

Michele Ford

[REDACTED], round 2

25 March 2018

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you once again for the opportunity to work with you. The meeting we had was especially helpful to me! I appreciate not only that you took time to meet with me individually, but also that you treated me like an editing professional as opposed to a student. I felt invigorated and even happier to work with you after our meeting, and I hope you got as much out of the meeting as I did.

During our meeting, you discussed a need to identify section of the manuscript to either add a point-of-view section from [REDACTED], or rewrite from her point of view. You also mentioned that you had added more interaction between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and substantially altered the beginning, and also expressed a need to add more of [REDACTED]'s sexual history into the narrative. I strived to address each of these issues in my note below.

You managed a lot of work in the short window allotted for your revisions, and I have to say I'm pleased by most if not all of your additions. Two of the plots I suggested emphasizing—the pets, and the bondage aspect—were executed with care and precision. Many of the added scenes came across as polished and intentional as opposed to haphazardly added; it can be tough to integrate new scenes, but you did so elegantly. I'm also pleased that a few background characters—namely [REDACTED]—were given more screen time (er, page time) and allowed to show off their personalities. The strength of [REDACTED]'s character rivals that of [REDACTED]'s.

For all the excellent work you put into this draft, there's still much to be done. We only need 10,000 additional words to hit your 100,000-word goal, and I'm confident your next draft will meet or surpass it. I've focused again on places of expansion as well as continuity and consistency in the manuscript. Where the focus of my edits in the previous round concerned the structure of your manuscript, in this note I've geared my suggestions more toward improving its language. I apologize if some of my suggestions here sound like things you've already heard; it must have been no simple task to juggle editorial feedback from twenty-odd students, and I can't imagine how anyone would be able to address every concern present in each note. I love the direction you've taken this manuscript in, and any repeated suggestions should come off not as disagreements with your revisions but as admissions that this process is not ideal, and that you had very little time to work on this draft.

STRUCTURE

THE BEGINNING (REDUX)

I'm glad the manuscript kept its cheeky opening. I'm pleased also that instead of jumping in time, the beginning remains rooted in the present. That said, I do think the opening in draft 1 was slightly more compelling to the reader. The key element missing from draft 2's opening is mention of the kidnapping. I wonder if a brief mention of the kidnapping could be added back into the manuscript? It doesn't have to be as long as the first draft's intro section, but you might try this:



This probably isn't the most elegant option, but it maintains the punchy quality of draft 1's intro while keeping the timeline from draft 2. Keep playing with the pace of the intro and trying out different reveals in the first page or so. After you have a new working intro, you could ask someone new to read it and give you their thoughts, or you could approach someone who is familiar with the way both drafts have opened and ask their opinion.

ADDITIONS/REVISIONS FEEDBACK

I'll discuss several of your changes in this section. You maintained the structural integrity of the manuscript while lengthening it and keeping a consistent tone. Good work!

- The opening: In addition to considering the above, the section describing [REDACTED]'s appearance could use some alteration. In our meeting, I discussed the use of mirrors to convey a character's appearance to the reader. Mirrors are overused as methods of describing point-of-view characters; especially in the beginning of the story, it's best to avoid them when possible. Instead of looking in the mirror and being reminded to tie her hair back, [REDACTED] could simply tie her hair back because it's wild and curly.
- Perspective swaps: I noted several in-line POV shifts in the first draft, and you did a good job adding line breaks and rephrasing things to avoid them. However, there was at least one that escaped your notice: page 21, at the top. Consider too how a line break looks on the page. We want to avoid giving readers excuses to put down the book, and a line break without an upward ending might give a reader that opportunity. Similar to chapter ends, section breaks should end with a slight uptick in pace—an intake of breath on the reader's part.
- [REDACTED]: This is such a great scene. Before this scene, I had an unclear picture of [REDACTED]'s personality. Now, though, I feel like I know him. I almost wish [REDACTED] would get a one-on-one scene with either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], but I don't know where I would put it.
- [REDACTED] in the kitchens: This is another well-written addition that effectively characterizes [REDACTED] and also strengthens the mysteries of the novel. For a scene in which [REDACTED] spends a of time thinking by herself, I wasn't bored or impatient at all.
- [REDACTED] overhearing [REDACTED]: The statement that [REDACTED] happened to be able to overhear this discussion in draft 1 didn't jive with me, but this mini-scene is a wonderful alternative.
- The penultimate chapter: [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s discussion reads to much better now. I'll admit, something felt off about that chapter in the first draft, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Now I know what it was, and you've fixed it! Good job.

