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August 1, 2018

Dear Michelle:

It is with enthusiasm that I submit to you your manuscript critique. Thank you for choosing me to review your novel, "**Love's Lost Pages**". Below you will find my editorial report of your manuscript, including all of the sections previously discussed for future development of the novel. To begin, I'd like to congratulate you on writing such a spectacular first draft of your book. You clearly possess a love of fiction, a talent for creative writing, and a vivid imagination. I pinpointed many valuable skills that are unique only to you, which will be covered in this letter. Overall, you have a marvelous grip on plot and structure with great potential going for you with this story.

My commentary on your manuscript is very straight-forward and prolifically detailed. Whereas it can be difficult to hear commentary on noticeable areas in need of improvement, my only goal is to assist you with perfecting your writing on a professional level. A book editor can be viewed as a silent "book doctor." My job is to covertly *float over your pages* and fine-tune or polish them with an ultimate focus on your readers. When it comes to editing, there are no such things as laws, just guidelines. As an adult educator in the field of English and writing, it is my belief that even the best of writers need to keep their skills fresh by practicing and learning. Here, I will provide you with detailed suggestions based on guidelines that will edit and improve, but not change your story. I advocate for your readers, as should you.

Despite your strengths and an engaging read, I did notice areas that would benefit from adjustment and will suggest them in this letter. Since this is not a developmental edit, my commentary is based on the overall 'big picture pattern' of each area as seen below. And now, as your book doctor, let's see if we can bloom your manuscript to optimum health.

Characters:

Creating believable, likeable, and dynamic characters requires a unique set of thinking and skills since we design fictional worlds on pages that must be brought to life. Because of the missing nuances of sound, tone, pitch, and voice, we cannot see or hear a character in a scene as we would in a movie. The words assembled on the page must craftily use educated techniques to give the characters life by applying these elements in a different way. For example, giving a character a voice through words when there is no voice through sound. The words must *provide* the sound.

Andrea: This is my favorite character in your book. She is flawed in so many ways, especially with her social anxiety that rules her life. You do an excellent job of making it clear what her inner and outer struggles are. I noticed that you are consistent with showing her work hard to overcome her struggle in many scenes. You have a good grasp on highlighting the character's weakness and also using it to move the plot forward. I wanted to ask if you have considered bringing more of her past history into the story about how she got this way? You write her character as if she already has the issue, yet there is little background on how she developed the disorder. I would suggest squeezing in little blurbs and glips of what caused the social anxiety to develop since likely that is part of what she must heal from. Let's take this to a new level and bring something from her past into her current path for her to face. Maybe something to haunt her and force her to battle demons of the past? I feel as if her struggle isn't as severe as it should be to keep readers dying to find out how she is going to overcome it (which keeps them hooked on the book).

Michael: This man is a real mixed bag of intrigue up and down like a ping pong ball. You cleverly designed him in a way that creates magnetism and interest in the reader through use of specific quirks or behaviors. In fiction, the characters with the strangest awkwardness are generally the most interesting to the reader. Michael is in love with two women, one that he thought was dead but isn't, and his current girlfriend. You brilliantly showcase his emotional and mental struggle

by putting him in a position of having to make a decision where either decision will lead to guilt and sacrifice. I found myself naturally wanting to read faster in order to find out how he'd resolve the situation. Did you ever consider what your story would be like if he chose his first wife who resurfaced instead of Andrea? Just a simple choice in the other direction would dramatically change the course of this man's life. I wanted to suggest you give Michael more outwardly expressed emotions so that he doesn't appear as robotic to readers. Even when making his choice between the two women, he is almost too calm considering the turmoil you describe he is in. I suggest you show Michael express grief over the loss of his first wife once he makes the choice to keep his current girlfriend. Maybe write a dramatic and emotional 'goodbye' scene where he breaks the news to his first wife instead of sending her an email. Give him something hard that he must do.

Dialogue:

I have enjoyed reading your dialogue throughout the book. I quickly discovered that you possess a knack for writing realistic dialogue that doesn't feel like you are even reading the dialogue. Instead, you craft your conversations between characters in a way that makes the reader feel like he is sitting in the room listening and observing it first-hand. Your method of dialogue is concise, catchy and enticing, grounding the reader into a scene. One thing I noticed is that you are very skilled at sandwiching your action and scene beats in between dialogue lines.

For example (pg. 123) – "Look, kiddo, there's no way I'm letting' you marry that guy," groused her dad while hacking up a bell pepper with a steak knife that suddenly worked like the weapon of an ax murderer. "You're too young, he's too old and I'm too unstable to handle this kind of slap in the face."

