**\*\*This Beta Read report has been modified from its original form, in order to protect the work of the author. Therefore, all names, settings and other vital information have been changed. Some sections of the report have been omitted to protect the author’s work and this will be noted in the appropriate section. This document reflects a typical critique of a novel of this size/genre, where the author has attached specific questions/concerns they would like to be addressed/critiqued. The manuscript contained very few grammatical/spelling/structural errors; instead there were a significant amount of minor issues regarding the plot. Many suggestions have been made on how to improve the plot structure, and the Critique Report points out many small plot holes which need to be rectified.**

**90,000 word Manuscript – Historical Fantasy Genre – 1st Book in a planned series**

**The Beta Read & Proof-Read Package was selected in regards to this manuscript**

**SECTION 1: SPECIFIC CONCERNS/QUESTIONS ADDRESSED**

**1. Opening chapter – should the first chapter be removed?**

I feel that eliminating the 1st chapter would be a mistake. If the novel begins at the point of the second chapter, the reader would be left wondering why Sara is in confinement, who she is, and why she was sent to confinement. All of these unanswered questions would have to be addressed, which would require some additions, or revision, of the following chapters to establish the answers to questions such as: Why was Sara sequestered in the castle? Who is she? Why does Robert despise her? All the other important information regarding the setting, the family members, and past history, that is included in Chapter 1, would have to be written into the following chapters.

I am somewhat confused as to why you would consider removing the first chapter. Your first chapter is excellent, and sets up the storyline wonderfully. The reader is introduced to some of the main characters, learns something of their personalities, and the possible conflicts between them. The reader establishes a sense of a beginning to the story, and gains a small insight into the background of how these three main characters have come to be in the same room together, and why.

We gain a glimpse into Sara’s cultural position; she must be somewhat submissive, but shows a spark of defiance, perhaps due to her elevated position as a royal daughter. We see evidence of George as the dutiful son, yet the reader will recognise that he also wishes to protect his sister. We see the father as being detached emotionally from his daughter and governed by the ruling norms of his culture and position. We gain insight into the power Robert claims, due to his position as a priest, and learn of his dislike of Sara. The reader will perceive how Robert has the confidence to reveal his dislike of Sara so openly in front of his king and crown prince, and this will intrigue the reader, in regards to how, and why, Robert wields so much power. I believe it would do your novel a great disservice if you removed the 1st chapter.

**2. Is there a medieval feel to the story, conveyed through the dress and setting?**

Yes, there is. It is conveyed through the setting, description of the cities and markets, and the relationships and norms demonstrated, and expected, of men and women in the society you have built.

One issue I feel you should look at is the dress you describe people wearing. I instantly felt confused when Sara is described as wearing a style of summer dress, labelled as being a toga. This is, as you know, a typically Roman or Greek style of dress, and is not likely to fit a reader’s image of being “Medieval European”.

I appreciate that when building a story, especially in the fantasy genre, that you are at liberty to place the characters in any type of dress you feel fits your story. However, it should be remembered that your readers will invariably come with pre-conceived ideas, and build images based on these. So, even though you are creating a “new world” in a sense, it is unfortunately a natural response of the reader to associate a certain dress with a certain place. I would argue that the majority of people will associate a toga style of dress with Rome, or Greece. If you wish to convey the setting as being “Medieval European” then this style of dress is not appropriate.

If you feel that this style of dress is what you want for your female character/s perhaps you could describe the dress as being in the design of a sari/toga, but call them by different names, which you are at liberty to make up. This will disassociate your reader from instantly seeing the dress in their mind when labelled as a toga, and automatically assuming that the story is set somewhere in a region similar to Greece or Italy.

I also advise that you be very clear in the storyline about how certain classes of people use one style of dress over another, or how people from one region use one style over another, or how women would use one, but not men, or how one style would be used by religious figures etc. This will ensure that your reader does not become confused by all of the terms being used somewhat interchangeably, which may create a confused sense of where the setting is.

It may also prove confusing for the reader that the elite/royal women are allowed to use a style of dress which bares their midriff, but the poorer, common women use a full, covered style of dress. Perhaps it would seem logical to many readers that a royal female would guard her modesty even more closely than a common woman, as you also make references to how the royal females they remain sequestered in their residence, and would not be alone with men who they are not directly related to without chaperones. Their style of dress would likely be in accordance with these cultural norms.

