

Ooligan Press Editorial Department

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Jennifer Hanlon Wilde
Finding the Vein
Developmental Edit

Dear Jen:

I want to begin this letter by thanking you for allowing the editorial team at Ooligan to work on this very special book. You've written a charming, touching, and thoroughly entertaining story, complete with a memorable cast of characters that jump off the page. My team of editors and I have had such a fun time immersing ourselves in the story and working to make it the best it can be, and I'm so excited to see how it turns out once you've made your revisions.

This developmental edit focused on big-picture concerns like plot, character development, verisimilitude, and overall structure. To conduct the edit, I assembled a team of six editors, all of whom read through the manuscript multiple times and then submitted their suggestions and line-level comments to me. This helped me get a variety of perspectives on what was working well in the manuscript and what could be improved. This letter represents my synthesis of the team's feedback. We also recruited several sensitivity readers and fact-checkers to take a look at the manuscript, and I've incorporated their feedback here as well. I've also sent you a copy of the manuscript with line-level comments; this will serve as a supplement to the letter and will help direct you to specific places where changes have been suggested. Be aware that this is our only opportunity to make large-scale changes to the manuscript; after this, it will enter the copyediting stage, where we will focus mainly on language and grammar.

So, without further ado, let's dive in!

NARRATIVE AND PLOT

Overall, you've done an excellent job writing a fast-paced, high-energy mystery with a creative plot that keeps readers engaged. The story starts off with a bang, and the tension builds well throughout. In this section, I will focus on how the reader experiences the story as it unfolds and suggest possible improvements related to plot, logic, and verisimilitude.

Setting***Place***

Throughout the manuscript, you do a great job of using Oregon and Heritage Camp as subtle backdrops to the story—the setting is definitely there, but it doesn't take over. That said, some of our editors felt that the setting could be developed just a little bit more to give readers a clearer sense of where the camp is in relation to nearby cities and landmarks. For example, how long does it take Mikie and Detective Wu to drive between Heritage Camp and Portland? What side of Lake Sandy is the camp on? As you make your revisions, keep an eye out for places where you can add in these little setting details, keeping in mind both local and non-local readers.

Additionally, some of our editors thought that there was too much rain and dampness in the manuscript, considering the story takes place in the height of summer and Oregon summers have been increasingly hot and dry in recent years. It's okay to have a late-night rainstorm during the book's climax, but local readers will be more on board with this if one of the characters comments on the fact that it's unusual. Also keep an eye out for other references to wet weather (such as the "cool damp air" in chapter 9) and consider making adjustments.

Time

Another thing to consider is time: when the story takes place and the pace at which it unfolds. Currently, the story is set in the summer of 2014. Does it need to be set during that year in particular? Or could it be rendered more "timeless" by omitting the year? Consider removing all mentions of the year (e.g., in the very beginning and in Isaac's emails to Michelle) so the book can age better. Additionally, there is a mention of birth years in the article excerpt in chapter 16: it says the illegal trafficking in babies occurred in "the late 1980s and early 1990s," and Isaac says, "That's when we were born." However, if Isaac is sixteen in 2014, then he would have been born in the late 1990s, not the early 1990s. My suggestion here would be to try to remove the year range from the article (and the ensuing dialogue) so as to avoid any issues with time continuity.

I would also suggest incorporating more time markers in the narrative to give readers a better sense of the pace at which the action is unfolding. It all takes place over the span of just a few days, but it's easy for readers to lose track of that, especially when the narrative is shifting between different characters and locations. One option would be to include a time stamp at the beginning of each chapter (e.g., "July 26, 7:30 p.m."); another would be to incorporate more temporal cues into the text itself. Inserting more emails to Michelle throughout the story could also be a strategic way to mark the passage of time (see "Structure").

Orienting the Reader

In addition to providing a few more cues in regards to time and place, there are other small changes that you can make to ensure that readers stay immersed in the story and can follow what's going on. Though you've done a great job keeping readers engaged in the suspense and mystery for most of the story, there are a few places where things get a little confusing.

The First Chapter/Prologue

One of these places is the first chapter, which is told from Paul A.'s perspective. I think it works really well to start off the story with a bang and throw the reader into the action from the perspective of the victim, and this chapter also plants some important clues for later on. However, several of our readers and editors found this chapter a bit disorienting. I think this is because there's a lot going on in this scene and readers are being introduced to a lot of different characters and camp activities all at once. It's good for readers to be thrown into an exciting scene, but we don't want them to be so preoccupied with trying to figure out who's talking, what game is being played, and why people are getting pies to the face that they can't focus on the important parts of the scene.

In my line notes, I've indicated a couple of places in this first chapter where you could add a little bit more description and context to help orient readers: What is E squared? What are the rules of the game the characters are playing? Who's talking at which time? What other details about the setting or the characters' relationships to each other can be provided on the first page? Remember that all of this is completely new information for readers. While it's important to keep the scene exciting and avoid getting *too* bogged down in detailed description, the action

moves so quickly here that you can afford to slow down a bit in the interest of keeping readers with you. A few more details and character/setting markers will go a long way.

