



****This sample is from an 80k contemporary romance. Length of memo will vary.****

Thanks so much for giving me the chance to work on this novel! First and foremost, remember that my feedback is only an opinion—and every editor will have a different one. It's up to you to decide which of my suggestions fits your vision for the manuscript. You can incorporate all my ideas, some of them, or none of them. As this is genre fiction, there are certain norms that influenced my feedback. By no means do you have to adhere to these norms—I just feel it's important to understand the norms and when you are veering from them, so you can make a conscious choice to do so. As the author, you have the ultimate decision. You know your story and characters best.

That said, I hope you find my notes helpful!

Pacing:

The pacing was problematic for me. It goes by a bit too fast; it felt like we switched scenes before we really even got settled into them. It wasn't confusing, which is good (confusion is often a by-product of too-fast pacing), but I felt like I was being rushed through things. In some places, it read more like a synopsis than a novel. To me, this indicates your word count is a little short for the amount of plot you have. Currently the novel is 53k, and after reading it through, I feel a more natural word count would be 60-65k. Staying in the scenes a bit longer would go a long way toward slowing this down to the proper speed. (See Writing Style and Setting, below, for ideas on how to add to the word count without adding plot.) You want the reader to feel like things are moving along well, but not so fast that it's overwhelming. If the plot were a car, you should be moving along at about the speed limit. Too far over the limit and you start feeling like you are losing control, too far under and you wonder if you are ever going to get to your destination.

Tense/POV:

As I mentioned in the sample edit, your choice of present tense is an unusual one when paired with third person POV. Most books in third person are in past tense;

it's with first person that you see the option of present or past tense. My general rule with unusual choices is that they should be made because they are adding something positive to the text that wouldn't be present if you made a traditional choice. I don't think that's happening here. I know you said on the phone you had this in first person present and had revised it, so whether you wanted to return to your original or do another revision to make this third person past is really up to you. This really could go either way. There are pros and cons to each, it's mainly about what your vision for this manuscript is.

Judy's POV is very strong, and gives us a great sense of her character. Jason's, however, felt very sparse. I'm guessing you decided to add him in when you revised this from first person. A general rule of thumb for heroes/heroines is that the POV should at least be split 30/70. Obviously there is lots of leeway here, but it gives you an idea of what many books in the genre are aiming for. I think you either have to commit to his POV and give him more substantial scenes in his POV, or eliminate his POV all together. This choice would go hand-in-hand with your choice of tense—if you chose first person present, deleting his scenes make sense, but if you went with third person past, seeing more of his POV is generally expected. (Alternating first person is becoming more popular—i.e. using first person for more than one character, and announcing which character's POV you are in at the beginning of the chapter. Personally, I never feel this is as strong as third person alternating or single first person, but it is also an option.)

Also, you have a tendency to “head-hop” when you add Jason in. Headhopping was very popular in romance novels in the 80s and early 90s, and there are one or two big-time authors who still employ this technique. But now, it is generally preferred that you stay in one character's POV for an entire scene (or most of it), switching POVs with a scene or chapter break (a scene break is denoted by an extra blank line, or three stars ***). That way your reader is staying in your character's head for a while, and not getting whiplash by jumping back and forth between heads. Most editors and agents will see headhopping as something to fix rather than a stylistic choice.

Writing Style:

Overall the writing is fairly smooth, and you do a great job of getting into Judy's head and letting us really get to know her. One big weakness I found was your tendency to tell us things vs showing them to us.

Examples:

Telling: Greg likes to stay out late at the bars, but Judy prefers to do yoga.

Showing: At the check-in desk, Greg inquires about the bar's hours, and Judy makes sure to pick up a brochure on the yoga classes the resort offers.

Telling: Judy thinks about calling her mom.

Showing: Judy picks up the phone, her finger hovering over the call button, but then she throws the phone down in disgust.

Showing adds a richness to the writing, while avoiding sounding like a synopsis. In this manuscript, it would also help slow the pacing a bit, to something more comfortable. You can also learn so much about each character by showing. Every character might be merely nervous, but one might chew her nails, one might obsessively clean, one might go for a run to clear her head. Showing is a great tool that all authors should keep in their arsenal.

Setting:

You do a great job of letting us know where the characters are, but I felt you could definitely expand the physical descriptions more. We want to feel like we are in the Caribbean: sand in our toes, salty ocean breeze blowing our hair, a cool pineapple drink in our hands. When she walks outside in Seattle, how is it different? How does her office feel different than her apartment? Play with all the senses so the reader feels immersed in the world you are creating.