Overall, your additions and revisions were well-integrated into the text and were tonally consistent with the rest of the manuscript. That said, it would still be beneficial to specifically look at all the transitions in the manuscript and ensure there are no snags or awkward points in the narrative.

CHAPTER ENDINGS

We discussed this in our meeting, but I want to restate it here. Chapter breaks are similar to section breaks: they're opportunities for the reader to stop reading. There are fewer chapter endings that would

result in a closed book—for example, chapter 6 ends in a much better place in this draft than it did in the first draft—but a few chapter endings still have too much of a downward movement, or a metaphorical release of breath for the reader. The end of chapter 14 feels a little misplaced and could benefit from an extra line to push the reader along.

Sometimes, a chapter ending can be reversed by making the ending lines more active, as in chapter 17. Other times, this downward movement is desirable, such as in chapter 13's end, which cuts away from ██████'s surgery. Take care that every chapter ends intentionally, whether it begs the reader to turn the page or gives them a break.

THE LAST CHAPTER

You mentioned in our meeting that you wanted to add more to the last chapter. I don't think it needs to be called an epilogue, but it does need a bit more resolution. I love that ██████ went out to buy a rope for them to use in the bedroom. However, it's not enough to end there. I want to see ██████'s reaction. She actively wants to participate in his most prominent sexual fantasy, after all; he's probably extremely eager to try it out. They don't have to try it in the manuscript, but some reference to their future bedroom plans would help the book close. Their primary arc may have ended, but they have so much more ahead of them. Ending with a promise for their future will give this book more staying power in the reader's mind.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION

A few other sections will touch on opportunities for expansion, but I thought it helpful to have a few suggestions for expansion in one place. These suggestions will be echoed by comments in the manuscript. Most of these suggestions center on events described in exposition that might be better relayed in scene.

- Chapter 1-2 transition. ██████ would probably have heard ██████ approach before seeing her. In chapter 2, I'd like just a quick physical description of the woman; I'd originally thought her to be much older than a woman with two unmarried daughters should be. She doesn't need the same amount of detail that ██████ or ██████ has, of course—just something for readers to envision as she moves in and out of the story.
- 121: mention of ██████'s unwillingness to reveal his father's habits. This could be done in a scene and create tension between him and ██████. My only worry is that this scene happens over a third of the way into the story, which is a bit too late to introduce a new subplot.
- 128: ██████ asking ██████ where ██████ was. This scene in particular relies on heavy exposition to move things along, when it could instead convey events through dialogue. This would establish ██████'s character (though she's minor, even minor characters can stick in a reader's mind if they're well-written) and give ██████ extra characterization.
- 159: trying to decide on a game to play after dinner. The scene itself isn't important, but ██████'s reactions to the other characters' indecision could characterize him—and allow him time for a sexual fantasy.
- 218: the party for ██████ help. It doesn't need to be its own scene, but if it were moved earlier (say, to the end of the previous chapter), it could demonstrate how ██████ is being worn down by constantly doing things for other people.
- 223: introduction between ██████ and ██████. ██████ gets a scene with ██████; it seems fair to request a similar scene or set of dialogue between ██████ and ██████. How ██████ receives ██████ in this scene will undoubtedly influence ██████'s feelings of ██████, and could also create tension between them. Not only that, but the two could discuss the scene later, making it an opportunity for double expansion.
- 260-261: the sex scene. This scene is much shorter than the masturbation scene earlier, and it feels rushed because of it. Linger on ██████ and ██████ for a while. This is what readers have been waiting for—give them a show.