I would also suggest labeling this scene “Prologue.” The time stamp can be maintained, but currently this section isn’t given a chapter heading, and we jump right into chapter 2 without a chapter 1 to precede it. This standalone scene from Paul A.’s perspective would work well as a prologue; we could then start at chapter 1 with the emails to Michelle (but see “Structure” for more on this).

Dialogue

This is a very dialogue-heavy manuscript, and you’ve pulled it off well, which is no easy feat! The dialogue does a great job of carrying the action and keeping readers immersed, and you’ve shown a lot of skill in writing dialogue that’s realistic and well integrated into the surrounding text. The only real problem we noticed with the dialogue was that in some places there are too few dialogue tags (e.g., “Isaac said” or “Paul Shaw asked”) for the reader to keep track of who’s talking. This can happen in long stretches of dialogue where there are no tags to indicate the speakers. In most scenes where only two characters are present, this isn’t an issue: you generally do a great job of establishing distinct voices for your characters, so readers should be able to follow most conversations that occur between, say, Isaac and Paul Shaw, without the need for a lot of dialogue tags. However, it can get tricky when more than two characters are present in the same scene. In my line notes, I’ve pointed out a few places where additional dialogue tags would be helpful. This is also something you can keep an eye out for as you make your revisions.

Plot Changes

The Nude-Photos Plotline

As I mentioned in an email early on, we have some concerns about the plotline involving the nude photos and underage pornography. Even when written with the best of intentions, these kinds of storylines often have the effect of sensationalizing the exploitation of underage girls and, ultimately, can serve to further sexualize them; the narrative can become titillating for readers, which leads to all sorts of ethical complications. Moreover, we feel that this plotline does not fully serve the story as it is, especially since it competes with the plotlines around plagiarism, the pill-selling operation, and international child trafficking. This runs the risk of weakening the narrative, and the overall story would be better served by combining some of these plotlines so as to streamline the narrative and more fully integrate these elements into the main plot. Taking all of these factors into account, we came up with the potential solution of removing the nude-photos plotline and replacing it with a more robust version of the plotline around plagiarism and the selling of pills.

As you’ve pointed out, removing the nude-photos plotline won’t be the simplest matter, as it comes up rather frequently throughout the story and is tied to a few different character motives and plot points. However, it is definitely doable, especially since this plotline is already closely connected with the pill-selling plotline through the character of Ty. Rather than selling term papers, dealing drugs, *and* drugging girls to produce underage pornography, Ty can just be engaged in the first two activities on a slightly larger scale. Since we already know that he sold some term papers to Nathan, a line or two could be added to reveal that he does this sort of thing routinely and has a rather expansive plagiarism operation; this could be the reason he got kicked out of college (or he could’ve gotten kicked out because he was selling pills to students, or it could be a combination of the two). In order to keep the stakes high enough to give Ty a good murder motive, his pill-selling operation could also be expanded to include more serious drugs than Adderall. For example, perhaps he also sells opioids and benzos. This would connect well

with his background as a medical student, since he might have connections that give him access to a supply of prescription drugs.

Of course, Paul Anderson and Sophie need to be brought into this somehow. My suggestion would be to replace Paul A.'s pornography addiction with an addiction to prescription pills and to make him some sort of accomplice in Ty's pill-selling operation. Perhaps Paul A. got caught up selling drugs for Ty back in high school, or perhaps he's been selling them within or outside the camp in exchange for a steady supply from Ty. Sophie, for her part, could be one of Ty and Paul's customers (or even another dealing accomplice)—since she already engages in underage drinking and other risky behaviors, prescription-drug abuse would make sense for her character.

If this were the case, then the explicit photo that Isaac finds on Paul A.'s phone could be replaced with something related to the drugs: perhaps a video of Sophie taking them, or a text message from her saying she doesn't want to take the pills anymore or regrets getting caught up in the dealing operation. Like the nude photo we currently have, this kind of evidence on Paul A.'s phone would give Sophie, Genevieve, and Ty potential motives for committing the murder: Sophie could have killed him because she was angry about him introducing her to drugs or because she felt desperate and trapped in the dealing operation; Genevieve could have killed him because he got her daughter addicted to drugs (setting aside her actual motive, which the main characters don't learn about until the end); and Ty could have killed him because he thought Paul A. was about to bail on the dealing operation and rat him out to the authorities. Perhaps Paul A. was acting strange and jumpy in the last days of his life (due to the revelations about his background, which Ty wasn't privy to) and Ty took this to mean Paul A. was about to blow his cover. Another interesting possibility to consider would be that Ty might worry that Paul A.'s death was somehow related to an overdose on the pills he gave him, which could lead Ty to act guilty and suspicious during the investigation, thereby making him a stronger suspect.

Another element that would need to be changed for this plot adjustment is the stash of pornography on Paul A.'s laptop. Rather than porn, perhaps the detectives find records of drug sales, pictures of drugs, messages related to drug deals, or a stash of term papers for sale—after all, if Paul A. is involved in Ty's drug-dealing operation, perhaps he's involved in his plagiarism operation too. In the current manuscript, the message around Paul A.'s porn addiction is that he's a good kid who suffers from an illness and has gotten help for it (as Mr. Anderson explains in chapter 23). The same could be true in this alternate version: perhaps Ty got him addicted to prescription pills and this led him down a bad path, but toward the end of his life he got help to overcome his addiction and wanted out of the drug-dealing/plagiarism operation. This would maintain his status as a sympathetic character, and it could also dovetail nicely with his motives for going to Thailand: maybe he not only wants to get in touch with his roots but also wants a fresh start after getting sucked into Ty's criminal enterprise.