You are entirely at liberty to decide, as the author, what dress your characters wear and why. Just be clear on why this is. One sentence inserted as an explanation can go a long way in informing the reader of the reasoning behind such choices.

**3. Is the balance between action and character development appropriate?**

The first third of the novel deals excellently with character development. The development of Sara, Robert and George is particularly good, and their personalities and overall character clearly evolve in a consistent manner. Throughout the remaining two thirds of the novel the character development progresses, but it is skilfully weaved into the action scenes. Overall, the development of the characters is the greatest strength of the novel, and the reader should feel that they know all of the main characters well by Chapter 22. The second and third sections of the novel narrate more “battle scene” action, however, the reader is also privy to the responses and emotions of the characters in regards to the battle. The exploration of the characters in the first third of the novel enables you to focus heavily upon “action” in the final two thirds of the novel, allowing the pacing to increase toward the conclusion.

I believe you can feel content that you have a good balance between character development and action.

**4. Was the love affair between Sara and Henry unexpected? Is it believable?**

One of the great strengths, and interest points, in the novel is the unconventional attraction and love between Sara and Henry. It emboldens the belief that love, in its purest form, should not be based on physical attraction alone, but that it can transcend the normal conventions of attraction, and is a meeting of mind, soul, and heart, rather than pure physical attraction. Broadly speaking, their relationship is believable, and the relationship grants you a wonderful opportunity to unravel their personal growth, and personalities throughout the novel.

However, in regards to the finer details of the story I suggest you consider undertaking some revision to fully embrace this opportunity.

It came across as far too convenient that at the beginning of the novel their love suddenly blossomed. If they have known each other for years, and were able to interact freely as children and teenagers, then it stands to reason that they would have managed to find secret moments together prior to being in Kenrick Castle, and would reasonably have begun some type of physical relationship prior to that, in secret.

Considering that George, and other male characters, are horrified and enraged by Sara’s eventual closeness/relationship to Henry, when they discover their relationship later in the novel, why would they, as Sara’s closest male chaperones, have then allowed her to associate with Henry as a young girl – surely they would have seen it as inappropriate even then, as that is the formative time when females/males would have been watched and separated. It is mentioned that men and women may not freely associate when unrelated, and many may feel that it is not realistic to believe that a servant was seen as a suitable companion for a princess; even if she had healed him of his sickness when he first arrived at age 10, and viewed him as a “brother” afterwards.

 His standing as a servant would likely regulate him to adhere to certain formalities between them. In addition, it appears more believable that George, or the King, would not tolerate an unrelated male, let alone a servant, becoming so close to her. It would reflect upon her chastity, modesty, and suitability as a wife.

I believe your novel would be greatly improved if there were more scenes in the initial half of the book where they begin to feel love for each other, and narrate some physical tension between them. Readers may feel disappointed that there is not more of a gradual build-up to their union. Your novel would be enhanced by creating more scenes of them stealing looks, small touches, and hesitant demonstrations of affection. Highlight the constraints they are both feeling due to cultural norms, their relevant social standing, and that they are being “watched” my Robert.

A gradual build-up can occur once Henry is moved to serve her at Kenrick Castle. If they have not been allowed to associate throughout her teenage years, then their meeting at Kenrick Castle would have greater impact. Sara has more freedom in Kenrick Castle than she has ever been granted previously, which opens the door for them to become properly acquainted. Henry is not likely to be seen as a threat to securing the love of Sara, considering he was labelled by most as being uncommonly ugly. His accident then renders him to being even less of a threat in claiming Sara’s interest, let alone love.

Perhaps you could consider the following ideas/changes to the novel:

When Sara is banished to Kenrick Castle, George decides Henry will be one of her servants. Considering he is a trusted member of George’s inner circle, this is very plausible.

Prior to their “accidental meeting” in the church, they have not spent time together, due to the conventions of society which restrict men and women associating. Rather they have stolen looks, smiles and have felt some attraction from afar, when Henry has been serving her, or they pass in the halls etc. For Henry, he is in love with her, and has been for many years. For Sara, she assumes he will not allow himself to love her, due to their vastly different social status. However, she begins to find him strangely attractive and feels a pull toward him. As she begins to learn more about his wonderful personality, she begins to suddenly care for him, but she cannot take it any further, or even consider any type of intimate relationship as a possibility, due to his lower class status.