NARRATIVE

THE BONDAGE ASPECT

As I mentioned above, you did a great job adding more references to bondage throughout the story. I especially appreciate the references to it in [REDACTED]'s POV sections. There isn't much more to improve, here, except for considering the possibility that [REDACTED] physically restrains [REDACTED] at some point, or she suggests it but he's too impatient to track down an appropriate bond. A simple way to increase the bondage is for [REDACTED] to blindfold her at some point in either of their sex scenes.

You expressed an interest in adding more light bondage references from [REDACTED]'s POV. How about giving her an attraction to [REDACTED]'s cravat? She could fantasize about untying it slowly, or using it to direct his head, or using it as a blindfold—either on herself or on [REDACTED]. She seemed to enjoy relinquishing control to [REDACTED] in the masturbation scene, which would be a good basis for other submissive behavior, but she also enjoys taking control of [REDACTED]'s restoration and the party with the *ton*.

[REDACTED]'S SECRET

I appreciate how many “creepy things” you added to the story. They could all be explained by the pets, but of course the characters observing the events (most often [REDACTED]) are inclined to disbelieve their own perceptions or chalk the weirdness up to ghosts.

CHARACTERS

[REDACTED]: There are quite a few ways he could become a more important character. In the narrative, [REDACTED] observes he had a “temper” leading up to the birth of [REDACTED]'s daughter, but we don't get to see his temper much. Does he snap at a guest? Does he snap at [REDACTED]? Also, [REDACTED] could judge [REDACTED] harshly for having so many sexual partners. He could also realize that [REDACTED] was sent away from [REDACTED] because he was supposedly caught in an intimate act with [REDACTED]. There's a lot of room for him to develop as a character in this last option especially: he could be harsh toward [REDACTED], or insult [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]: Her character didn't change much between drafts, as she was already fair strong in draft 1. My main question of her is, why does she want [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to be together? Does she simply think they'd be a good fit for each other? Or is there something else going on with their families that they don't know about? Also, I found a couple places that could benefit from being written from her POV. The scene on 111, when the [REDACTED] arrive, could easily be told from [REDACTED]'s POV. A scene between her and [REDACTED], by themselves, could easily be added, too. This scene would characterize both of them ([REDACTED] doesn't need it as much as [REDACTED] does).

[REDACTED]: He's said to live in [REDACTED], but his parents say he's out (from their house) visiting a patient. This is a small inconsistency, and hopefully one that's easy to fix. Where does [REDACTED] live, and how long is he staying with his parents? A few of his gestures (elbowing [REDACTED] on page 87, for example) seem unrealistic: would [REDACTED] really act with such familiarity with [REDACTED] after not seeing him for a decade? If the answer is yes, what does [REDACTED] think of it? Is he surprised? Does he awkwardly try to be familiar with [REDACTED] in return?

[REDACTED]: I'm very happy he's no longer a simpleton (though he is quite dumb). His dialogue feels more natural, too, though his accent doesn't come across easily. I have no suggestions for how to improve his accent other than to read/watch more period pieces and steal phrases from them.

[REDACTED] AND [REDACTED]'S RELATIONSHIP

Everyone seems to want to them to be together. But I don't quite understand why. Clearly [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] want what [REDACTED] wants, and they don't want to push her into a decision she doesn't

like. Same with [REDACTED] But [REDACTED]? [REDACTED]? Why do they want the two together? And why do the [REDACTED]s want [REDACTED] to marry one of the sisters? Additional explanation of various characters' motivations would not only aid reader comprehension but would also add tension between the characters.

PAGE-SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Here, I identify specific instances in the manuscript that were confusing or need more revision.

- 88: discussion of [REDACTED]'s time in the military should be placed earlier, in the drawing room scene (as opposed to its current position in the dinner scene).
- 110: highlight how far [REDACTED] is and ever was from the vase, making it clear to the reader that she didn't cause it to break.
- 131: the story of the Venetian count comes at an inopportune time. It slows down the narrative and distracts the reader. It might be better placed in a scene where another character could reveal it in dialogue, and [REDACTED] could get unexpectedly jealous.
- 204: the easter egg. This scene is a bit short, especially because [REDACTED]'s POV is extremely limited (and will probably continue to be limited in successive drafts). I like that the characters in the scene reveal their feelings about [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], but do they devise a plan to push the two together?

