

# SAMPLE EDITORIAL LETTER

Author  
Anywhere, USA

RE: *Title*

Dear Author:

Thank you for allowing me to serve as editor for your novel, *Title*. It is a privilege to participate in the production of a writer's first novel, especially on a subject that the writer is so passionate about. Your voice comes through so strongly in ██████'s character that I can't help but wonder whether you or someone you know has shared a similar experience. It was heartening to watch ██████ find the courage to accuse and face her abuser, then begin to pick up the pieces of her life.

The plot and timelines worked well and will not be addressed unless specific issues coincide with other issues being addressed. You also made good use of dialogue, narrative summary, and beats throughout.

In this letter I will primarily address issues with **characters, pacing, chapter headings, and scenes**. I will also offer a few suggestions for revisions; it will be your choice as the author to accept or ignore them. My intention is to provide a different perspective on your story. Additional *minor* issues may become more apparent while copyediting, and they will be addressed by queries in the manuscript when we get to that phase.

The main theme of the novel is about the **power imbalance** between medical and ecclesiastical professionals and people in their care, with a nod to power struggles in the workplace. Subthemes address **love and dependence, addiction and recovery, and the healing power of friendship**. ██████ has experienced sexual abuse from a priest as a child, castigation from her supervisor, and humiliation from the man she fell in love with. In the novel, she crosses the line from love to dependence, experiences narcotic addiction with hope for recovery at the end of the story, and through it all discovers who her real friends are. Have I accurately stated the themes of the novel?

Your novel appears to be written primarily for a female audience almost as a cautionary tale. Male readers would also benefit from this novel as boundary violation issues are not the sole province of women. The story is told primarily from ██████'s point of view, although you also include ██████'s side of the story in a handful of chapters. Interestingly, you present one chapter from the point of view of ██████ ██████, the attorney who advocates for victims of professional boundary violations. I will discuss this chapter later.



Author  
Title Editorial Letter  
Date  
Page 3

I was a little unclear as to the time frame of the story until about the middle of the novel, but I think this could be better addressed with an adjustment to your chapter headings, which I will discuss shortly.

## Characters

██████ is the director of corporate travel at ██████████, an international law firm. At the age of 38, she has finally given up on the idea of finding a decent man to marry and decided to adopt a little girl from China on her own. Everything is falling into place when she has her first ever asthma attack and ends up in the emergency room at ██████████. There she meets a charismatic doctor and immediately responds to his attitude of authority. She feels safe with him. They begin a passionate and ultimately short-lived affair, but in the few months they are together, she starts smoking again and becomes addicted to narcotics.

██████ is the main character of the novel, and therefore the most developed. She has shared an apartment with ██████, her best friend, for some time, so moving into her own place is a pretty big step. She is still a little unsure of herself when ██████, the ER doctor, begins pursuing her, and she goes along with him when at her follow-up appointment he prescribes Paxil for anxiety and Ambien to help her sleep. A couple of weeks later, ██████ prescribes Valium, and shortly after they become involved, ██████ begins smoking again. Finally, when she complains of a headache, ██████ prescribes Vicodin. All of these recurring or new drug habits occur in the time frame of the first 100 pages (about two months?)

I can understand how ██████ might begin smoking again; after all, ██████ is a smoker. I also get from her backstory that she is susceptible to authority figures. And it isn't difficult to believe that a doctor would overprescribe. But I have a hard time believing that she is able to tolerate the number of pills she is ingesting in Chapter 31 (page 206) where she is gorging on M&Ms and adding a "Valium or two to the mix" every couple of hours. Would it work better to show *psychological* addiction by having her obsessively check the time to see how long before she can take the next pill?

█████ is the pulmonologist who preys on vulnerable female patients by giving them a sense of safety. ██████ is one of many relationships that have lasted only about six months. So far, he has gotten away with his behavior: his victims tend to be high profile women who do not want to expose him because of the publicity it would create in their personal lives.