When they accidently meet in the church it encourages them to secure time together thereafter, and gives them the desire to become closer. Sara’s attraction to him is awakened, they gradually learn more of each other, and the relationship can begin to slowly develop. This occurs in a heightened environment of attention upon Sara; despair, aggression, confusing revelations regarding her magical abilities, and Robert’s negative presence. If you plan to make this manuscript the first of a trilogy it works to have a prolonged tension between the two characters, falling in love despite the odds, and the turmoil around them. Don’t rush their relationship, or make it feel abrupt.

One of the great strengths of the novel is their love, so utilise this to its fullest effect. Readers will likely appreciate the romantic and sexual tension between them, and they will relish reading about the stolen moments, which slowly build to a climax later in the novel. It would be entirely possible to draw out their relationship further, so that they do not enter into a full physical relationship in this novel, as you could really tease the reader and leave it to the 2nd novel in the series. This will leave the reader eager to read Book 2 in the series.

Many readers may be disappointed that by Page 44 they are already in bed together. Twilight is a great example of using chemistry between characters and prolonging the tension. It is a series which has become hugely successful, despite not necessarily representing the best writing skills, and this is largely due to Meyer being very adept at understanding the power of sexual tension between two characters and drawing this out to its fullest effect. Readers almost become obsessed with their interplay, their chemistry, and the eventual, long awaited conclusion. As the love between Sara and Henry is a major plot line, it is advisable that you do not rush the progression of the relationship.

Chapter 27 really began to make me lose a lot of faith in the “beauty of their love”. That Sara seems to enjoy the sexual relationship she has with Matthew, and her actions regarding this situation, somehow took away from her growing love for Henry. I started to feel like she would only feel content with Henry if he could also satisfy her sexually, if he was just like other men – eager to bed her as soon as possible. In fact, his natural chivalry is one of the things that led her to become attracted to Henry, and to so easily forget this seemed out of character for her.

I was personally left feeling very unsure of what you were hoping to achieve in regards to her relationship with Matthew. I suggest you clearly explore, to greater depth, the relationship Sara has with Matthew. Perhaps you might consider adding in some additional dialogue between Sara and Maryann in Chapter 25, through which Sara can confide to Maryann what she is feeling, and why she is engaging in a relationship with Matthew. Is it to make Henry jealous? Is it to punish him for being forced into his engagement to Claudine? Is she just full of hormones, so to speak, and is in need of physical fulfilment? Is she scared of her love for Henry, and what the consequences of that mean? Or, is she in denial and trying to force herself to love someone such as Matthew instead?

The reader will greatly benefit from an explanation regarding this relationship, and it will give this particular plot line much greater clarity and impact.

**5. Does the shock ending wrap the novel up sufficiently?**

I believe the ending was quite disappointing. Many readers, who have invested their full attention into the novel, will easily see the ending as being the type of conclusion they expect. The worst scenario is that they are so annoyed and underwhelmed that they feel no interest in picking up the second novel. At best, they will simply be ambivalent about continuing on with the sequel. Either scenario is frankly your worst nightmare I am guessing.

An ending should leave the reader desperate for the second novel to come out, eagerly searching the internet for the date of its release, and cursing you that you dared to leave them hanging in such a way, yet subconsciously thrilled that you did.

I was left with several questions at the end which I feel should have been “explained” in some manner. I couldn’t understand why Sara didn’t just use her magical abilities and create a way for them to escape the invading army. I couldn’t understand where she disappeared to for so long, as this scene was not narrated. I strongly suggest you narrate this particular scene, so that the reader is completely privy to where she went, and what she was doing when she suddenly disappeared. I also couldn’t understand why Sara and Henry didn’t leave immediately after being given an escape plan?? After this point the ending came across as an anti-climax.

Perhaps you might like to consider the following idea as a means of improving the ending:

**\*\*THE FOLLOWING SECTION IS OMITTED TO PROTECT THE AUTHOR’S WORK – A SUGGESTION REGARDING AN ALTERNATIVE ENDING WAS INCLUDED AT THIS POINT, INCLUDING CLEAR SUGGESTIONS ON HOW IT COULD BE CONSTRUCTED WITHIN THE EXSISTING CHAPTERS.**

**SECTION 2: BROAD ISSUES FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

**1. The journey across the English Channel**

I believe every reader will feel immensely cheated that you did not include Sara’s journey across the sea to reunite with George and Henry. It was building up to be an exciting few chapters discovering how she could possibly have managed to do it being penniless, as a lone (beautiful) woman, in addition to Robert pursuing her with the intention of capturing her, and Matthew following her with the intention of forcing her to marry him.