LANGUAGE

ITALICIZING “TON”

The word “ton” was italicized in the first draft when referring to the elite London social circle. It was also italicized in your first book. Additionally, all of the sources I found when Googling the London “ton” italicized the term. What motivated you to change it to roman letters? I don't know why it was changed—perhaps another editor suggested it, or your publishing house wants it in roman letters, or there was a formatting error somewhere in the revision process. Whatever the reason, I suggest changing it back for consistency with your previous book as well as the genre as a whole.

FILTERING

I found many instances of filtering in this draft. I highlighted many in blue, but by no means all of them. I focused on the use of the word “watched;” there were a few cases in which it was not used to filter, but the majority of its use was to filter observations through [REDACTED]'s or [REDACTED]'s eyes. This filtering is mostly unnecessary, as it distances the characters (and the reader) from the action. It's preferable to simply state a thing happened (instead of “[REDACTED] watched his brows furrow,” use “His brows furrowed”) because it's implied that whatever happens in the narrative is being observed by the point-of-view character. Don't find & replace instances of “watched” and “noticed,” of course; rather, in one of your next read throughs, focus on this filtering language and try to pare it down.

PASSIVE LANGUAGE

This language foible is harder to track, and harder to identify. Often, the use of filtering results in a passive sentence construction: “She noticed this thing happen,” rather than “this thing happened.” Many instances of passive language overlap with filtering language, so a good place to start might be to find all instances of “was” and “were,” and replace these verbs with more specific, active ones.

REPEATED/IMPOSSIBLE ACTIONS

Also be wary of chapter endings that repeat actions from the previous chapter, as in chapter 4 where █████ enters the room, but he'd already entered the room in the end of chapter 3. It's especially important to keep track of actions and body parts—not only between chapters, but between scenes and even paragraphs as well. I noticed a few instances of █████ putting his hands somewhere, when they're already doing something else. Sex scenes are notorious for losing track of characters' limbs. It might be helpful to go through each scene and write down the physical actions, kind of like blocking a scene in drama. For the sex scene on 260-261, such a list might read, "█████ holds █████'s hands over her head. One of █████'s hands touches her breast..." This would immediately reveal that █████'s next action, performing oral on her, is physically impossible if he's still holding her hands above her head.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A good deal of the sentences in this draft are complex (they have two clauses, a dependent and an independent clause, in that order). There's nothing inherently wrong with this sentence structure, but it becomes obvious when it's used too much. The first full paragraph on 128 stood out to me in particular, mostly because there's an easy way to avoid the repeated sentence structure. Instead of writing "Though there was never a weed to be found, █████ seldom trimmed back her garden," consider the effect of "█████ seldom trimmed back her garden; even so, there was never a weed to be found." Dependent clauses contribute to a slow pace and passive sentences; perhaps one in four complex sentences could be rewritten for greater effect on the narrative.

DIALOGUE

Some of the lines you added shine and roll easily off the tongue (█████'s talk with █████, in the study, has great lines). That said, a good portion of the dialogue still feels stilted. Take "We've been here for over a week. You're only concerned for our comfort now?" on page 207, compared to another line in that same scene: "If you are looking for another task to keep you occupied, I am certain I can come up with something." The key difference between the two is the use of contractions in the first example. Writing dialogue with regency-style diction can be tricky, but I don't think it requires a total absence of contractions—rather, it demands a careful consideration of each contraction to create dialogue that flows but also sounds period-accurate.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

As mentioned before, the physical description you added was appreciated. However, we still need a lot of it, especially for minor characters. I'd like to see █████ better, as well as █████. █████ received a fair amount of physical description, but not many other guests did; █████ is a more principal character than many other guests, but it still feels unbalanced. Pare down her description and add some for the other characters that currently lack it.

