

With a shuddering breath, I followed my high school art teacher's ~~Mr. Claw's~~ advice and shut my eyes, hoping it would help me see. My eyes hurt, and my face was itchy with tears, though I knew from experience that my crying left my cheeks prettily colored instead of blotchy and swollen. I pressed a hand against my nose and leaned my head back.

Commented [BP1]: I couldn't remember who this was for a while, so I figured just saying Surrey's teacher would be easier for the readers to remember, too.

I had fallen for him.

Commented [BP2]: With just a couple of tweaks earlier that I've already mentioned, this moment when Surrey faces her feelings is going to feel like such a natural and satisfying progression! I love it.(:

I jerked forward, sniffed, and forced myself to relax and lean back again. I couldn't run from the facts. Running from them had led me to losing control of my tear ducts. I took a deep breath.

Just like I had fallen for the other guys, I had fallen for Croft. As much as I had planned for it, I no longer looked forward to the day his dream girl would show up and sweep him away. I ~~didn't~~did not want to help him find her~~make it happen~~, and I ~~didn't~~did not want to hurry it along. But I couldn't avoid it, and~~However,~~ the longer it took, the more it would hurt.

I couldn't bear it. Oh, I just couldn't bear it. I was so tired of heartbreak. I had agreed to spend time with Croft to get rid of him. It should have been risk-free. I had never thought I would fall for the unapologetic guy who had pranked me. His departure was supposed to make me happy, not leave me with yet another scar.

Commented [BP3]: Let's add another action somewhere in here!

When would my past dating history stop haunting me?

Commented [BP4]: I left a lot of edits around here, but it's mostly just rearranging the text to make Surrey's logic a little more coherent and to condense a little bit of her repetitive thoughts, too.

It had happened too many times. After Keaton, I had thought for sure Jesse and I would get married. After Jesse, I had thought for sure Killian was the one. After him, I had thought it couldn't possibly end the same way again—surely Frank and I were meant to be. We had both been so in love. After Frank, there had been Brody.

And after Brody, there was Croft.

My shoulders fell. It would keep happening, whatever I did. I shouldn't have gotten attached again. What was I going to do?

I turned over scenario after scenario in my mind. I could keep trying to find his dream girl—and probably become a walking watering pot. I could just try to enjoy the time I had left with Croft—and face even greater heartache than I did now. I could try to break up with him, unofficial though our dating status was—but what guarantee did I have that he would let me? I could try to just be friends with him

Couldn't I just be friends with him? If he stayed friends with me after his girl came along, —I would be okay not dating him, right?

Oh, stupid, stupid, stupid. I did want to date him. I wanted to spend time with him. I wanted him to hold my arm in his when we walked. I wanted him to extol ridiculously but sincerely on my virtues and offer only rare compliments on my beauty. I wanted him to give a piece of his mind to the guys whothat acted like I was nothing but a pretty face. I wanted to talk to him on the phone over Christmas. I wanted him to still be around, still asking me out, when I returned to Provo after New Year's Eve.

I wanted to stop being haunted by my past dating history.

It had happened too many times. After Keaton, when I was with Jesse, I had thought for sure we would get married. After Jesse, I had thought for sure Killian and I would get married. After him, I had thought it couldn't possibly end the same way again. Surely Frank and I were meant to be. We had both been so in love.

After him, there had been Brody.

My shoulders fell. It would keep happening. It would. I shouldn't have gotten attached again.

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~~Still, it was becoming obvious that if I didn't want to be a constant watering-pot going forward, I had to do something different from what I had been doing. The question was, what?~~

~~I had cried over the other guys . . . after they left me. Until then, I had enjoyed our time together. Maybe I should let my journey with Croft be more similar to my journeys with them. Maybe I should stop looking for his girl.~~

~~I opened my eyes and asked myself another question. What did I want to do?~~

~~I wanted to spend time with him. I wanted to date him.~~

“Stop trying to speed up our break-up, then,” I mumbled to myself and rubbed my salty cheeks.

~~I wanted to talk to him on the phone over Christmas. I wanted him to still be around, still asking me out, when I returned to Provo after New Year's Eve.~~

Maybe ~~I~~that could ~~set abe~~ my goal. Hold on to ~~Croft~~him over Christmas ~~break, and then I would let events play out as they would~~ and ~~I would~~ be happy with the memories even after I lost him.

~~I suddenly let out a hysterical laugh.~~ It would be just my luck for his dream girl to show up tomorrow, right after I'd decided to stop deliberately helping him find her. If she did, I would deal with it. ~~I always did.~~ But . . . what if she didn't? ~~What if Perhaps~~ I could slow things down?.

My mind spun. ~~I'd agreed to spending so much time with Croft in hopes that the more time I spent with him, the sooner he'd find his dream girl. But maybe the opposite was also true.~~ If spending ~~moreas much~~ time with him ~~as possible~~ would ~~have~~ helped him find her sooner, surely spending less time with him would ~~keep her away~~~~make it take~~ longer.

