

Title

An overview of the title for marketability

Although the title is the name of the town where the story takes place, it's not intriguing enough to stand out in the genre. I recommend finding a theme that you run through the story, perhaps something about hiding, since this is one of the themes.

Genre

Recommendation for appropriate genre and sub-genres (if applicable)

The genre is listed correctly.

Targeted Audience

Recommendation for targeted audience and age for children's books

You clearly know your target audience.

Word Count

The word count of the manuscript

It would help to bring the novel to at least 45,000 words, and there is room for expansion.

Hook

A critique of the ever-so-critical opening paragraph.

The third paragraph should actually be the first. The third paragraph has an excellent hook and should open the story. It has the intrigue to draw the reader in. Switching them won't disrupt the flow and you'll grab the reader right away.

Character Development- protagonist(s)

A review of the protagonist(s) for development as well as character strengths or flaws

The protagonists are well developed and you have given them a lot of depth. You really "show" how they view the world, and the characters are realistic and familiar. That said, sometimes Erika comes across a bit shallow. She's a main character and most of the time we see her as strong, yet there are scenes where she's presented as whiny. I suggest keeping her as a strong, independent woman so that the reader doesn't feel let down when she shows too much weakness. The reader really gets to know her in the early chapters and then may be thrown when she's all of a sudden whining in chapter 11.

Character Development - antagonist(s)

A review of the antagonists(s) for development as well as character strengths or flaws

You have given Justin a lot of depth, and he is very believable. As a protagonist turned antagonist, Zeb is well developed, actually so convincing that it was a shock to learn he had been conspiring all that time. The character in need of a bit more development is Marissa. Her jealousy of Jennifer needs more depth so that the reader can better relate to her hostility. This is one area where you can expand on word count. Perhaps adding

more dialogue between her and Jennifer would make Marissa's intentions clearer to the reader.

Plot Development

An overview of the plot for development, plot strengths and weaknesses, and any plot holes.

Plot development is good, however, there are some plot holes. For example, on page 74, you have Zeb entering the restaurant, but on page 71, he's still at home. When did he leave his house? He just appears at the restaurant with no explanation or movement so that the reader will question how it is he got there and, more importantly, why. There is no previous mention of Jeb even wanting to go to the restaurant. When he arrives, he orders a drink, then he's back home on page 75. Other than ordering a drink, the reader knows nothing of his actions during that time or of him leaving. This should either be expanded to show the reader a reason for him going to the restaurant (and leaving to go back home), or delete the scene, as without a compelling reason the scene doesn't add to the story. The scene is never mentioned again, hence, it's confusing.

Beginning on page 112, the pace is too quick. The premise is fine, however, the reader is taken into a major catalyst event with no moment or pause. This is another area where word count can be expanded.

Subplot development

An overview of the subplots for development, plot strength and weaknesses, and any plot holes.

The subplots are well written and relate to the story. There is one that needs to either be expanded or deleted (see Plot Development).

Conflict

A review of conflict strength and weaknesses, potential plot holes, and overall use of conflicts in story.

The conflict is apparent from the first paragraph and continues throughout the story without dragging the reader with drawn out scenes and meaningless dialogue. As noted, Marissa's conflict needs to be better developed in the same manner as the rest of the characters. The goals of each character are clearly defined with the exception of Marissa and the above-mentioned scene with Jeb.

Setting

An overview of the setting or settings used in the story

The settings are nicely described. I particularly like the use of simile, and there is much the reader can relate to. (Can't we all relate to the smell of "institutional" food!) It may help to expand on the school scene that begins on page 181. I didn't really "feel" myself there. More description here would help the reader better visualize the argument scene.

POV/narration

Notation of any unintentional POV changes in the story and an overview of narration use and noting any areas where the author's voice may have come through rather than the narrator.

You, the writer, should remain *unseen* throughout the story, and you are *seen* in some of the metaphors and foreshadowing at the end of some of the later chapters (check the last five). Otherwise, the POV is good.

Dialogue

Use of dialogue and balance of dialogue vs. narration

The dialogue and narration could be better balanced in chapters 3 and 4. Although it's early in the story, the narration is heavy. Adding some dialogue (showing vs. telling) would break up some of this. Character interactions are well-constructed. The dialogue adds to the tension and there are no static character interactions.

Tense

Notation of any tense disagreements

On page 41, the narration reads as if it's a backstory, however, it's the present. The tense needs to be fixed here. There were no other noted tense issues.

Prologue and Epilogue (if any)

A review of the prologue and epilogue

n/a

Bridge (if any)

A critique of the bridge for appropriate placement and story separation.

n/a

Ending

A critique of the ending of the story.

The ending was not only riveting, but it was a complete surprise. The story ended so that the reader can feel satisfied, yet there is just enough for a sequel. The manner in which you turned a beloved protagonist into an antagonist was astonishing. I never suspected.

Additional issues

Editing or proofreading issues; overuse of filter words, purple prose, or pop culture and any inconsistencies noted in the story.

There are some punctuation issues and instances when a question mark should be replaced with a period.

Summary

A comprehensive overview of the manuscript.

The mystery and intrigue carried throughout the story, and the pace was good. The story didn't suffer from unnecessary scenes with the exception of the Jeb restaurant scene. Character emotions weren't glossed over, with the exception of Marissa and Erika. For Marissa, the reader should feel more tension with the addition of dialogue tags and descriptive beats together. While the reader has a sense of her hostility, the reader needs to be more immersed in her feelings. Erika needs some further development so that she's solid in the reader's mind.

There are no flaws in the timeline or backstory, and the backstory was well told without being an info dump.

Slang and idioms were kept to a minimum, and you used adverbs sparingly. As mentioned, the writer's voice came thorough in some of the metaphors, and they are easy fixes.

Zeb was so convincing that I doubt any reader will figure out he is the kidnapper/killer. While I wasn't expecting the obvious (neurotic Michael), my mind was geared toward Edward or Jake. Especially impressive is the way you were able to cast suspicion on the others so much so that the ending is a complete shock. Yet, once the truth is revealed, I realized all the ever-so-subtle hints sprinkled throughout the story.

Consider giving Marissa a stronger presence. She is an interesting character, and she seemed to not be at her fullest potential. She can add a lot to the story with her vicious and jealous nature. You started strong with her character development and somehow it fizzled. Marissa is definitely the evil character that readers want to know and "boo."

As mentioned above, removing Erika's whining scene will really strengthen her character. It seems too unrealistic for her to be so strong and determined, yet whine and complain at something so small. She's almost heroic, so you want to carry her throughout the story as someone who doesn't back down.

I truly enjoyed your story, and I wish you every success.