
GREY'S ANATOMY 101

SEATTLE GRACE, UNAUTHORIZED

Edited by Leah Wilson



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We all have our dream jobs: movie star, fireman, cardiothoracic surgeon. Kristin Harmel wants to write for *Grey's*. And what's not to like? The writers seem like they'd be a blast to work with, and you could see McDreamy pretty much whenever you wanted. But Kristin has more than just a dream. Kristin has *qualifications*.

Kristin Harmel

I WANT TO WRITE FOR *GREY'S*

Ms. Shonda Rhimes
Executive Producer and Series Creator
Grey's Anatomy
Prospect Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90027

Dear Ms. Rhimes,

I want to write for *Grey's*. Sure, I know you must get applications from people all the time. I mean, who *wouldn't* want to get inside Meredith's head and make decisions for her? Who wouldn't want to write Derek's character and make him choose Meredith from the start? Who wouldn't want to help straighten out the interns' love lives and bring the loveable Denny back to life?

So why, you might be asking, should you pick me? Why should you choose me? Why should you love me? Well, it's not just because I badly paraphrase your main characters' memorable words in application letters. It's because I have a real passion for your show. I am nearly obsessed with the characters who live in your head. And I have a wealth of my

own bizarre dating and relating experiences that I could bring to bear upon Mere, Izzie, George, Cristina, Alex, Derek, and the whole staff at Seattle Grace. (After all, I figure I might as well make all my romantic failures count for *something*.)

Before *Grey's Anatomy* debuted, I didn't realize that being cheated on, having complex family issues, and marinating in my own insecurity would qualify me for a job. I didn't guess that getting into almost unbelievable romantic entanglements would make me the perfect writer for your show. But here's the thing. They do. Because if there's one thing I know, it's how to make a mess of my life. And then laugh at it. I'd like to do the same for the gang at Seattle Grace. I think that's largely what *Grey's Anatomy* is all about: Life falls apart, but your characters still manage to find humor in the everyday and solace in each other.

So without further ado, in lieu of a résumé, I will tell you why I, a novelist who won't answer the phone or have any human contact whatsoever whenever a *Grey's* episode is airing on ABC, would be the perfect addition to your writing staff.

2 After all, I'm Meredith with a writing degree instead of a medical one.

REASON #1 TO HIRE ME: I AM A FLAWED MESS

Okay, so usually this would not be considered a major selling point on a job application. In fact, my initial instinct would be to bury my flaws. But for you, Ms. Rhimes, I fly my mess flag high. Why, might you ask? Well, it seems to be the thing to do, at least in the fictional world in which your characters dwell. Meredith, Izzie, Cristina, Alex, and George are all proud to be the messes they are. They wear their insecurities and their faults on their sleeves like others wear their hearts. I kind of like that. I've spent a lifetime hiding my insecurities beneath the surface. Why not let them be part of who I am? Especially since my flaws make me that much more qualified to write for your show. After all, isn't *Grey's* based on the tenet that people's flaws shape and drive them?

One of the best things about *Grey's Anatomy* is that none of the characters are perfect; they all have glaring imperfections. They're not imperfect in a comical way, like *Friends's* divorce-prone Ross, brainless Joey, or formerly fat Monica. They're not like *Desperate Housewives's* promiscuous

Gabby, frigid Bree, or scattered Susan. No, the characters on *Grey's Anatomy*—particularly Meredith—are flawed in a real way. As you yourself have said, Ms. Rhimes, “Meredith is the one of only a few women on television who is truly flawed. FLAWED in capital letters.”

Meredith is too insecure and self-questioning. George is too passive. Cristina is too pushy and driven. Izzie is too emotional, and haunted by questions. Alex is too immature. Derek is too conflicted to commit. Addison has made mistakes that are too big to recover from. Burke is too much of a perfectionist. The Chief is too focused on work. And Dr. Bailey is all too human.

“FLAWED in capital letters” only scratches the surface of problems that run true and deep in this complicated cast of characters.