I am wondering if you have considered applying more lines like this on each page instead of the standard "he said" or "she said" at the end of a statement? I always suggest a balance between methods of laying out tags on the page. One thing you could try is writing an entire page of dialogue "a conversation" between two people with no tags. Then, go back in and add them evenly throughout the page about every fifth line, with each one laid out differently than the last.

Remember, every word of dialogue in a sentence must carry its own weight. What this means is that every word must have a purpose. Sure, characters are meant to reflect real people in a fictional world, so you can assume they say normal things such as "how are you today" and "I'm fine, thank you." However, this sort of every day dialogue would quickly bore a reader and has little purpose in your story. Each line should somehow move the story forward.

Let's look at an example of a line you have on page 47:

"Dad, I really love you."

How about instead giving this a purpose?

Try, "Dad, I love you more than any man I could ever love. You have to know that even after I get married, you'll still be my number one. But for now, I really need you to see me as a woman, not your little girl."

If you are going to have a character express a sentiment, then attach a purpose or meaning to her saying the words. In my revision, despite the length, she offers reassurance while asserting her freedom to make a choice and reminding him that he has an issue to work on. This means you can show her dad strive to overcome his over-protectiveness throughout the book, coming to terms with seeing his daughter as a grown woman.

Setting:

During the reading of your book, I discovered many interesting sets as backdrops where your scenes take place. My particular favorite was the location of the butterfly garden in Paris where Michael proposed to Andrea in a very creative way. Considering her love of butterflies expressed in the book due to the one drawn by her mother the night before her death, this setting held meaning which influenced Andrea's likelihood of accepting the proposal. Brilliant! I was wondering, have you thought about choosing more unique settings for scenes outside of their homes? It seems as if many of the scenes happen in either of their houses.

For example, the scene where they have their massive fight the night before their wedding, I would suggest moving the location to somewhere public instead of the living room. By moving the setting to somewhere busy such as in a diner or a sport's bar, their fight would draw public attention and be witnessed by others. How would this change the scene? It would heighten the stakes for each character.

For example, Michael's abusive outburst would be witnessed by others in a restaurant. He would catch them staring at him after yelling at her. This would provide internal guilt or embarrassment that could prompt him to reflect on his behavior since he is known to have an anger problem. If you keep all of their fights in a private setting, he has less reason to gain awareness of his actions and behavior. Also, you could have Andrea run out of the diner into a busy street trying to get away from him. Blend in some high action into the argument through setting and it keeps readers sitting on the edge of their seats.

Let's elevate this to another level. Remember, setting is more than just the backdrop in a play. Setting has many purposes such as it can suggest mood, heighten fear, promote tension, serve as disruption or relate to a plot point. For example, Andrea walking through the cemetery where her mother is buried while reflecting on her regrets would invoke a different emotion in the reader than when she sits at her desk at work looking at a photo of her mother in a gold frame. Choose a scene in your book that is a repeat setting of another scene with the same setting. Then, come up with a *new setting* to move that same scene and think about how you can relate it to what's happening in the book.

Example: Andrea grieves her mother's death the day of her funeral, but it's a bright, sunny, spring day. She's smiling looking at the flowers mindlessly thinking about walking to the funeral home.

Instead: Try making this a dark, stormy, miserable-weather day where the air holds a crisp chill, the sky thunders violently, rain downpours with large hail balls as she is about to walk to the funeral home. Think about matching Andrea's internal mood and grief with the setting to further emphasize her misery.

Grammar:

Grammar is hard for everybody. Fiction writers tend to write before they think. This, in essence, is what makes them terrific at their craft. If writers spent time pumping out scenes thinking about the nitty gritty grammar on the page, the creative flow would flitter away. Scenes would not feel as natural. This isn't to say grammar isn't critical. Certainly, a good editor can help you fix this up. However, to save yourself money and your editor more work, you can make note of some basic grammatical essentials that would help your book flow more smoothly. Eventually, through practice, these would come out naturally on the page. Overall, you have a tight grip on the basics, which I appreciate.

I have noticed a few areas where your transitions from one speaker to another need tightening. For example, if a character's words are interrupted by another, you end the dialogue line on that word with a period. This does not indicate to the reader an interruption. It would make more sense to the reader to follow the *Chicago Manual of Style's* recommendation for trailing off a train of thought or interrupted speech, as follows.

Train of Thought: "Michael, I need to tell you something hard but...well..."

Note: Here you see she trails off an incomplete sentence due to struggling to get it out.

Interrupted Speech: "Michael, this is the last time I'm going to tell you that you must shut—"

Note: When a character is interrupted like this, it is standard expectation that the very next line shows the character doing the interrupting saying something.

NOTE: The remaining 7 pages of this letter are cut for this sample – for privacy reasons.



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