Readers will no doubt be shocked, and very disappointed, that you chose not to narrate the sea crossing. Many readers will not only feel cheated, they may put the book down at this point. It was confusing as to why the journey was not narrated, in any way or form, even if it was only through dialogue with others after she had arrived in France.

The first 13 chapters of the novel were excellent. The opening three chapters began to set the scene nicely, and introduced the main characters to great effect. I was personally enthralled throughout the following 10 chapters. Chapter 14 is unfortunately a point where your novel begins to display weakness, and this is primarily due to omitting Sara’s journey to France.

**\*\*THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS HAS BEEN OMITTED TO PROTECT THE AUTHOR’S WORK. A DETAILED CRITIQUE FOLLOWED ON WHY, AT THE POINT OF CHAPTER 14, THE STORY DEMONSTRATES WEAKNESS. SUGGESTIONS WERE MADE ON HOW TO STRENGTHEN THE NOVEL AT THIS POINT – THE PRIMARY SUGGESTION BEING TO INCLUDE A FEW ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS ON SARA’S JOURNEY FROM KENRICK CASTLE TO FRANCE.**

**2. Sara’s eyes**

I was immensely disappointed that you did not explore this issue to any great depth throughout the novel. At the beginning of the novel it was strongly, and clearly, implied that Sara’s eyes were of great importance, especially in regards to how they inspired reactions of discomfort in other people. Several vague references are made to Sara’s unusual eye colour on occasion, but then the reader is not given any answers to the questions the initial chapters seemed to advance. Why do her eyes cause others to become nervous? Are her eyes connected to her magical abilities? Are the colour of Sara’s eyes indicative of Sara not being the daughter of Queen Isabella? Did her father have an affair, and pass Sara off as being “pure”?

I sincerely feel that you have missed a huge opportunity to make this novel truly shine, through weaving the mystery of Sara’s eyes, and the significance they have in directing the path of her future, into a major plot line throughout the story.

At the beginning it appeared you were going to do that, as you made particular mention of her strange eyes and the responses they evoked, and I was excited to learn of the mystery behind her eyes. I was personally asking myself questions throughout the first 13 chapters, such as: Why is she different? Why do people feel fear and nervousness when they see her eyes? Why is Robert so intent on destroying her? What is her background? Did her father have an illicit affair and she is the produce of that, but the secret has been hidden? Is her real mother someone of great importance; someone who links Sara and her eyes to some mysterious people, who possess mysterious abilities? Is the old lady going to be the link to finding out these answers, as perhaps the old lady knows her background?

I appreciate that incorporating a deeper plot line regarding Sara’s eyes into your manuscript would take some revision and re-writing, but I hope you are willing to consider the possibility of doing exactly that. I suggest you consider adding in additional scenes/chapters which slowly reveal the significance of Sara’s eyes, slowly unravel the mystery behind them, and answer the questions I have posed above.

**3. The Old Lady**

Firstly, you have a wonderful ability to strongly convey the characters of Matthew, Paul and especially Robert. All of these characters were my particular favourites, and I really enjoyed the chapters where they were present. It seems no coincidence that all of them are somewhat darker, sinister and overall “aggressive” characters, as I believe you are very good at writing a darker type of dialogue, where wit, sarcasm, aggression or slyness is involved.

As much as I personally felt upset that Paul was killed, and therefore wouldn’t continue as a character in the series, it was a great twist to eliminate him in Chapter 13. I am sure all readers would not expect him to die at the point.

**\*\* THE FOLLOWING SECTION HAS BEEN OMITTED TO PROTECT THE AUTHOR’S WORK –ADDITIONAL CRITIQUE WAS GIVEN ON SOME OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS**

I personally loved the character of Marie. She was mysterious, wise and somehow secretive. Initially I was convinced that she was the major link between Sara and the mystery of her strange eyes. The scene where Sara first spots her in the church courtyard, and has a glimpse of her eyes, eyes which are just like hers, seemed to lead the reader toward the idea of the old lady fulfilling a very important role in revealing the mystery of Sara’s eyes and magical abilities. This scene was one of the best cliff hangers of the entire novel. I couldn’t wait to read on and discover the mystery behind this strange old lady that had just appeared from nowhere.