Most of what we know about ██████ is from ██████'s perspective, that is, a woman infatuated with a powerful, authoritative professional. Not surprisingly, he is a narcissist who will do anything to promote his own interests or save his own skin. Towards the end of the novel (page 359) when ██████ is meeting with the firm's attorney, the reader is not surprised when ██████ agrees that he'd be

Author  
Title Editorial Letter  
Date  
Page 4

willing to expose his assistant as incompetent and make a public spectacle of it to boot—as he puts it, “anything to save my ass.”

██████████ is the high-powered attorney who works to obtain settlements for women abused by professionals who have violated boundaries. He serves as an excellent foil to ██████, that is, a professional who does not abuse his authoritative power.

His passion for this cause comes through loud and clear. However, in Chapter 57, I found him to be a little too pompous. For example, on page 374, ██████ calls himself the “quintessential litigator.” His arrogance is displayed throughout the chapter and makes him unsympathetic. Would you consider revising this chapter for ██████’s character and expanding the courtroom portion of the story (as I will discuss shortly)?

██████████ is the vice president of human resources at ████████████████████ and is ██████’s boss. Although that is the description of ██████’s position that I pulled from the manuscript, I found her actions to be out of character for someone in human resources. Don’t HR managers typically supervise employees within their own department? If ██████ is director of corporate travel, it might make more sense for her to be supervised by another level of manager. Alternatively, would it make sense to call ██████ the director of corporate travel and ██████ a senior travel specialist?

A note on the number of characters: I am attaching a list of characters that I made while reading the manuscript. The two main characters are ██████ and ██████. You have a number of supporting characters, such as ██████ and ██████. You have several general minor characters who are momentarily involved in the action and play a minor role in the story. Finally, there is a rather long list of walk-on characters who should serve as background or scenery but not distract from the storyline.

Some of your walk-on characters might be better left unnamed. For example, ██████’s mother, ██████, or ██████’s twins, ██████. Anytime you name a character, it sets up an expectation that they will play a role later, and if they do not, it clutters the reader’s mind. Please consider doing a search for each of the names of the walk-ons. Can the character’s role survive without the name? If so, I suggest you delete it.

## **Pacing**

The pacing of the novel works very well, right up until the courtroom scene. At that point, the story seemed rushed, as though you couldn’t wait to spring ██████’s trap on the unsuspecting defendant. When you read a legal thriller, you will notice that the trial portion is often spread over several days and over a third to a half of the novel. One reason for that is the structure and pace of a trial. Following opening statements, the plaintiff presents her case through examination

Author  
Title Editorial Letter  
Date  
Page 5

of witnesses and introduction of evidence. Quite often the plaintiff herself is the culminating witness. Following the plaintiff's case, the defense presents his side with the defendant often serving as a witness on his own behalf. After both sides have presented, the plaintiff has an opportunity to rebut the defense. This is the moment when ██████ would present the DVD recordings as his surprise evidence because it would rebut ██████'s claim that he never had sex with ██████, especially in a therapeutic role.

It may be that you thought it would be repetitive to showcase the trial after describing in detail the OPMC proceedings and ██████'s deposition. If so, I see two possible solutions. One is to offer a detailed summary of the plaintiff's and defendant's cases before diving into the rebuttal case. The alternative—and I think the better solution—is to summarize the OPMC proceedings and ██████'s deposition and incorporate what you've written in those scenes into a more detailed description of the trial using your excellent skills of narrative summary, dialogue, and beats. Your use of these techniques has created a good story up to the point of the trial, and I think you could apply these skills to draw out the suspense before ██████ presents his surprise evidence. If you have time and you have not already done so, you might attend a short jury trial or two at a local court to get an idea of the pacing and the order of events.

I will address other issues with legal scenes in the last section.

## **Chapter Headings**

Your chapters are titled with the names of characters, but predominantly that character is ██████. Out of 59 chapters, 12 are about ██████ and one chapter is about ██████. Because you used characters' name as chapter titles, I was expecting to learn more about these other characters.