Though I hope these ideas have provided you with some creative inspiration, I don't want to be overly prescriptive: you know better than anyone what's true to your story and your characters, and you might come up with ideas that work even better. If you do decide to remove the nude-photos plotline, I would encourage you to use my line-level comments as a guide for these revisions: wherever I found a reference to this plotline in the text, I inserted a comment to flag it (e.g., "Scene flagged for nude-photos plotline"). You should therefore be able to find most of the places where adjustments are necessary by typing "nude-photos plotline" in the document search bar (as long as the comments are turned on under the "Review" tab in Word). Some of these revisions will be simple (for instance, the word "photo" might just need to be replaced with "text message," or "porn" might need to be replaced with "pills"); in other places, larger-scale adjustments will need to be made (e.g., changes to a passage of dialogue).

Insulin/EpiPen Plotline

Another element of the plot that you might consider adjusting is the way in which Genevieve kills Paul A. On the whole, you've done a great job setting this up: the medical themes carry through the text really well, and I love how the murder method is so creative and connects to Mikie's nursing background as well as Sophie's diabetes. The only concern here is that we had someone with type 1 diabetes do an authenticity read on the manuscript, and she reported back that the amount of liquid that would be injected by two EpiPens (0.6 ml total) would not contain nearly enough units of insulin to kill someone. It turns out the math for this is rather complicated (as it involves converting between mg and ml), and I don't have the know-how to confirm it myself. However, our reader consulted with an actual scientist to check the calculations, and they determined together that even two EpiPens combined would not be able to inject the hundreds of units of insulin needed for an overdose. If you would like to see some of the specific sources they consulted, I would be happy to provide them. That said, I know you have a medical background, and you may have other knowledge or sources that contradict these findings. Whether or not you make changes to this plot point will be up to you—factual accuracy ultimately falls within the purview of the author, and there's always a certain amount of creative license in fiction. Moreover, most readers will not have in-depth knowledge about EpiPens and insulin and likely wouldn't notice potential discrepancies here.

That said, if you do want to make an adjustment, we've come up with a possible solution that's fairly noninvasive: Paul A. could be allergic to insulin as well as peanuts. According to my own preliminary research, anaphylactic reactions to insulin injection (though rare) do occur. Local reactions can also occur from skin contact with insulin. Therefore, if Paul A. ever came into contact with Sophie's insulin while at camp (perhaps she broke a vial at some point prior to the story and he helped her clean it up), he could have developed a local reaction to it, tipping Genevieve off to the fact that he was allergic. If this were the case, she could carry out the murder in exactly the same way: the only difference would be that instead of having an anaphylactic reaction to the peanut and then dying of an insulin overdose, he would die of anaphylactic shock from both the peanut *and* the insulin, and Genevieve could still claim she was trying to save him by administering the EpiPens. If you were to make this change, only a few scenes would need slight adjustments: one would be the conversation with Dr. Kitchener in chapter 13 (which might need some additional lines to account for the signs of insulin allergy in the body), and another would be Genevieve's confession in chapter 37 (which will be discussed at length in the "Characters" section).

Again, this is all up to you, and that's only one possible solution. Another would be to change the murder so that it takes place with no witnesses: perhaps Genevieve still uses the two (insulin-containing) EpiPens in front of all the campers but then takes Paul A. to the infirmary and gives him additional insulin (enough to cause an overdose) away from prying eyes. This version would likely require a bit more rewriting, especially in early chapters (such as the initial death scene and also chapter 6) where the scene of the crime is described and witnesses give their accounts.

Note that in case you do decide to make changes to the logistics of the murder, I have flagged most instances where it's referred to in the text: you can find these by searching "insulin/EpiPen plotline" with the comments turned on.

Coincidence and Verisimilitude

In this section, I will discuss issues of logic and coincidence in the plot. Mystery readers tend to want their plots to be as realistic as possible, and it's important to tie up any loose ends. While you've done a good job writing a plot that's relatively realistic and believable overall, there are a

few plot points that readers might find a bit too coincidental or far-fetched.

Heritage Camp and Its Connections to Child Trafficking

First, I have a quick question about Heritage Camp: Is it realistic for the director and assistant director to be so young? It seems Ty is about twenty-one, and Katie seems to be quite young as well. You have more experience with these camps than I do, but it struck me as a bit odd for the director to be so young. You might consider aging Ty and Katie up slightly, making Ty the head counselor instead of the director (which would necessitate some explanation as to why the camp director isn't there), or providing a little bit of an explanation as to why the camp is run by college-age people.