Yet, it seemed to go nowhere. Somehow her eyes were explained away as being cataracts of old age….so disappointing!!! Sara also seemed to already know her name, as if she had heard of the old lady from others in the castle, so the mystery suddenly dissipated dramatically (Please also refer to the Chapter-by-Chapter notes on this point).

**\*\*THIS SECTION HAS BEEN OMITTED TO PROTECT THE AUTHOR’S WORK – ADDITIONAL CRITIQUE WAS INCLUDED UPON THE CHARCTER OF THE OLD LADY AND SOME SUGGESTIONS WERE MADE ON HOW HER CHARCTER, AND STORYLINE, COULD BE DEVELOPED TO FURTHER IMPROVE THE OVERALL PLOT LINE, AND TO ELIMINATE VARIOUS PLOT HOLES**

**4. The Title**

I am not sure the title is fitting to the novel as it stands now. Even after completing the novel I am personally unsure as to the particulars of the magic systems, what the magic system actually is, and how it controls the fate of a people. Also, the concept of the magic system did not seem to be so imbedded in the culture and society as no-one really seemed to make mention of it. If you choose to retain this title I believe you should aim to include more concentrated references to the magic system, to help the reader clearly understand what the concept is all about.

**5. Question Marks**

Throughout the manuscript there is a significant omission of question marks. Remember that without a question mark you are leading the reader to interpret a sentence in a different light. Readers will read the sentence, while processing whether it is meant to be rhetorical, a statement, a question, a musing of the character etcetera and readers will become confused and may have to read a line a few times to gain a clear understanding of your intention. If you do not have a question mark to clearly indicate the meaning of your dialogue, the reader will assume it is a statement, and confusion will ensue.

Below, I have listed some examples with page numbers included, showing where question marks are needed, and the first few words or the sentence to which a question mark should be attached.

**\*\* THE FOLLOWING SECTION HAS BEEN ALTERED. SPECIFIC PAGE NUMBERS WERE LISTED WHERE QUESTION MARKS WERE REQUIRED. (2 Examples are shown, as to how the sentence containing a mistake was referenced).**

p.3 “Have you seen the house….

p.11 “Where were you yesterday…

**\*\* IF YOU HAVE OPTED FOR THE BETA READ & PROOF-READ PACKAGE YOUR CRITIQUE WILL ALSO INCLUDE COMMENTS ALONGSIDE YOUR MANUSCRIPT, WHERE APPROPRIATE, USING “TRACK CHANGES”. PROOFREADING CHANGES, PERTAINING TO SPELLING, GRAMMER, PUNCTUATION ETCETERA WILL BE MADE WITHIN YOUR MANUSCRIPT, ALSO USING “TRACK CHANGES”.**

**EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS USING “TRACK CHANGES”, GIVEN AGAINST THE SAMPLE MANUSCRIPT, ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

**CHAPTER 1**

p.1 - Using the word ”defect” in regards to Sara’s eyes does not read well. Perhaps you can change this to something else to describe her eyes. If you choose to keep this then you should perhaps add in a sentence or two to indicate why her eyes would be considered a “defect”. Also, you may like to consider perhaps explaining why she feels this way; do the servants, people in the castle, her family refer to her eyes this way, or whisper it behind her back?

p.1 - Move ‘She cursed the sight of dirt on her hands’ up to the start of the paragraph, as it would read better this way.

p.2 – ‘……George caught her eye….’ – It is then repeated soon after, ‘His dark eyes met hers…..’. By saying George caught her eye they are already looking at each other, and so the second time you mention this it is irrelevant, as they are already looking at one another.

\*\* This chapter has excellent dialogue, introduces tension and drama, establishes some crucial background and develops the characters well. I would have liked to see more background story to Sara’s family actually. Does her father treat her differently from his other children? Do her eyes have a link to someone in her father’s past? Do her eyes call into question his background as much as hers? You could perhaps insert some memories or flashbacks throughout the novel to document some of the family’s history.