At the same time, one small issue I found with the plot is that I wasn't clear about the time frame until around the middle of the novel, when ██████ starts describing how long she was involved with ██████. It may be that I simply missed that detail. Then again, it may be that it wasn't clear.

Both of these issues could be resolved by substituting the names of the characters with dates as chapter headings. Doing so would provide a clear time frame and would not set up the reader for the expectation of more detailed character perspectives. I don't think you need to change the point of view being presented in those chapters as the characters' voices are clear. (The one exception might be ██████'s chapter. If you expand the trial portion of the novel, you may find that ██████'s point of view is not the only one after all. You may even want to include perspectives from other characters, such as ██████, the defendant's attorney.)

## Scenes

For simplicity, I will address scenes in the order they appear in the manuscript, and I note my comments in blue to consider and change as you see fit. Some are minor; others I might feel more strongly about, but it is still your choice as to how to proceed.

- p. 29 [REDACTED] arrives for her first office visit with [REDACTED] and is shown into his office. Is it typical for a patient to be shown into a doctor's office *prior* to being examined? My experience is that the doctor consults with the patient after the exam or after tests are run.
- pp. 41-42 After an evening of listening to music with [REDACTED], [REDACTED] goes home but cannot sleep. She takes what she thinks is a Valium but is more likely a diet pill (amphetamine). After sleeping for an hour (would she be able to sleep at all after taking an amphetamine?), she awakes with a start in the midst of an asthma attack, which she treats with the Albuterol inhaler. Then she takes a hot shower, after which she falls asleep immediately. Someone taking an amphetamine, especially someone who is not used to taking amphetamines, might not be able to fall asleep after only a few hours, even after a hot shower. More likely, she would have had a sleepless night.
- p. 45 [REDACTED] is on her cell phone on the subway platform. Is one able to get cell phone reception on a subway platform underground?
- p. 46 [REDACTED] watches a carpenter ant inching across the platform. Aren't the subway platforms concrete? Carpenter ants live in wood; are the rail ties in the New York subway system wood? Would a cockroach be more plausible in this scene?
- p. 200 [REDACTED] asks [REDACTED] if [REDACTED] ever used protection when they were together. This is the first mention of [REDACTED] refusing to use protection. It seems like it should have been brought up when [REDACTED] first started seeing him, but I don't recall that it was.
- p. 221 [REDACTED] calls [REDACTED] from the hospital lobby. Are people allowed to use cell phones anywhere in hospitals or would she have to go outside to make a call?
- p. 235 [REDACTED] is discussing transference issues with [REDACTED], and he notes that the feelings she transferred to [REDACTED] were the ones she had toward the priest years ago. This statement almost sounds like she had an attraction to the priest. My impression is that he sexually assaulted her. Are you telling the reader is that she transferred her *trust* in the priest as an authority figure to her doctor? Perhaps you could indicate that a little more clearly as this was the only scene where that didn't seem clear.