Additionally, several of our readers and editors came away from the manuscript with the impression that too many of the campers were Thai and that too many of them came to the U.S. through child trafficking. This seemed a bit too coincidental. That said, you do mention in the first chapter that some of the campers and counselors are from Haiti, Ethiopia, and China, and you also mention that Paul Shaw is mixed race. Peppering in information like this in one or two other places in the manuscript would help to more fully establish the diversity of the camp and show that not everyone is coincidentally from Thailand. When minor characters like Katie, Piper, and the twins are introduced, consider giving them (or another character) a reason to casually mention what country they were adopted from to reinforce this sense of diversity.

Another idea to consider would be to give a reason why a large percentage of the campers are from Thailand—or why several of the campers there have come through this illegal baby-selling operation. Is Heritage Camp affiliated with a particular adoption agency that has connections to Thailand (and to those baby factories in particular)? What exactly is the role of the Oregon church that Ty (chapter 24) and Tanya (chapter 33) both mention? Is it affiliated with Heritage Camp? Providing more details about the operation of Heritage Camp and its connections to illegal Thai adoption (perhaps during Tanya's backstory in chapter 33) would help readers understand that these plot points are deliberately and thoughtfully related to each other rather than just coincidental.

Some other questions to consider are these: Does Isaac really need to be one of the stolen babies? Does he even need to be from Thailand? Some of our editors pointed out that Isaac's character already has so much complexity—given the fact that he's adopted, Asian, and trans—that the revelation that he is quite possibly one of the stolen babies doesn't add anything necessary to his character arc: his backstory is really interesting as it is. In fact, this revelation might even dilute the similar revelations about the backgrounds of Sophie and Paul A. and make the plotline around illegal adoption seem too coincidental. It also leaves readers with some loose ends and lingering questions: Will Isaac try to find out for sure whether he was stolen? Will he tell his parents? Will he try to track down his birth mother? The plot point is a bit underdeveloped, and removing it would allow readers to focus on the more developed aspects of the story and Isaac's character. Additionally, changing Isaac's country of origin—perhaps making him from a different Asian country—would help diversify the cast of characters and avoid giving readers the sense that there's too much coincidence at work.

Genotypes and Phenotypes

On a related note, the team raised some questions about the fact that Sophie and Paul A. turn out to be close relatives. Any kind of allusion to incest is going to make readers squirm, though that's not necessarily a bad thing. However, it is important to consider whether a revelation like this is truly serving the story: What purpose does their familial connection fulfill? And is it too much of a coincidence for readers to accept? I would encourage you to explore other possibilities here. Perhaps the reason Paul A. fights the urge to kiss Sophie in the beginning is that he doesn't

want to get too close to her and further entangle her in Ty's drug operation; or perhaps he feels conflicted about the possibility of revealing her background to her. They might not need to be related.

This brings me to the matter of Paul Shaw's facial-recognition program. As I'll discuss more at length in the "Characters" section, I love how Paul Shaw serves as a kind of mysterious boy genius and young Sherlock Holmes in this manuscript. However, the idea that he could create his own facial-recognition program that could determine whether people were related to each other might be a bridge too far for readers. Since family resemblance varies so widely and people only share approximately 50 percent of their genetic material with their parents and full siblings, this kind of technology seems a bit beyond the realm of possibility. While it's true that readers are often willing to suspend disbelief to some extent, it might be worth considering some alternatives. What if, instead of creating this program, Paul Shaw found out what he knows about Tanya, Paul A., and the illegal adoptions through some kind of hacking of secret databases? Or what if he began to suspect that they were related earlier in the summer and managed to get ahold of some of their DNA and get it tested (through some kind of illicit means, of course, since it's probably not easy to get someone's DNA tested without their consent)?

If you decide to keep the facial-recognition program, it might help to more fully acknowledge how outlandish the idea seems. Perhaps Isaac could react with more shock and incredulity, or perhaps Paul Shaw could explain just a little bit more about how he managed to pull off such an unlikely feat. This kind of acknowledgment would help keep readers on board with the story.

A Surplus of Pauls

A couple of our editors questioned the decision to include multiple characters named Paul. Judging from the way Paul Shaw pokes fun at the "surplus of Pauls" at the camp, I always assumed this tendency to name children Paul was a bit of an inside joke within the adoption world. I don't see a problem with having two Pauls in the story as long as readers can easily distinguish between them (which they generally should be able to do, since you do a good job of making it clear which Paul is which). However, if this wasn't a very intentional decision on your part, it would be worthwhile to consider giving one of the Pauls a different name.

CHARACTERS

One of the greatest strengths of this manuscript is its characters. You show a real gift for writing young people, and most of your characters have such distinctive and entertaining personalities that readers will feel invested in them from the get-go. As I mentioned above, you've done a great job with dialogue in this manuscript, and this is where a lot of these characters' personalities really come through. In this section of the letter, I will do a breakdown of each character that we think could stand to be improved in some small way, whether that's through their backstory, their inner life, or their contributions to the plot.

Isaac

Isaac is a great protagonist for a lot of reasons: he's funny, he's quirky (we all love that he has a habit of climbing trees), he's relatable, and he has a complicated and sympathetic backstory. We especially appreciate how the fact that Isaac is trans is part of his story but doesn't define him: on the whole, that aspect of his experience feels authentic and not tokenistic (see "Sensitivity" for a full discussion of trans representation). And of course, his relationship with Paul Shaw is one of the highlights of the book.