**CHAPTER 2**

p.4 - It is worth mentioning that all the girls sitting around the church pond are wearing blue coloured cloaks - this establishes that everyone in the church wears them, and they are all treated as equals, regardless of their prior social status or wealth.

\*\* It is also worth including a few sentences to explain why girls are sent to the church near Kenrick Castle. What are they all training to be? Is it a respectable job? Are these girls from all walks of life, poor and rich? Are only girls admitted for training? If so, why?

p.16 – Revealing that the old lady’s eyes were a vivid green colour, just like Sara’s, is a crucial part in the beginning of the novel and well written. It has a great impact in shocking the reader and forcing them to want to keep reading to know more. As my notes discussed above, I think, however, that you did not capitalise on this and lost a golden opportunity to create a fantastic storyline to complement the love story.

p.20 - ‘She knew someone watched…….’, but then you go on to say ‘She was right’. This is repetitive, as the first statement indicates that she knows already. If you wish to keep ‘She was right’ it would be better to change the first sentence to, ‘She felt as if someone watched…....’

p.22 - You are missing a few words in the following sentence, words which I will add and highlight:

‘Yesterday she’d been a woman of a **royal** house, betrothed to the greatest **knight in** England, and the beloved sister…..’

\*\* As I mentioned above in Sections 1 & 2, it is worth considering changing the dynamics between Sara and Henry to create a slower pace and more prolonged tension. Already by Chapter 2 Henry is in a position to “caress her hands” - this seems out of place in a setting where men and women are tightly segregated, where the difference in class structure would have been fairly regimented considering there were numerous servants, and Henry would always have been in George’s quarters serving him.

How often would Sara have been sitting in George’s quarters, but without George, or anyone else, to enable an exchange between Sara and Henry to occur? How often would Sara have been unaccompanied in the castle grounds at the same time as Henry, so they could become more like brother/sister and develop a relationship? It seems implausible that Henry, as a servant, would be permitted to walk the castle grounds in any case.

p.24 - Elizabeth is introduced to the reader, and Sara’s reaction when she first heard her voice implied that she held some major part in this story. I had to read this section a couple of times, as it did read as if Sara KNEW Elizabeth - as in, knew her previously from her past. Actually, if Sara had known Elizabeth from the past it would have added a deeper layer, and meaning, to their rivalry, and many readers may feel a little disappointed to find this is not the case. It would have added another dimension to Elizabeth’s inclusion as a character, as all she seemed be in the end was one of the girls used by Robert, and someone who happens to run away. I was expectantly waiting throughout the final stages of the novel for her to reappear, and drop some type of bombshell or be part of another major story line. This did not occur, and I was somewhat confused as to why she is mentioned by name so often, why she was initially built up to be a particular nemesis of Sara’s, but then she randomly seemed to reappear and just as quickly die.

I believe you have a great opportunity to expand her role in the book and create another fantastic sideline plot weaved into Sara’s and Henry’s. Perhaps you may like to consider the following questions/suggestions, and add scenes which address such questions, or the suggestions presented:

Could Elizabeth have been a particular enemy of Sara’s in the past? Why does she harbour animosity towards Sara? Perhaps she was in the castle in Sara’s youth, and she was in love with George, but Sara found out about this and felt she was a threat to her and George’s special relationship as brother and sister, and manoeuvred to have banished her to the church? Is she going to be a vital enemy of Sara’s in the future? Can Sara use her in some way later in the story? Is she some type of important link to Sara’s mother or the origin of her vivid green eyes?

Elizabeth is another character who you write really well; Elizabeth’s cutting remarks and disdainful manner are portrayed really well through your writing. She is another character who you should entertain keeping, to be a central character within a major plot line.

**CHAPTER 3**

p.25 - The passage where the church boys are watching Henry “behind their hands” sounds strange. Why would they be standing there with their hands up to their faces and watching him behind them? Perhaps you mean to shield their eyes from the sun also while watching him? If so, just re-word this to sound more realistic.

p.26 – To use the expression “Say again?” sounds too much like slang, and is not appropriate for a medieval setting and the manner in which the characters speak; it appears out of place.

p.27 - You make reference to Sara having been in the church for month, and at this point I thought, “WHAT??!! Months already??” It seemed like the story had jumped too far forward, and readers may feel cheated that you did not include any events which directly happened after the drama of the previous chapters. Surely there continued to be developments after Sara was sent to Kenrick Castle.