How ironic. In order to have more time with him, I might have to cut down on how much we saw each other during the week. My mind caught hold of the idea, painful though it was. If it meant we might still be together ~~after~~over Christmas . . .

It would be worth it.

Excerpt from editorial letter:

I want to give you a rundown of some of the overarching developmental notes I have so you can see the whole picture of what I've done in my edits. My biggest concerns deal with how the climax with Surrey's stalker is handled, the pacing of the falling action, and how the themes carry through the whole story. We'll talk about a few other little things too, but for now, let's dive in!

The Stalker Build Up and Climax

You did an excellent job of foreshadowing so many aspects of Surrey's stalker. The picture in her yearbook, her dislike of being caught on hidden cameras, the uneasy feeling she often got at home—even the details of how Mrs. Blaine watches her neighborhood so closely or how early Gina goes to work fitted in so nicely!

But as you've read, I do have some worries about how the climax works with the rest of your story. The tone of the climax reads like a fascinating domestic thriller, but almost the entirety of the rest of the book reads like a hilarious and sweet romantic comedy. We do have those italicized moments that slowly become creepier and add to the foreshadowing, but they have some structural issues too.

By leaving the structure of the story as-is, we risk disappointing some of your audience and completely missing another portion of your audience. Some romcom readers are going to be totally thrown off by this huge shift in plot and tone (despite the foreshadowing), enough to potentially put down the book or simply come away saying something like, "Yeah, it was great, but I was disappointed by the last half." On the other hand, the crowd that loves domestic thrillers aren't likely to pick up the book in the first place because all they'll see in the beginning is a romcom, so they won't even get to enjoy the twist you've added! You've picked a rather narrow audience—readers who love romcoms *and* domestic thrillers—yet few of these readers will actually be attracted to your book.

Now, I understand why you wanted these italicized moments spread throughout the book and slowly revealing the fact that Surrey had a stalker. It also allowed you to add a bit of a

red herring because it's easy to mistake these POVs for Croft rather than Jack. However, as fun as it is to mislead the readers a little bit, establishing the overall tone of your book is more important than building up that slow reveal. Additionally, the writing in Jack's POVs is some of the weakest in the whole book because you're working so hard to hide the stalker elements in the beginning. To a first time reader, these moments can feel confusing and unnecessary at first. So, to overcome these issues, I suggest taking out the italicized moments with Jack and restructuring them into a few other things.

First, a prologue. Using a strategic prologue will establish the tone of a domestic thriller, effectively promising that more of the same will come later in the story. I would suggest this prologue be a moment when Jack is inside Surrey's room, looking at her things (e.g., maybe he notices that she's rearranged the clothes in her dresser). You can still purposely withhold all identities and just make it clear that this man is unhealthily obsessed with this woman and has the seed of an idea that he should kidnap her—although he would phrase it differently, of course, and it might not even be clear to the readers yet that he wants to kidnap her. But it should be creepy enough to get the message across that something intense is coming.

You might worry that a prologue like this would be too obvious and spoil what might happen later, but I know you can pull it off without spilling the beans. What's more important is establishing this thriller tone and planting the promise that it will come up again in the story. This prologue only needs to be about a page or two (but can be longer if you want). (If you want to understand more about why this structure will work so well, ask me to talk to you more about promises, progress, and payoff!)

Second, an interlude between chapters 13 and 14, probably showing Jack changing out one of his cameras or simply looking at his secret photo collection or whatever scenario you can think of. To clarify, this interlude is not simply an epigraph at the top of a chapter; it is its own distinct section of the book, just like a prologue or epilogue is. This moment should establish that Jack is growing restless and developing this idea of kidnapping Surrey, even though the readers still might not realize that he'll actually kidnap her yet. I know this might feel like it's not as subtle an approach as the other moments were. There's not going to be quite the same effect when the readers suddenly realize that this POV has been a stalker all along. But there will still be some build in the intensity this way, and remember, we really need that tone upfront so the readers aren't totally blindsided, possibly leaving them feeling betrayed or disappointed. Again, this interlude will likely only be about a page or so.

Third, a final interlude between chapters 25 and 26. This interlude should show the final moments when Jack makes a decision to act on his growing obsession and execute his plan to kidnap Surrey. Again, the details can be somewhat vague, much like later italicized Jack

POVs are. In all these prologue/interlude moments, remember to work on developing Jack's voice in these interludes as well. His dialogue when he actually encounters Surrey was so on point, so aim for that effect!

Okay, last thing I'm going to say about all of this. If you really want to try to pull off that reader-slowly-realizing-this-guy-is-a-stalker thing, I'd suggest trying that in your prologue. Let Jack sound very normal and nice at first, slowly dropping in hints that something is off, and let those hints build until you realize at the end that he is a total creep. The prologue might need to be longer to accomplish this, but it could still be really effective and help you land that moment that I know you want your readers to have.