That said, we would love to see a little more of Isaac's interiority and his emotional reactions to things that are happening around him. This comes through really well in certain moments (for example, when he feels like he's going to faint after seeing Mai for the first time), but since the manuscript is so heavy on fast-paced dialogue, his perspective sometimes gets lost in the flurry. There are moments when I would expect him to be having a noteworthy emotional reaction to things that are happening in the story, and I've pointed out a few of these in my line notes. For instance, how concerned is Isaac after witnessing Sophie in distress in chapter 10? What exactly is going through his mind when Wu interrogates him in chapter 27? These don't need to be lengthy passages or inner monologues, but combing through the manuscript and adding a little line here and there about how Isaac is feeling and processing everything around him will help readers get to know him better and feel more immersed in the story.

Mikie

I love the different ways in which Mikie's backstory connects with Heritage Camp and the mystery—from her childhood memories of camping near Lake Sandy to her former career as a nurse to her discovery about her parentage. These personal connections to the investigation create a lot of potential for adding some more depth to her character; as things stand, several of our editors came away from the book wishing they knew Mikie a bit better. What inspired her career change? Does her discovery about her own parentage have an impact on her emotional investment in solving the case? For example, does she feel for Paul A. and his quest to get in touch with his background? What is her emotional reaction to learning that Genevieve, a fellow nurse, was the murderer after all? What happened with the "former partner" who she references in chapter 35? There are so many ways in which Mikie's character might be given more depth.

One possibility to consider would be adding a short scene—maybe just two paragraphs or so at the beginning or end of one of Mikie's chapters—showing her at home. Perhaps she's lying in bed next to a sleeping Jamie, unable to sleep herself because she can't stop worrying about the case—or about the discovery she recently made about her own family. This is just one idea, and you might think of a better one. But getting another glimpse or two of Mikie when she's not on the job will help readers connect with her in a more intimate way. Moreover, one or two of our editors said they would like to see a little more of Mikie's relationship with Jamie, and adding a scene like this could help flesh that out more.

Finally, my team experienced some confusion around what exactly Mikie discovers about her parentage: several editors thought she was adopted, but I thought she was the product of an affair and was fathered by another man (based on the line "She wanted to ask how he'd forgiven her mother" in chapter 38). This suggests that this plot point is too subtle to be reliably interpreted by readers and therefore needs to be made more explicit. This could be accomplished in part by adding one or two lines of clarifying dialogue to this final scene between Mikie and her dad. I would also recommend teasing out this plotline at a few points throughout the manuscript. This relates to one of my questions from above: Does her discovery about her own parentage have an impact on her emotional investment in solving the case? Some of our editors thought Mikie was connecting her own background to the backgrounds of the kids at Heritage Camp (for example, when she feels an urge to tell Rachel about her personal discovery when discussing adoption in chapter 25), and it would be helpful to make this connection more explicit.

Another idea for strengthening this plotline would be to include a short scene where Mikie first receives the inheritance or hears about her biological father's will—it wouldn't have to spoil the final reveal by giving the reader all the information, but rather could serve as a tease suggesting that Mikie has made some momentous discovery about her background. This moment currently

happens “offscreen,” and it would likely be more powerful (and clearer for readers) if it got its own short scene.

Wu

I recall using the phrase “roguish charm” in our acquisition meeting to describe my impression of Wu’s character, and this is still accurate! He certainly has his funny moments (I’m partial to “Wu and be Wu’d” in chapter 26), and his banter and power struggles with Mikie add a dynamic layer to the story. The fact that this new, unproven cop was right about Genevieve all along provides a nice twist too.

However, many of our readers and editors struggled to connect with Wu because he often comes across as too much of a jerk. He makes a lot of insensitive remarks, has prejudicial thoughts, has a tendency to oversexualize women and girls (despite apparently being married), and can seem overly callous in the face of trauma. All this isn’t to say that Wu *shouldn’t* be a little bit of a jerk, as it’s important for characters to have flaws and rough edges. But Wu isn’t meant to be a villain, and the balance here feels off—there are moments when he risks losing reader sympathy entirely. In my line notes, I’ve flagged several of these moments and made suggestions for how they might be softened. I would also suggest keeping an eye out for places where Wu’s softness or his goofier side could be played up to make it easier for readers to connect with him. I enjoyed seeing his awkwardness and vulnerability at the beginning of his conversation with Tanya in chapter 26, and it would be great to see a few more human moments like this one.

Paul Shaw

Paul Shaw really steals the show. He has some great zingers, his relationship with Isaac is a lot of fun, and he works really well as an amateur sleuth. While we appreciated the mysterious aspect of his character to a certain extent, we did find that there were some loose ends in regards to both his sleuthing and his backstory that could be tied up to make the story more believable.