- p. 240 [REDACTED] tells [REDACTED] there are a lot of crazies in the world. “Millions, billions.”  
Unnecessary hyperbole?
- p. 242 [REDACTED] tells [REDACTED] that she can break into a filing cabinet with a paper clip. Is that possible? I suspect that the lock would have to be drilled out instead. Can you confirm this with a locksmith? What about if the file cabinet was simply left unlocked?
- p. 256 [REDACTED] has her first visit with the therapist, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is asking [REDACTED] leading questions about the relationship. Don’t therapists usually let the patient talk in generalities about their issues for the first visit while they gather information? The way [REDACTED] is questioning [REDACTED] is very suggestive of what she ([REDACTED]) thinks the problem is. Would it be more professional if she let [REDACTED] state the problem in her own words?
- p. 276 While in China, [REDACTED] identifies her daughter as [REDACTED], her first name being [REDACTED]. But when she identifies the women in the agency, she identifies them as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I’m not sure how many people besides me would notice this discrepancy but I thought I would mention it.
- p. 279 [REDACTED] is waiting for someone to bring [REDACTED] out to see her. She hears two sets of footsteps: one clipped and quick, the other slow and soft, more like a shuffle. Would a shuffling toddler be able to keep up with someone walking quickly? Would it make more sense for [REDACTED] to be carried in to meet [REDACTED]?
- p. 285 [REDACTED] is discussing the confidentiality clause of the new patient safety bill with her colleague. I have the impression from the story she is writing that this new bill will affect any complaints previously filed as well as claims filed in the future. Usually bills that are signed into law have a specific effective date and only affect complaints filed after that date. To clarify, you could indicate that the bill is intended to be effective retroactively to a point in time that happens to coincide with when [REDACTED] filed her complaint.
- p. 296 [REDACTED] sends [REDACTED] an email about the story that is coming out about her complaint. He writes, “Remember, it’s *The Post*—it’s worse than it looks.” Does he mean to say “It looks worse than it is”?
- p. 301 While [REDACTED] is in China, a fax comes in, and the assistant hands the “shiny fax paper” to [REDACTED]. Are the Chinese still using fax rolls? Most machines (in the U.S., anyway) use regular paper now.

- p. 323 ■ is served the Complaint against him by certified mail. Can you confirm that service of process against a civil defendant can be by certified mail? My memory is that the initial complaint must be personally served, but maybe that's not true where you are.
- p. 331 While ■ is setting her purse down on the seat next to her at the medical board hearing, her purse falls to the floor. The items that fall out are a lipstick, a pen, and a tampon case. Would it add a dramatic element if pill bottles fell out of her purse here?
- p. 341 ■ has found a doctor in Connecticut who will burn off his body markings using a Fraxel laser. I suspect any semi-competent dermatologist would be able to tell if body markings were recently burned off, but I don't know for sure. Is there someone you can ask to confirm?
- p. 360 ■ meets ■ at a restaurant for lunch to prep for her deposition. Deposition prep would probably take place at the attorney's office because there's a lot of work involved. Lunch would be too much of a distraction.
- p. 365 ■ notices that ■ is wearing the same style of necklace as he gave her. The matching necklaces is a nice touch. Would it add a dramatic beat if ■ noticed ■'s necklace, too?
- p. 366 At the deposition, ■ is sworn in by a court officer. Typically court reporters, who are notary publics, are able to swear deposition witnesses. Again, this might be different where you live.
- p. 375 ■ is questioning ■ on the witness stand. ■ is elaborating on his answer. ■'s attorney would have instructed his client to simply answer the question asked and no more. The attorney asking the questions must do the work of eliciting information.
- p. 383 ■ is reviewing ■'s testimony with him. He asks him, "Do you think clearly when you're performing surgery?" I didn't think ■ was a surgeon. Would "procedures" be a better word here?
- p. 385 The dermatologist has examined ■ and found no trace of his birthmark or mole. See the comment above from page 341.

Author  
Title Editorial Letter  
Date  
Page 9

- p. 387 ■ realizes that his DVDs are gone, and he races back to the courtroom before the judge and jury can see it. It is unlikely that the jury would view anything outside the parameters of the court proceedings unless there is good reason, such as when someone's identity needs to be protected (a minor child, for example). Even then, the parties would probably remain in the courtroom to wait, or at least in the vicinity of the courthouse.
- p. 391 The attorneys inform the judge that the ■ has agreed to a settlement. Although it's a small distinction, it would be more correct to say that he has agreed to settle, because a *settlement* (dollar amount and terms) has not yet been agreed to by both parties.

Author, you have written a fine story about a difficult subject. The plot is plausible, the characters are well-drawn, and you make good use of dialogue, narrative, and beats throughout. I don't know whether you have had formal training in writing or whether you participate in a writing group, but whatever you're doing, keep doing it. It has been a pleasure to participate in making a good story even better.

Sincerely,

*Julie Klein*

Julie Klein

A+ Editing and Proofreading