

****This sample is from a proposal critique. 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 is good. No issues here.

POV:

You have a tendency to “head-hop.” To me, this is the biggest weakness in the manuscript. This is my standard spiel on headhopping: Headhopping was very popular in romance novels in the 80s and 90s, and there are one or two big-time authors who still employ this technique (basically, authors who made it big during that time and haven't evolved their style). 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:

For the most part the writing is strong. I did mark a few anachronous words. I am not a stickler for these—I mark them when it feels modern enough to take me out of the story for a minute. I use dictionary.com as my reference for origin dates.

There was also a bit of repetition in word choice, which I corrected a bit (as did the other editor). Sometimes you were doing it for effect, but often it didn't quite have the impact and felt repetitive instead. Varying word choice when possible is always a good idea.

Setting:

You do a good job of telling us where they are, but I would have liked a bit more physical description. This is a shorter story, so I don't want you to bog down the manuscript with physical details, but I want to be able to *feel* the story a bit more, and make sure you are showing us instead of telling us. Plus you can use it to show the difference between Cat and Edward's lives. For instance, a quick physical description of the camp and of Cat's clothing would contrast nicely with more details about the opulence of the party and Margaret's dress.

Plot:

The overall plot is solid and I saw nothing in the synopsis to worry me. My one concern is about why Edward, a second son, is marrying Lady Bonwhite if Robert is not married. As hoity-toity as the Bonwhites are, why did they not insist on Robert? Surely someone with her dowry couldn't get a better match than a poor second son? I just didn't see what they were getting out of the match, considering she is already a lady and has no need for the title. Could you explain a bit more why? The usual reasons would be that she is ruined (in rumor if not in fact), or that her parents are merchant class or recently elevated to the peerage and are hoping this match with an old noble family would help their status.

Also, why was Robert paying his tenants? I have never seen this. Usually tenants pay rent. I have seen stories where the lord pays for repairs—maybe you can revise?

Characters:

Heroine: Cat is a very intriguing character, and I definitely wanted to keep reading about her. But maybe you could give us a few more specific breadcrumbs about how she ended up there? For instance, she mentions she didn't choose this, but maybe she can mention how they took her in when no one else would, etc.

Hero: Edward is lovely. I am a little concerned that he is so nonchalant about wanting to see Cat again. In this time, I would expect him to either be clear that he likes the lad as a friend, or be horrified that he seems to be attracted to a boy. Honestly, with the interactions between them, I kept forgetting she is dressed like a boy. Luckily the synopsis says he finds this out pretty quickly, so that's good. This is something I would not suggesting changing until I saw the whole manuscript and how it played out—it would just be on my radar.

Secondary: My only issue with the secondary characters is the names of Thomas and Toby. They're easy to confuse, and in something this length, we are unlikely to get enough of a feel for either character to really tell them apart. If possible, I would change one to something starting with another letter.

Conclusion:

To sum up, I think you've got a good start here. I don't judge other editors, but I will tell you I saw nothing in her notes that was a red flag. I can see why you were nervous—new genre, new editor. I think it's probably more that her style doesn't really mesh with yours, and that's perfectly legitimate—not all authors will get along with all editors. It could also just be the “first date” phase where feedback is awkward until you get to know someone better.