At several points in the manuscript, our editors found themselves asking, “But how does Paul Shaw *know* this?” He has a lot of mysterious knowledge that aids him in solving the case, and readers need some kind of explanation of where this knowledge comes from. I’ve already discussed the facial-recognition database in a previous section, and in my line notes I’ve pointed out a few other places where some added explanation for Paul Shaw’s knowledge would be helpful. One such case is his unwavering conviction that Sophie is innocent. How does he know she’s innocent? And why is he so quick to assume that others will suspect her? Paul Shaw seems a bit overly defensive of Sophie, and it’s unclear whether this is because he has a crush on her or because he has knowledge of her innocence that readers aren’t privy to. I’ll discuss Sophie further in another section, but I would also encourage you to find places in the manuscript where you can clarify what exactly Paul Shaw knows and how he feels about her. There is some evidence in the text to suggest that he only likes Sophie as a friend, and it might be a good idea to play that up so that Isaac’s feelings for her can really shine.

Another example is Paul Shaw’s sudden realization of Ty’s innocence at the end of chapter 36. The reader never really gets an explanation as to what tips him off that it was Genevieve and not Ty. I would suggest adding another line or two of dialogue in the following chapter to explain this realization and keep your readers with you.

And finally, there’s Paul Shaw’s background. We learn from Wu that Paul Shaw had a rough childhood in foster care, was “a huge problem child,” and was emancipated at fifteen. If this is the case, then how exactly did he end up at Heritage Camp? What is the relationship between his childhood problems and his current genius? What’s his side of the story? There are so many unknowns here, and it’s okay not to fully resolve them—he can be a little mysterious. However, I

think readers need a bit more information or a sense of closure. Perhaps Isaac could have one more scene with Paul Shaw at the very end, where Paul Shaw alludes to his own story and Isaac starts to see him in a different light. These two could also use a goodbye scene, since they're about to leave camp and might never see each other again. Since I've already discussed the possibility of removing the part about Sophie and Paul A. being related, this new scene could possibly take the place of Isaac's brief interaction with Paul Shaw at the beginning of chapter 39.

Sophie

Another character our editors wanted to learn more about is Sophie. She currently has a few strong moments where we get glimpses of her personality, like her interaction with Isaac on the dock in chapter 18 and her final scene with him at the end of the book. But there are also some unresolved questions: Why does she wear those colored contact lenses? Why does she blame herself for Paul A.'s death? Does she find out what her mother did? Why is she going to live with her grandparents at the end? We also came away with the sense that Sophie lacked agency in the novel: things happen around her, but she doesn't seem very involved in what's going on; rather, she tends to come across as a sad, beautiful girl who others want to protect. But what does *Sophie* want? Are there any scenes where she could take a more active role in either aiding or hindering the investigation? Could her two intimate scenes with Isaac be expanded slightly to help readers learn more about who she is?

Another thing to think about is how Sophie can be played up as a potential suspect. This goes along with my discussion of Paul Shaw above—the characters need to have a reason to suspect Sophie. Do they think she intentionally ate the peanut butter cup before kissing Paul A.? Why do they think she did it? Do they confront her about it? Try to play around with some ways in which Sophie could come forward just a little bit more in the story.

Additionally, our sensitivity readers found that in many places, Sophie came across as overly sexualized, which raises some concerns around the representation of teenage girls. I've addressed many of these problematic moments in my line notes, and I think a lot of this will be resolved if the nude-photos plotline is removed.

Genevieve

Opportunities for improving Genevieve's character all involve strengthening the murder plot. I like what you've done by making her a top suspect initially but then shifting the focus over to Ty (and the possibility of suicide), only to bring it back to Genevieve in the end. However, some of our editors felt that Genevieve was so suspicious throughout the story that the final revelation of her guilt wasn't as surprising as it could have been. In order for this maneuver to have the full effect, Genevieve needs to seem as innocent as possible throughout most of the book. This can be accomplished through a combination of playing up her alibis and playing up Ty's suspiciousness (see next section). In my line notes, I've noted one place in chapter 10 where Genevieve comes off as just a little too suspicious. This whole chapter could also be an opportunity to make her seem more innocent, since it's told through her perspective—maybe her sense of horror at the fresh memory of Paul A.'s death could be emphasized more to make readers think she couldn't possibly be the cold-blooded killer.

Our editors also saw some opportunities for strengthening Genevieve's confession in chapter 37. As it stands, this scene reads as slightly anticlimactic, and there are a few loose ends that aren't tied up. For instance, I don't believe we ever find out exactly how Paul A. came in contact with the peanut butter cup, so it would be a good idea to have Genevieve explain where and how she planted it. And what *did* she do with those EpiPens, anyway? We also don't get a full picture of Genevieve's mental state and all the factors that led her to finally snap and kill Paul A. This is one of the most important scenes in the book, so it shouldn't be rushed—don't be afraid to slow

things down here in order to give readers that big sinister confession they've been waiting for and help them put all the pieces together. If you decide to change the plot so that Paul A. and Sophie are involved with the drug dealing rather than the nude photos, this would also be a good time to tie up some of those loose ends and consider whether this plotline contributed to Genevieve's motives at all. Did she know about the drugs?