Well, guess what: I'm FLAWED in capital letters, too. Actually, to be more specific, I'm FLAWED in capital letters and then underlined. Probably italicized, too. And who better to get inside your characters' heads than the Queen of Flaws? (That would be me, by the way. I've just crowned myself.)

Ask anyone who knows me. They might be nice about it at first, but loosen them up with a martini or two and they'll spill the truth.

“Kristin Harmel is a mess,” they'll tell you. “A flawed mess. We love her just the same, but yeah, she sure knows how to make a disaster out of her life.”

Never was this as clear to me as it was the night *Grey's Anatomy* premiered.

Like many other people, I watched the first episode of the first season back in March 2005 expecting to sort of like the show. It sounded intriguing. However, when Meredith woke up naked next to a rather dreamy guy named Derek and awkwardness ensued, I sat up a little straighter in my chair.

“Wait a minute,” I said to myself. (Because I often talk to myself while watching TV alone. It's very sad, really.) “I've been there.”

Well, not *there* exactly. (Because if I woke up next to Patrick Dempsey, I probably wouldn't make him leave. In fact, I'd probably lock him in my bedroom and keep him there forever. Is that wrong? . . . Ahem. . .) What I mean is, *there* in terms of waking up next to someone I really shouldn't have been waking up next to. Being in a hurry to get him out the door.

It's a well-established pattern: Boy meets girl, boy gets girl, television ratings plummet. Shows have tried all sorts of tricks to maintain audience interest, most of which have involved tearing the new lovers apart and making them work their way back to one another. But often as not, by the time they get there, something feels off. They aren't the same people they were back when they fell in love the first time. Those insurmountable issues that split them up in the first place turn out to actually *be* insurmountable. Something about the relationship just doesn't work. Not so with Derek and Meredith. In fact, their relationship was almost *better* the second time around. Why? Because of Addison.

Carly Phillips

IF ADDISON HADN'T RETURNED, WOULD DEREK AND MEREDITH HAVE MADE IT AS A COUPLE?

From the moment they met, Derek and Meredith were the couple the audience rooted for, the couple they wanted to see end up together. The chemistry between the characters was incredible and they seemed meant to be—up until the moment Derek's *wife* Addison Montgomery-Shepherd arrived at Seattle Grace. Derek's wife. Not his ex-wife or his one-time lover, but his wife. Suddenly the perfect couple wasn't so perfect. Dr. McDreamy had lied to Meredith, a whopper with enormous repercussions. The audience hated Addison and blamed her for breaking up their dream couple. But even if Addison hadn't arrived on the scene, the contrite wife who wanted her husband back, would Meredith and Derek have survived?

I find this an interesting question and I don't think the answer is as simple as it may have seemed during season one, when Derek and Meredith were the couple everyone wanted them to be. The reason ties into my favorite part of writing and of life: character.

Television drama aside, because of course *Grey's Anatomy* is a TV show that must have conflict in order to bring viewers back each week, what is inherent in Meredith and Derek's characters? What kind of people are they? Are they people capable of monogamous, committed relationships? And if they are, does that automatically mean that *they* would have made it in a world with a high divorce rate and the intense pressures of their respective careers? Not to mention their different status levels at the hospital where they both work.

Let's start with everyone's favorite, Dr. McDreamy. Dr. Derek Shepherd is sexy. He's God's gift to women. Certainly the females he comes into contact with at the hospital would agree. He is an egotist: arrogant, even conceited. He'd have to be in order to be a top-notch neurosurgeon who operates on people's brains every day, taking their lives and their futures into his talented hands.

12 Derek is also a man capable of compartmentalizing his life. A wife back East. A lover in Seattle. Yet just what was the status of his marriage in his mind when he moved to Seattle and met Meredith Grey? How would he have dealt with the marriage issue had Addison not returned? Would he have divorced his wife? And when would he have told Meredith? Clearly, the longer he waited, the angrier Meredith (or any woman) would be. A lie of this magnitude is poison to any relationship, and yet this never seemed to bother or dawn on him in any way.