It may also be advisable to avoid using direct references to time, and in this case you could easily do that and allow the reader to formulate a time frame in their own mind, one which they feel comfortable with. Rather, why not write this sentence as “It was Sara’s first afternoon in which Magdalene gave her permission for her to visit the church”. It is ambiguous in regards to the time frame of WHEN this occurred, but the reader can interpret that in whatever way they wish.

A plot which gives the appearance of a quick time frame does subconsciously make the reader feel like the plot is exciting. I appreciate that in real life things to not happen like this, as, of course, we can go for months with nothing exciting occurring. In a novel, however, you have the liberty of creating a world and plot which seems exciting and eventful, and yet still entirely believable.

\*\* This chapter is told from Sara’s point of view and when the old lady walks away from her it is written that she scowls at Victoria’s back. Yet, Sara does NOT know her name at this stage, or who this woman is, so how can she refer to her by name?

\*\* The section with the old lady is wonderful. The dialogue and wittiness of the narrative is excellent, and yet, at the same time, this is one of the most disappointing sections in the novel, as you explained away the mystery of the green of Victoria’s eyes as just being cataracts. SO disappointing!!!!

p.29 – Henry states that “Robert is looking for you” - how does he know this if he has been near Sara in the garden and has been reclining under the tree the entire time watching Sara. It seemed too unbelievable. Rather, you could just write it as ‘No doubt Robert is looking for you’. This is plausible, as Robert is keeping watch on her at all times, or using his spies to follow her when he cannot.

p.31 – At the end of page 31 you mention Sara brushing off her robes, but you also mention her brushing off her robes again at the beginning of Page 32. Once is enough; the reader creates an image of her doing this the first time you mention it.

p.33 - I felt that Henry would likely notice her reaction to the man in the market, and that he would in turn notice her moving away, or at the least notice that she was not next to him after such a long period. It seemed too convenient that he was so concentrated talking to someone that he fails to notice what Sara was doing initially, right next to him.

**CHAPTER 4**

p.37 – Henry makes reference to Sara and that he believes she is “discarded”. Are you referring to her entire life, or just having been sent to Kenrick Castle? It is not clear, so perhaps you should consider clarifying this through references to either her past, or go into greater detail by adding a line such as “discarded and sent to the castle”.

\*\* Henry’s past, as it is gradually revealed, is a great part of this chapter, yet it seemed to appear very abruptly, out of nowhere almost. This scene read as if you knew you needed to slot it in somewhere and this section was as good as any. This section, though interesting to read, becomes more “Telling versus Showing”; something a writer must be very wary of. It goes on for some time in the same style and seems out of place with the surrounding sections of this part of the novel. It would perhaps be better to insert his memories in a staggered fashion.

He might recall the first part of his past, when he is with his brothers on the stony beach, as he watches the girls in the church gardens talk together, demonstrating a comradery that he remembers he had with his brothers. As he is watching Sara, as she sleeps in the sitting room, he might recall his accident, as if he is showing regret that he was once considered handsome, and therefore someone who Sara might be attracted to. In another chapter you could use the scene of when he sees her after she has healed him, and he might reveal more of his past through dialogue with her. By breaking up the pieces of his story it would create some on-going tension, and the reader would be eager to read the next part of his story in another part of the novel.

p.42 – The comment is made by Henry that he has “committed this crime dozens of times over the last year”, when he lies in the bed to comfort Sara. As I mentioned earlier, I believe the time frame should be far shorter than this, or as I suggested, that no time frame is even referred to. The reader can assume on their own accord whether it is days or weeks after their meeting in the church.

I was personally shocked when I read this line, and thought, “What!! They have been in Kenrick Castle a year already??!!” I suggest you consider reducing the time frames, if only through vague references, and allow their relationship to play out a little differently; much slower and more tentative.

**\*\* THE CRITIQUE COMMENTS OF CHAPTERS 5-36 HAVE BEEN OMITTED. THE COMMENTS CONTINUE IN THE SAME MANNER AS THAT PERTAINING TO CHAPTERS 1-4.**

**\*\*A CONCLUSION TO THE CRITIQUE IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF THE CRITIQUE REPORT.**

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THE SAMPLE CRITIQUE REPORT BY PRO BETA READER. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT PRO BETA READER IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, OR WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT FOR A BETA READ.**

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