ANACHRONISMS

A few words used in the manuscript merit further consideration. "Jackass" (153), "gender" (166), and "glitch" (236) were, admittedly, used in 1811, but were not yet in the common parlance. This revision step could be put off until the line edit phase (it might be useful to have someone read just for such anachronisms) but it doesn't hurt to get them out of the way now.

SUGGESTED MEDIA

Here are some more items that might inspire you during your revision process (or give you a much-needed break after so many weeks of writing):

This Mortal Coil: Great chapter ends. This story leaves you breathless, and it has a fine romance subplot.

The Golden City: A book I'd forgotten I'd read until the other day. It's part mystery, part fantasy, part romance. There's a good deal of social intrigue as well. There's nothing this book does better than yours, though, so read it mostly for inspiration.

The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms: Another book I'd read, yet forgotten about. It's classified as fantasy but it's really a romance with fantastical elements. In addition to being an interesting story with fully developed characters, it has some good sex scenes.

One Day at a Time: A Netflix sitcom. Aside from having well-rounded characters and interwoven subplots, this show has great timing-based humor. Watching it might give you some ideas for how to better your own jokes; there were a few that fell flat due to improper timing.

The Big Sick: One of my favorite movies of all time and easily the best romance movie I've seen. Like *One Day at a Time*, I don't know how useful it would be to study it with a critical eye, as the romance is in a very different stage from █████'s and █████'s, but every character has a distinct personality. And it's just a good movie.

EDITING ROADMAP & FINAL THOUGHTS

For this revision, you have much more time to work on the manuscript. I've adjusted my editing roadmap, keeping in mind that this is a second draft and you will have different revision steps than you did before.

1. Find one edit you're excited about and do it, right now (or whenever you're done reading all of these notes). From the quality of your added scenes, you're on a writing roll, and I want to do all I can to maintain your momentum.
2. Again, read through your manuscript and fix small things you catch on your own. Become reacquainted with your voice, your characters, your setting. Use a clean draft as opposed to a file an editor sent you.
3. Read through the multitude of in-line comments you've received and note places for expansion or identified inconsistencies; either handle them now or wait until you read for language mechanics.
4. Expand scenes further and add more new material. Take some breaks, read or watch some inspiring material, and don't get bogged down trying to perfect each scene.
5. Check for appropriate transitions between scenes or chapters. Make sure the added scenes fit with the larger narrative both thematically and structurally.
6. Focus on dialogue. Read the lines out loud; if you stumble, mark the line and jot down some alterations before moving to the next line. Avoid reworking the manuscript line by line, as this could lead to inconsistent tone or contradictions in a character's speech.
7. Add descriptions where needed. I've suggested a few specific characters that could benefit from further physical description; that said, every character should have at least one defining detail.
8. If there's anything you want to cut, do it now.
9. Take a break. Read other stuff. Let the manuscript sit for a while. Then, come back and do a full read-through for language mechanics, like filtering, passive sentence construction, varied sentence structure, and anachronisms.

It's been such a pleasure to work on this manuscript with you. Seeing the manuscript transform in the second draft really hit home for me that editors can and do shape stories—but ultimately, it's the writer putting in all the effort. You added or fixed many items that I didn't even notice when reading the first draft. This did a few things for me: it let me know that I didn't catch everything wrong in your first draft (and I hold no delusions that I caught everything in this draft, either), and it also inspired me to become a better editor. I hope this experience has had a similar effect on you and has given you more motivation than frustration. I have so much respect for you as a writer and as a person; not everyone would be willing to give their infant manuscript to a group full of fairly inexperienced editors, and I'm in awe that you managed such a wonderful second draft. I have a renewed appreciation for both editing and writing, thanks to this project.

Though I know my interaction with this manuscript will probably end here, I would absolutely love to work with you on future projects. And I'm always willing to help iron out a kink in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s story if you need another opinion. If you would like to further discuss anything in this note, please contact me at [REDACTED].

Warmest wishes,

Michele Ford