Derek is a solitary individual, not given to opening up his trailer, let alone his heart or his emotions. Whether or not his wife returned, she existed, and he never mentioned her. Someone unwilling or unable to communicate the most important facts and feelings in his or her life is a risky long-term bet. Especially for a woman who needs security and stability more than she needs oxygen to breathe.

In fact, even the *Grey's Anatomy* writers point out in their blog on "Save Me" (1-8) that for the first week Meredith was with Derek, she knew nothing about him, his family, what he enjoyed or didn't. She only knew she liked him and that he made her feel good. Needy by nature, Meredith did realize she wasn't privy to important areas of Derek's life and called him on it, but he had the charming ability to turn the subject away until *he* was ready. It is worth noting here that Meredith's neediness (a subject we'll tackle in more depth later) paired with Derek's ability to

compartmentalize, and omit select things about himself and his past, can be a particularly bad combination. But for now, back to the beginning.

Eventually Derek showed Meredith his trailer, his land, and his home. And eventually he opened up:

MEREDITH: Where are we?

DEREK: Shut up. My mother's maiden name is Maloney. I have four sisters, eight nieces, and five nephews. I like coffee ice cream, single malt Scotch, and occasionally a good cigar. I fly fish, I cheat when I do the Sunday crossword puzzle, and I don't dance in public. My favorite color is blue. And not that light blue. Indigo. *The Sun Also Rises*? Favorite novel. The Clash? Favorite band. This tiny little scar by my nose? That's why I don't ride motorcycles anymore. And I live in that trailer! And all this land is mine and I have no idea what I'm gonna do with it!! That's it, that's all you've earned. For now. The rest . . . well, the rest you'll have to take on faith. ("Save Me," 1-8)

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Meredith took Derek's word. On faith, she allowed herself to trust. But as the writers reminded us in that same blog entry on "Save Me," "the rest" that Derek asked Meredith to take on faith was his wife. *His wife*: "Not only did Derek not tell Meredith about Addison, he told her everything except that. And then he asked her to have faith in him." The nerve of the man.

When the audience watched that scene for the first time, it seemed pure and simple, honest and beautiful. But when they saw the same segment again in reruns, after they knew about Derek's wife, the scene was painful to watch. Again the writers wondered, *How can Meredith trust Derek after that?*

Good question.

Still, Derek is obviously someone who can make a commitment, which is more than we can say for many men. He took his wife back after she cheated on him. He tried to make his marriage work because, as he reiterated on many occasions, he took vows. And from the moment they reunited, he was loyal to his wife and those vows—or at least tried

to be—until he cheated with Meredith at the end of season two. In order to further the argument in favor of Derek and Meredith lasting as a couple based on *his* character, let's assume that he is loyal when invested with one person only. Once he commits and is committed to in return, he doesn't stray. Furthermore, if we do not view Meredith as a woman with whom he violated those marriage vows because Addison betrayed him first—if he truly was in love with Meredith as he has said—then we can draw the conclusion here that Derek is capable of a monogamous long-term commitment.

Yet this isn't the whole story. I find myself looking forward, to the Derek who had to choose between Meredith and his wife. Each time there was a choice to be made, we were led to believe by the writers and by Derek that it was Meredith who had to make it. The finale of season two was a primary example. *Whom would she choose?* But the truth was, Derek expected Meredith to pick between himself and another man when—and to me this is key to Derek's character—*Derek had not yet left his wife.*

14 So I see Derek as a flawed man who claims to be in love with Meredith, but who made Meredith suffer emotionally by having to watch him with another woman, even though he had never really let her go. An egotist. A man more concerned with his wants and needs than the woman he claims to love. A man who had been emotionally vacant with his first wife. And a man whose attitude and behavior led her to find comfort in the arms of his best friend. Would Derek eventually have done the same to Meredith?

An argument in Derek's favor is that his proximity to Meredith, by virtue of them working in the same hospital and seeing one another every day, would have strengthened the bond between them. However, working in the same hospital didn't save Derek's first marriage. Would proximity have helped Derek and Meredith fare any better?

