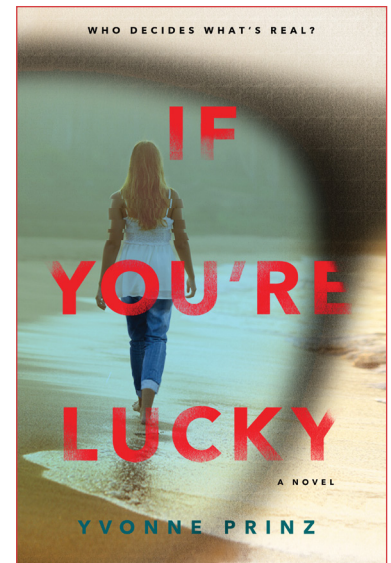
Next I created a handful of artsy, eccentric residents who live in this idyllic albeit isolated seaside hamlet. As I began to populate False Bay with its quirky inhabitants, the book started to shape up almost like a play: It has a small cast of characters, and almost all of the story takes place in one setting. This became one of the things I relished about the writing (while simultaneously being driven crazy by it). Georgia’s father owns an oyster farm in a brackish estuary not far from where they live and her mom is a famous potter, very focused on her work. After I killed off Lucky, the hamlet’s prodigal son, I introduced Fin, a charming, beguiling character who seemed an awful lot like Lucky, but who also seemed to be hiding something dark. Then, as the town fell in love with Fin, I started building doubt and suspicion about him into my smart, observant protagonist, Georgia. But because of Georgia’s mental illness, the townspeople have trouble even considering that she might be right about the charming stranger’s sinister motivations. Georgia becomes more and more isolated within the already isolated town.

As I was writing, I moved into False Bay myself. I was so deeply familiar with every detail in that place that I imagined it was real—and the last time I took a drive along that highway I was surprised not to find it.

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On sale October 20, 2015
Ages 14 & Up, Grades 9 & Up
\$17.95
288 pages, 5½" x 8¼"
ISBN: 978-1-61620-463-1
E-Book ISBN: 978-1-61620-554-6