Ty

To continue a train of thought from the last section, Ty could stand to be strengthened as a murder suspect. This could largely be achieved by playing up the pill-selling plotline, as I discussed above. You might also consider dropping some hints earlier in the story that make him seem more suspicious. For example, you might make him seem jumpy in his interview with Wu in chapter 24, or perhaps he could be flustered and angry when he catches Paul Shaw and Isaac in the closet in chapter 14. As I discussed in the "Narrative and Plot" section, this jumpiness and suspicious behavior would make sense if it turned out that Ty was worried that Paul A.'s death was related to a drug overdose. It would also help throw readers off the trail and make Genevieve's eventual confession more surprising. Whatever you choose to do, just make sure that all motives and suspicious behavior are adequately explained by the end.

Tiffany

I love how Tiffany is a young, inexperienced cop who turns out to be quite competent despite the prejudices of her superiors. One of her defining traits is her "Valley girl" accent—particularly her tendency to use "upspeak" so that every sentence sounds like a question. While I think this trait makes sense for Tiffany, it's something we need to be careful with for a couple of reasons. First, some of our editors flagged the constant question marks in her dialogue as annoying and distracting. My suggestion would be to just include the question marks the first time Tiffany speaks and then to reference her upspeak once or twice: this will be sufficient to let readers know that she speaks this way, and the rest of the question marks won't be necessary. Another thing to be aware of is that upspeak has become quite common and accepted among young women especially, and those who mock upspeak can come across as condescending or even sexist. Since *Finding the Vein* straddles the line between YA and adult fiction, we want to keep the younger audience in mind and make sure they stay on Mikie's side. I would therefore suggest softening Mikie's irritation with Tiffany's speech patterns. Perhaps Mikie finds the upspeak a little annoying at first, but then later she feels bad about this. She could also defend Tiffany when Wu makes fun of the way she talks—this would add to the dynamic banter between Mikie and Wu, all while keeping readers on Mikie's side.

SENSITIVITY AND FACTUAL CONCERNS

Sensitivity Read

In my line notes, I've flagged a few passages that raised concerns for our sensitivity readers and offered suggestions for adjusting them. In this section of the letter, I will discuss what the sensitivity readers reported in more general terms.

Race

You've done a great job writing a story with a diverse cast of characters. In most cases, these characters' racial and ethnic backgrounds are presented as qualities that are *part* of who they are but that don't define them, and this is exactly what we like to see in terms of racial representation. That said, there were just a few places where our sensitivity readers felt that a character's race was being mentioned unnecessarily. Sometimes a character's race is important

to the plot or their backstory; but in cases when a character is introduced as “Asian” and this doesn’t add anything to the story, this can have the effect of over-racializing the character, which tends to rub readers the wrong way. Since we want to avoid this, I’ve flagged a couple of places where mentions of a character’s race could easily be removed without taking away from the story. I understand that the balance between representing diversity and overemphasizing race can be a tricky one to strike, so my advice would be to look closely at every mention of race and consider how it’s contributing to the story and whether it needs to be there.

Trans Experience

As I mentioned above, we loved how Isaac’s experience as a trans boy makes up part of his story without defining who he is. Overall, you’ve handled this aspect of his character really well. The one scene that raised concerns for our sensitivity readers was the scene at the very end, when Isaac shows Sophie the picture and tells her he’s trans. I love that we get this really vulnerable moment between the two of them, but as our sensitivity readers pointed out, trans people tend to have a lot of really complicated feelings around seeing pre-transition photos of themselves and revealing their pre-transition names, or deadnames. For many trans people (if not most), it would be a very painful experience to deadname themselves and show a pre-transition photo of themselves to someone else; in fact, it’s common for trans people to destroy or hide all pre-transition images of themselves. Our sensitivity readers therefore found it a bit unrealistic for Isaac to so willingly show Sophie the photo and openly refer to Imogen. They also questioned why Isaac would be carrying around this photo in the first place.

With this feedback in mind, I would suggest adjusting this scene so that Isaac experiences a lot more pain and discomfort around outing himself to Sophie. It might be more realistic for him to avoid deadnaming himself—instead vaguely referring to “that girl who went to camp before”—and then cringe when Sophie blurts out the name Imogen. Another idea would be to avoid the deadnaming entirely, since Sophie and Isaac don’t actually need to say the name at all. The photo could also be removed, but if you decide to still include it, I would recommend that you provide some kind of explanation as to why Isaac still has it and what kind of emotions he’s experiencing around it. Moreover, therapists who specialize in trans issues likely wouldn’t push a client to out themselves as trans unless they really wanted to do so, so this is something else to keep in mind as you make adjustments to this scene.

Disability

We also really appreciate how you’ve included characters with various disabilities in your story. For the most part, these disabilities are represented in a way that feels natural and not tokenistic. There were, however, a few places where our sensitivity readers raised concerns about language that might come across as insensitive or overly negative in regards to disability. There were also a few places where it seemed a character’s disability was mentioned unnecessarily, which we want to watch out for. In my line notes, I’ve flagged these instances and made suggestions for resolving the issues. The major moment that bothered most of our readers and editors was the description of Wu’s disgust with physical disability in chapter 26. My team felt that this prejudice on Wu’s part made Wu overly unsympathetic without contributing much to the story, so I’ve flagged it in my line notes and offered suggestions for adjusting it.

