

THE WORKSHOP

– XXXXX –

CONCEPT / MARKETABILITY:

XXXXX offers a twist on the domestic thriller plot by adding an inanimate object –[NAME], the ventriloquist doll – as an antagonist to the storyline. [NAME]’s husband, [NAME], uses his replica dummy, [NAME], to terrorize [NAME]. While the storyline seems unique in concept, it requires cohesion to pull everything together. A story should be a well-constructed puzzle, where all the separate pieces fit together to create a larger image. Right now, it seems as though XXXXX has a lot of separate parts that aren’t creating a clear image.

PLOT/ STRUCTURE / CHARACTERS:

The synopsis requires some restructuring for it to be successful. The synopsis is typically written in chronological order of how the story unfolds. Because of this, you should start with your second paragraph, where you state, “the story begins...” As written now, it is clear that you are trying to hook the reader in with somewhat of a logline before “starting” the story. The problem with this, is that the information you provide in your first paragraph doesn’t make much sense because there is no context surrounding it. It is also problematic, because you later backtrack and repeat the information already stated in the first paragraph as it unfolds within the story. Something else you should avoid in your synopsis and the initial pages is including too much exposition or irrelevant information. You include a lot of background information that doesn’t seem to relate to the main plot. To appease this, perhaps open on a sentence that includes just a line or two of exposition and then propels the story into the plot. For example, you could write something like: “[NAME], desperate to have children, married the first man who’d have her. His name was [NAME], and little did she know, he was abusive and crazy. After years of putting up with him and his ventriloquist dummy, [NAME], she finally snapped. She defaces [NAME] and hangs him. In retaliation, her husband locks her in his bomb shelter. After finally being rescued by [NAME], one of [NAME]’s employees, [NAME] vows to never fall victim to [NAME] again.” For the pages, including too much background information takes the reader out of the story. The purpose of the first chapter is to hook the reader and immerse them in the story. Only include the most vital information needed for the story to make sense, otherwise, exposition can be shared in later.

I recommend going through and deciding what information the reader NEEDS to know for the story to make sense. You don’t need to include everything in your synopsis, just the main story beats, which I will list in a moment. It is okay to leave some information to be discovered in the pages of the story. Right now, your synopsis is running too long, and that is because you include a lot of irrelevant information. For example, you don’t need to include the subplot with [NAME]. You can simply state that she learns how to drive with the help of her neighbor. Nothing else is needed. Similarly, it is difficult to see how taking out the plotline with [NAME]’s father would affect the main plot. While this may be instrumental in the story, it’s probably not needed for the synopsis. You should also avoid extraneous details in the synopsis. For example, the paragraph

that describes [NAME]'s plans once rescued from the shelter can be streamlined to something like this: "After [NAME] rescues [NAME] from the shelter, she vows to never fall victim to [NAME] again. She makes an escape plan where she will learn to drive, become financially independent, and brainstorms way to kill [NAME]."

When you write your synopsis, these are the questions you should be answering:

- Who is your protagonist?
- What is their desire? What drives the story forward?
- What obstacles get in the way of their desire?
- What is at stake if the protagonist fails?
- What is the climax of the story?
- What is the resolution?
- How has the protagonist transformed? This will dictate what the story is about.

Remain as close as you can to these questions without including any irrelevant information. As mentioned in the earlier section, it feels as though there are a lot of story pieces that aren't working together to create a larger theme or message for the story. For example, [NAME] and [NAME]'s relationship should make sense for the reader to buy into the story. I could maybe understand why [NAME] would settle for [NAME] because she wants to have children, but wouldn't she make sure he could have kids before marrying him if that was the only reason she married him? You want your protagonist to be intelligent, otherwise, you risk the reader not empathizing/sympathizing with her. In both the synopsis and the initial pages, it seems as though [NAME] has zero interest in [NAME]. Why would he marry [NAME]? This is then emphasized by the fact that he has a mistress. And why would [NAME] go along with booby trapping the house? Is she psychotic as well? Each character needs to have motivations that make sense to the reader. Otherwise, they become one-dimensional plot devices which can keep the reader from becoming fully immersed in the story. You need to make sure that your character decisions are well-justified and their motives are clear. For example, what if [NAME] was actually very handsome and charming. [NAME] didn't think to ask about fertility, because he was so handsome and viral looking, she just assumed he could have kids. And, if she was attracted to him, she may more easily overlook how crazy he is. Similarly, perhaps [NAME] came from some money, and [NAME] was poor. This would motivate him to marry someone he didn't necessarily like.

Finally, it is important for the reader to be able to garner what the story is about from the synopsis. What does the ending say about the story? How do her genetics come into it? Could her desire for a child influence her decision? Rather than destroying [NAME], he becomes a surrogate child for her? If this is the case, then the story would be about the lengths a woman would go to have a child? Or perhaps it's about how insanity is contagious? Murder is in her blood? Either way, the ending should tie the whole story together—seamlessly integrate with the explored themes—and leave the reader with a clear understanding of what the point of the story was. Why should the reader care?

VOICE:

While some of the dialogue in the pages sounds a little “on-the-nose,” the voice of your writing is strong. You do a great job establishing the tone. While it is settled in reality, something is not quite right. [NAME] adds a great uneasiness to the pages. For the dialogue, I recommend reading it out loud to yourself and making sure it sounds natural and realistic. Otherwise, good job here.

MECHANICS:

In the synopsis, you want the reader to be immersed in the story. If you start mentioning that the story is told from [NAME]’s POV, and the story starts at the inciting incident, this will take the reader out of the story. When you start using story terms in the synopsis, you are reminding the reader that they are being told about the story, rather than taking them on a journey through your story. This information should become apparent simply on how the story unfolds.

EMOTIONAL RESONANCE:

You do a great job with this. You make sure that [NAME] has emotional reactions to everything within the pages, which is great, because [NAME] is clearly an emotional character, and this is vital for the plot. The reader will also empathize/sympathize with her because of her falling victim to her husband’s abusive ways. My only suggestion, as mentioned above, is making sure the character decisions are justified. I recommend giving more reasons as to why [NAME] married [NAME] in the first place, and vice versa. If their marriage doesn’t make sense, it will cause the reader to wonder why they got married in the first place. If the reader doesn’t buy their marriage, then the story is setting them up to question the rest of the story.

OTHER THOUGHTS:

N/A