This leads to Meredith. Even if we were to assume based on Derek's loyalty, which is an admirable character trait, that he would have stayed with Meredith, would she have been on the same page? Is Dr. Meredith Grey capable of sustaining a committed relationship with Derek? Meredith is even more interesting as a character if for no other reason than we have deep insight into her family history. Before we touch on her past, though, let's deal with who she is now.

Imagine the cast of *Grey's Anatomy* as wolves. No, seriously—give it a shot. Elizabeth Engstrom did, and came up with some compelling conclusions about inter-intern relations, Burke and Cristina, and the perils of dating alpha wolves.

Elizabeth Engstrom

WHY DR. GREY AND SHEPHERD WILL NEVER LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Sleeping with the boss is never a good idea.

Some call it “fouling your own nest,” perhaps for good reason. Others call it fraternization, realizing the potential for sexual harassment problems among those of unequal power. Some companies have strict policies against it; others seem to understand that the workplace is the center of most employees’ social lives, and it’s only natural that, as mammals, we will breed with those in proximity. Whatever the situation, whatever the policy, a love affair gone wrong among coworkers makes for too much drama in the workplace, and most businesses don’t like it.

But viewers love it.

The writers of *Grey's Anatomy* have taken this an extra step, giving us two contrasting sets of workplace romances: Dr. Meredith Grey with Dr. Derek Shepherd, and Dr. Cristina Yang with Dr. Preston Burke. Yang and Burke have a chance of making it, but Drs. Grey and Shepherd? Not a prayer.

Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus author Dr. John Gray made the general public aware, back in the 1980s, of the multitudinous differences between men and women. Since then, countless studies have proven his

points with regards to the way we think, act, and relate, from the physical aspects of the brain (women have an actual physiological aptitude for multi-tasking and perhaps even intuiting) all the way down to primitive mating rituals (over which we seem to be relatively helpless).

Men and women approach everything differently, but we are total opposites when it comes to falling in love. Consider this: Men tend to fall in love with women they are attracted to, and women become attracted to the men they've fallen in love with.

Could anything be more opposite?

For example: In order for a man to want to get to know a woman, he must first be attracted to her. Once attracted, he will make a move.

Burke brought Cristina a coffee.

A woman, on the other hand, can *suddenly* become attracted to an old family friend, or someone she's known socially for years: her husband's brother, her husband's best friend, her brother's best friend, her son's best friend (God forbid), her neighbor, her co-worker. Over time, she has come to know him, she has fallen in love with him, and sexual attraction has followed on love's heels.

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Cristina drank the coffee and couldn't stop thinking about it.

If you want to see the mating dance at its most primitive, go to the mall. The girls—makeup perfect, clothes perfect, hair perfect—are seeking the attentions of a “nice” guy. The boys, slovenly and cool, slouch around looking for a “hot” girl. She's looking for values; he's looking to broadcast his seed. She wants to marry the captain of the football team; he wants to fuck the head cheerleader.

That first night when Meredith met Derek, she looked hot, and he was attracted.

She was just looking for some touch. Then she got to know him, as he relentlessly pursued her. When she finally agreed to actually date him, her affections were rising. She'd gotten to know him, was falling in love, and his sexual appeal was growing. She could no longer refuse his requests for a little extracurricular dalliance.

By the time she agreed to go out, of course, he was already smitten. First, he was attracted to her, and then he got to know her, and his attraction grew. Finally, it ripened into whatever kind of love a man can have that lets him say, “Oh, Meredith, I'm so sorry,” as his never-before-

revealed wife walks through the door (“Who’s Zoomin’ Who?,” 1-9).

To recap: She’s hot, he’s nice. She’s looking for values (at least after that first night); he’s looking to hook up and gets caught in love’s snare.

And what of Burke and Cristina?

She’s hot; he’s attracted. He’s nice; she’s attracted. He pursued her until she caught him.

Textbook.

And yet, while these couples share much in common, there’s one big difference between them: their respective statuses within their social orders—within their packs. And that difference has everything to do with whether their relationships will succeed.