Fact-Checking

Most publishers don’t have official fact-checkers, and, as I mentioned above, the burden of factual accuracy ultimately falls on the author. You also have some creative license in this manuscript given that it’s a work of fiction. That said, we did our best to fact-check the more

technical elements in the manuscript to try to make sure the story would seem as realistic and believable as possible and wouldn't raise any factual red flags for readers.

Diabetes and Sophie's Amputation

As I discussed in the section on the insulin/EpiPen plotline, we had someone with type 1 diabetes read through the manuscript and look at everything related to Sophie's diabetes. This reader pointed out that it would be extremely unlikely that Sophie would lose a limb due to having untreated diabetes as a child. Diabetes-related limb loss generally only happens when diabetes goes untreated for many years, and it's the result of a cascade of other problems that take a long time to develop. It's also very rare in young children.

If you would like to address this to avoid raising flags for some readers, a simple solution would be to attribute the loss of Sophie's leg to the car accident with her father, rather than to childhood diabetes. This would only require adjustments in two places: Isaac's July 17 email in chapter 2, where he states the reason for Sophie's amputation; and Genevieve's confession in chapter 37, where she mentions that Sophie blamed herself for her father's death.

This reader also flagged a few other places in the manuscript where the diabetes-related information didn't match up with her knowledge or experience. I've included those in my line notes so you can take a look at them and decide how you want to address these discrepancies. As you'll see, many of these notes have to do with Sophie's "midnight freakout" in chapter 10. After reviewing these comments, you might consider reworking this scene so that Sophie doesn't actually get dosed with epinephrine but simply has a night terror instead. This could resolve some of those factual concerns around diabetes.

IO Needles and EpiPens

One of our fact-checkers did some research into IO needles and the possibility of tampering with EpiPens, and she determined that it would be very unlikely for Genevieve to have access to an IO needle unless she was working at a hospital. You might consider providing some kind of explanation as to how she got her hands on one. Did it take her a long time? How premeditated could this murder have been? Did she just happen to have an IO needle lying around for a particular reason? Discerning readers will likely want to know the answers to these questions, so it would be a good idea to try to include those in Genevieve's confession or elsewhere in the book.

STRUCTURE

Emails to Michelle

The emails to Michelle in chapter 2 are a fun and creative way to introduce Isaac's character—his personality really comes through in these emails, and readers learn a lot of important information about him in this chapter without you having to do a lot of "telling." That said, most of our readers and editors found it a bit odd that the emails only appeared in a single chapter and weren't carried through the rest of the book—they thought this chapter felt disconnected from the story as a whole. For this reason, I would recommend interspersing a few more of these emails throughout the book. The investigation lasts a couple of days, and we know Michelle insists on hearing from Isaac every day, so is he still writing emails to her while the events are unfolding? Consider starting or ending a couple of chapters with Isaac's updates to Michelle. Alternatively, you could conclude the book with Isaac's final email to Michelle, in which he might apologize for not being in touch for the past few days and might offer some kind of summary of the investigation. Including an email at the end would help bring the book full circle and make that initial chapter with all the emails seem more purposeful. You might also consider

calling chapter 2 something different to make it more like a “second prologue,” since it isn’t a typical chapter: perhaps it could just be called “Emails” and then what’s currently chapter 3 could become chapter 1.

Combining Chapters

There are currently thirty-nine chapters, and many of them are quite short. Having a large number of short chapters can make the design process difficult and can interfere with the natural rhythm of reading, so I would encourage you to look for chapters that could be combined to reduce the total number. Here are some chapters that could potentially be combined without disrupting the timeline: 8 and 11; 13 and 15; 16 and 18; and 36 and 37. That said, chapter 35 may need to be split into two chapters, since it’s divided between Isaac’s and Mikie’s perspectives and this disrupts the established chapter pattern. However, this would create a very short chapter told from Mikie’s perspective, so maybe we’ll be able to figure out a way to combine it with another chapter once you’ve made all your revisions.

CONCLUSION

And there you have it: we’ve finally reached the end! These editorial letters can run quite long, and it’s understandable if you’re feeling a bit overwhelmed after wading through all those suggestions. But I want to make it clear that you’re starting from a good place: *Finding the Vein* is already a fun, unique, and touching story, and all of our editors really enjoyed reading it. All the basic structures are there, and the writing is solid—now it’s just a matter of expanding some things, trimming others, and adding that final polish to the plotlines and characters. Though it may seem like a lot at first, many of these revisions can be accomplished by simply adding or adjusting a few lines here and there; others may require the addition of a paragraph or two. At about 50,000 words, the manuscript is on the shorter side for a novel, so don’t shy away from adding more content wherever you feel it’s necessary.

I would suggest making a plan for your revisions before you dive in. It would likely be easiest to start with the bigger changes, like the adjustments to the plotlines around the nude photos and the pill selling. The next step could be writing in any new scenes you deem necessary, and then you could work your way down to the more nitty-gritty changes. Remember that my line-level comments can also serve as a guide throughout this process.

Working on this edit has truly been a pleasure. I’ve grown so attached to the story and the characters, and I can’t wait to see what changes you make in this round. If you have any questions during the revision process or want to talk through anything, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me.

All the best,

Olivia Rollins
Copy Chief
Ooligan Press