Plot:

The overall plot and conflict is solid. The timeline, however, felt slightly arbitrary. For instance, you show us Judy and Greg arriving in the plane, and then we see Greg breaking up with her the second day they are there. What happened the first day? Does Judy feel a sense of awkwardness, like Greg is just going through the motions? Or is he a really good faker? By skipping over that day, you've missed the opportunity to show us a lot about their relationship.

Also in this example, you tell us a lot about their relationship and their issues while Judy is just thinking on the plane. Giving us so much information upfront is referred to as an "info dump," and can be overwhelming for a reader just diving into the story. Instead of getting it all out there at once, you can say that they are working on their relationship, and show the rest come out a bit at a time, more organically. Greg refusing to help her get an airsickness bag is a lead-in to explaining his job. Getting to the hotel can be a lead-in to their different schedules—perhaps Judy is ready to go to bed, but Greg is still wide awake. Instead of cramming all the info into Judy's head on the plane, use the first day to show us Judy and Greg's interactions, and use those interactions to give us a

window into the problems in their relationship. By seeing everything firsthand, the reader has an easier time sympathizing with Judy and understanding her motivations, which is crucial to being able to root for success in her relationship with Jason.

That said, I found no major plot holes or logistical errors, and the story flowed together pretty well. I didn't feel there were any extraneous scenes, and the scene sequencing felt on point. For a first time author, these are major accomplishments, so pat yourself on the back!

Characters:

Heroine:

Judy is a strong, smart woman, and I felt she was very likable and relatable. I am concerned that the reader doesn't get a clear enough picture of her relationship with Greg: mainly, why she is bothering to save it. You have to walk a very fine line here, because Greg has to be enough of a jerk that the reader doesn't judge her harshly for jumping into a relationship so soon, but the reader must also understand why on earth Judy would want to save this relationship at all, otherwise the vacation feels contrived. Does she miss the way their relationship used to be? Or is she basically on the verge of divorce already, but feels that she can't file for divorce without trying every last thing? If the former, the reader would expect a bit more remorse/regret in the aftermath (even if it is totally his fault, she still might pine for the good times). If the latter and she's already got a foot out the door, it does make things a bit easier emotionally.

I was also concerned that her feelings for Jason are so intense so quickly. It can be very difficult to make this sort of "insta-love" feel genuine, and for me, this fell a bit short. She and Jason spend so little time together before declaring their love—it amounts to a day, I think. And that day isn't particularly emotionally revealing. They don't learn a lot about each other. I absolutely believe that they are "in lust" with each other, but I feel being in love requires some sort of emotional connection, and the reader doesn't see them connecting enough to believe this relationship is love after one day. A whirlwind relationship can certainly be genuine, but you have to give the reader reasons why this one isn't just a sexual fling.

I would suggest a two-part solution to address this. One, don't have them declare love on their vacation. They can definitely say they haven't felt this way before, or similar, but build to that moment of the L word a little further in the

story. Two, show us a scene where they really connect while on vacation. These changes will make their romance feel more organic, and therefore the reader will have an easier time empathizing.

Hero:

Jason has all the markings of a great hero. Like I mentioned above, it might be nice to have more in his POV so we get to know him better. If you choose to do this, I would strongly suggest bringing his internal conflict into play more. He is falling for Judy, but before he met her, he was planning on leaving Seattle. How does this conflict inform his actions? Is he going into this with the “one day at a time” mentality? Or is he already thinking on how he can get her to move with him? Judy’s conflict is so obvious, it would be nice to balance things out on Jason’s end and really play with the conflict you’ve already set up.

Also, you might consider showing us his relationship with someone other than Judy. Judy has so many secondary relationships that we explore (her coworkers, Dani, her family); it would be nice to see a little bit of that from Jason as well.

I also would have liked a bit more about Jason’s dating history. Is he usually a player? Does he usually fall quickly, like he does for Judy? Or has it been years since his one serious girlfriend? Etc. Painting a picture of what he was like in other relationships and contrasting them with how he is with Judy can give us a good sense of his character.

Secondary:

I didn’t see any issues with secondary characters. They all seemed suitably fleshed out for the length of this manuscript. I loved Dani—she is a great sidekick for Judy and balanced our heroine out well. Rich was appropriately horrifying, so well done there.

Conclusion:

To sum up, you’ve got a good base to work with here. My suggestions are all about tweaking what you have, rather than a major overhaul of the story or characters. I hope my feedback helps you toward your publishing goals!