Humans are not dogs, but we engage in pack behavior more often than we like to admit. Mob mentality is a kind of pack behavior. The military hierarchy depends upon pack mentality to keep everyone in line. But for a moment, let’s talk about wolves. See if you see any similarities between the typical pack of wolves and the activities at Seattle Grace Hospital—

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or your office, your family, or any social group to which you belong. Wolves are extremely sociable and highly intelligent animals. They typically live in packs of five to ten, and function as a cooperative family unit. Pack animal behavior is instinctive. Every pack has a hierarchy, and every animal in the pack has duties, responsibilities, and expectations.

In every pack there is an alpha. The alpha and his/her mate comprise the alpha pair. The alpha leads the pack and makes important decisions concerning the welfare of the group. Just below the alpha pair is the beta wolf, then the subordinates. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the omega wolf. This wolf is the scapegoat and will bear the brunt of the pack’s frustrations and harassment. It will usually be the last to feed, and will go without if food is scarce.

Any of this seem familiar?

It’s all about power.

The *Grey’s Anatomy* cast falls into two specific packs: the surgical interns and the hospital staff.

In the halls of Seattle Grace, Beth Kendrick has noticed, motherhood means something a little different. Pregnant surgical interns get transferred to the “vagina squad” (as Cristina put it in “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head” [2-1]); female surgeons with kids get “mommy-tracked.” All in all, *Grey’s Anatomy* doesn’t make having a baby seem particularly appealing. The question is—why?

Beth Kendrick

“WE DON’T DO WELL WITH MOTHERS HERE”

THE PERILS OF PARENTING AT SEATTLE GRACE

Here are the three commandments of becoming a surgeon, according to a recent med school grad:

1. No lying, no crying.
2. Eat and sleep whenever you get the chance.
3. Don’t mess with the pancreas.

But there appears to be a fourth cardinal rule at work in Seattle Grace Hospital:

4. Motherhood and surgery don’t mix.

You don’t mess with the pancreas because it’s basically a big, mysterious bag of digestive enzymes—an extremely delicate, temperamental organ that affects the surrounding systems in unpredictable ways. And you don’t swap your scrubs for a maternity dress for the same reason—becoming a mother sets off a chain reaction through the psyche and heart that irrevocably changes the way you practice medicine. A good

surgery is clean, precise, and free of complications. A good mother-child relationship is exactly the opposite.

In the surgical wing of Seattle Grace, mothers, by definition, are patients—passive and in distress. Pregnancy is presented as a medical problem to be solved, a crisis to be averted, a mire of complications. For a surgeon to save others' pregnancies, she can't possibly have a family of her own. Her life must always come second to her job. Motherhood is a distraction, and distractions make for sloppy surgeries.

ELLIS GREY: WORST MOTHER, BEST SURGEON

30 Dr. Ellis Grey had no illusions about the choice she had to make when she had a baby. Everyone, from Meredith's father to Liz the scrub nurse, is matter-of-fact about Ellis's superlative skills as a surgeon and spectacular failings as a mom. Ellis knows she is generally regarded as a ball-busting bitch, and is proud of this reputation. It means she is respected by her male peers. It means she doesn't let emotions get in the way of good medicine. It also means that her daughter grew up essentially without a mother, raised by . . . well, we don't know who raised Meredith, actually, given that her father left in her early childhood. Viewers know Ellis only as well as Meredith knows her, which is to say not at all. Ellis reveals the occasional tantalizing tidbit of her life story through the fog of Alzheimer's, but for the most part, we are left to fill in the blanks ourselves. It's too late for Meredith to forge a real relationship with her mother—all she can do now is assume the role of caretaker and try to move forward into adulthood without parents, siblings, or any extended familial support network.

Given Ellis's passion for her work, we have to assume that Meredith's conception was accidental, and that her role in her mother's life was primarily that of dead weight. Meredith is well aware that her mother resents her: "How many times have I told you not to bother me at work?" Ellis screamed when she was admitted to Seattle Grace and spied her daughter in the corridor ("Make Me Lose Control," 2-3). The rage with which Ellis said this told us everything we need to know about the frustration (and, perhaps, the shame) she feels about her failings as a parent. Self-righteous arrogance was her only defense against "mommy

guilt"—her patients needed her more than her child did. End of story.

As an adult, Meredith still craves her mother's approval. She saw what Ellis's career did to her family, yet she decided to become a surgeon against her mother's advice. Surgery is the only real connection Meredith has with Ellis, and it is significant that she chose to do her internship in the hospital that was her mother's home base.

Becoming a surgeon is Meredith's way of rebelling against her mother while simultaneously demanding her respect (surgical skill is the only currency that has any value with Ellis) and feeding Meredith's own self-destructive, "dark and twisty" side. Just like her mother, Meredith fell into a forbidden love affair with a co-worker, then retreated to the OR when her emotional life got complicated (like on Thanksgiving.) And when Meredith was forced to assume the role of caretaker to her mother, she behaved just as Ellis did: avoidant, ambivalent, terrified of getting too close. In "Break on Through" (2-15), Meredith panicked that her mother was going to die alone, but that is the nature of a female surgeon: to aggressively isolate herself. Emotional distance, after all, is the key to success when you're about to slice someone open and literally touch their heart.

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CRISTINA YANG: CONTROL FREAK OUT OF CONTROL

Cristina is a fascinating study in contradictions: she knows everything about the brain and nothing about psychology, she's a lifelong rule-follower who suddenly starts an illicit affair with her boss, she's an anal-retentive perfectionist whose personal living space is the definition of chaos. She's brilliant, she's fearless, and she makes sure everyone knows it. She's on track to be the next Ellis Grey.

There's just one little catch: Cristina can't take care of herself.

When Burke asked her to move in with him, Cristina offered up her squalid wreck of a luxury apartment as proof that she's unfit to live with another human being. Every time she opens her locker at the hospital, it's crammed full of everything from exotic lingerie to empty candy wrappers. She looks great on the outside, but she's a mess on the inside, and she knows it. This is why she keeps pushing Burke away—she doesn't want him to see how apprehensive and vulnerable and (let's face it)

selfish she can be. Sharing her body with Burke is fun and easy, but every time she's pushed to bare her heart and soul, she freezes and/or pulls back and/or goes in search of hard liquor. She defines herself solely by academic accomplishments, which protects her from having to examine her intrinsic sense of self-worth.

Cristina got pregnant despite her best efforts at birth control. This shook her to her core not only because she was completely opposed to having a child, but because the pregnancy proved that, no matter what the medical textbooks say, the body sometimes triumphs over the mind. Science is Cristina's Holy Grail. She wanted to believe that modern medicine is infallible, but two little pink lines proved that nature can find ways around science.

32 At first, Cristina faced the unplanned pregnancy the way she does every other adversary—with direct action and without emotion. She scheduled an abortion around her surgical rotation schedule and froze out the clinic administrator's well-meaning attempts at counseling. Like Ellis Grey, she works through her problems in stoic isolation. She kept the pregnancy secret from Burke and most of her fellow interns; she had to, because the embryo growing inside her was evidence that she was secretly out of control. She kept up the good front and soldiered on through morning sickness and fatigue, but she couldn't power through the psychological implications so easily. Cristina didn't frame abortion in terms of moral absolutes—that would go against her value system—but she was deeply distressed nonetheless. She couldn't allow herself to even consider carrying the baby to term because she was terrified by the black hole of neediness that an infant represents.

"You know what happens to pregnant interns," Cristina said to Meredith. "I am not switching to the vagina squad or spending my life popping zits" ("Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head," 2-1). But even though she dismissed motherhood with typical bravado, the abrupt end to her ectopic pregnancy was what finally brought Cristina to her knees. She collapsed and found herself, for the first time, a helpless patient on the OR table. During the recovery process, we started to see the first cracks in her veneer. She blamed her weakness on Burke ("He turned me into this fat, stupid, pregnant girl who *cares!*" ("Enough is Enough [No More Tears]," 2-2) and on her own mother, whose misguided attempts