

Hi Michele,

November 10, 2006

Thanks so much for this latest draft! You've really done a great job drawing the reader into this fresh and interesting world. All the characters feel very, very real. Raquel's sassy dialogue, Dee Dee's dreamy romantic side, Alex's completely realistic dumb-guy-ness. All of this is done perfectly! The dialogue is great (with only a few exceptions, as noted in the text). This book is a lot of fun to read!

There is still a ton of work to do going forward, and please keep in mind that this is your last significant revision. You'll really need to step it up in this round if we want the book to be as good as I know it can be! (As you know, you'll have another short revision 12/22-1/8, but this revision will just be for making whatever final changes the publisher asks for, but if everything has gone well, by that point the changes they request will/should be very small.)

Going forwards, here are the areas to focus on:

Writing:

In the places where your writing is clean, it really sparkles! But I must say, I was a little surprised by the number of awkward/illogical/lumpy sentences still remaining in this draft, to be honest. I've gone through the manuscript and noted a lot of these sentences with a green circle and the letters "awk", which stands for awkward. I haven't explained exactly why every sentence is awkward in every case, but I'll keep a copy of the marked up manuscript should you want to discuss anything. I've also written "wc" next to some words, (this stands for "word choice" and means that a different word might work better in this context). I don't mean to sound harsh! But please change every sentence that I've marked in green.

Note on your last revision: Your hard work on your last revision is noted and appreciated! But many of the sections you added to address a specific note feel tacked on. Please see notes throughout for areas where the transitions need to be smoother.

The Friendship

At its core, this book is a book about the friendship between Dee Dee, Raquel and Evie. And this being the case, we still need to see many more sweet moments between the friends. We need to get more of a sense of their history. I love the moment when Raquel offers to lend Evie the money to fix the car. This is really subtle, yet very touching. We need more moments like this. As is, Raquel is funny and sassy and clever, but sometimes she seems harsh and not necessarily very likable. We need to see more moments of her being nice, in her own Raquel-y way. (Another moment like this is when Raquel offers to

plant weed in Alex's locker...this would be good, but slightly misses the mark since Alex is supposed to be her friend too).

Can we see Raquel do something nice for Dee Dee? What if Raquel is wearing a very un-Raquel like piece of clothing and Dee Dee likes it and she gives it to her? While the Dee Dee/Raquel dynamic is, by its very nature, a slightly antagonistic one, we could definitely use a few softer moments here. And in that vein -- Dee Dee says sweet things to Evie, but never says anything nice to Raquel. While I'm certainly not suggesting that their characters become different people, a moment of niceness from someone sassy is often even *more* touching than a moment of niceness from a person who's always very nice.

Okay, so at the risk of sounding like a broken record ☺ -- We need to see a lot more niceness between these girls (their sass is tons of fun to read about, and this shouldn't be *removed*, but some extra warmth should be layered on top of this). We need to get a real sense that they love each other and will be there for each other no matter what, despite that they are well aware of each other's flaws and don't always agree what the other one is doing.

Raquel's drug/alcohol problem

This needs to be built up a little bit more. Can we see her hung-over at school a couple of times? We want to believe Raquel really needs to be sent to rehab, otherwise the ending seems unfair and unsatisfying. As is, though, it seems like her parents are overreacting. Just adding a few mentions of Raquel being hung over at school will do a lot towards taking care of this issue. Not sure how serious we want to get here, but we could have Raquel hung over at school and Evie could say, "but I thought you weren't with Davey last night." For a moment Evie could wonder if Raquel is hanging out with other people Evie doesn't know about, and Raquel could say something to the effect of, "yeah I was drinking by myself, whatever" which will definitely go a long way towards making us all worried about Raquel.

Also, at some point, can Dee Dee try to confront Raquel about her problem? Although Evie tends to keep her mouth shut about stuff, it seems believable that Dee Dee might make some sort of a light remark to Raquel about her drinking/smoking. This remark can lead to a little fight (or at least some harsh words). Later at the end, Raquel can think Dee Dee for caring about her (in a non-cheesy, not-over-the-top sort of way of course). This will add to the Raquel's problem plotline, while also showing the reader how much Dee Dee cares about Raquel.

Horse Reserve:

It's sweet that Evie gives her birthday money to the reserve, but as is, it's not totally believable, nor totally satisfying. Can we play up Evie's relationship with Chamuco? Evie's donation would feel more meaningful if we knew *exactly* what Evie's money would be spent on. Or that she really had a special relationship with this horse. Two or three poignant paragraphs would really go a long way towards making the reader better understand Evie's feelings here. What does Evie like about horses? The way they're

powerful and strong at the same time as being gentle and cute? Does she feel like Chamuco *knows* things when she looks him in the eye? Does she feel like she can relate to him because he gets overlooked, the way she does in her family? We don't need to be too heavy-handed about this and we don't want to make the book too horse heavy, but what we already have needs to be tweaked just a bit to make Evie's feelings about this more relatable to the reader.

The Party:

The party still needs to be built up more. Evie goes to a rich school full of kids with well-off parents, so it's still very hard to believe that everyone would be talking about her party as is. What about it is so special to differentiate it from other sweet sixteens? If we *want* everyone in school to be talking about it, it needs to be so amazing as to warrant that kind of attention. Alternately, we could build up the coolness of the party a little bit, but also add to it's importance in the plot by showing readers exactly *why* it matters so much to Evie. What does this party represent to her, emotionally? Since keeping the party is the main plot of the story, it'd be great if her reasons for wanting it went beyond wanting to be popular/have a fun time. When's the last time there was a big party, just for her? Is she excited to imagine everyone gathering in the same place, celebrating her? Does she feel embarrassed? Also, we need to hear something from Evie's parents to explain why she can't have the party if she's not doing well, a real reasonable sounding reason so that we *will* believe they might cancel. As is, the canceling never really seems like a real possibility. We just don't believe her parents could be that mean.

Alex

The Alex plot wraps up a bit too easily/neatly. We're glad to see Alex and Evie end up together at the end, but Evie doesn't really seem to have to do anything to earn this. Also, while she does seem to learn something about relationships -- that she wants a shoulder to lean on, more than anything else, this lesson seems to get lost in the shuffle. Also, this lesson doesn't necessarily connect as closely to what happens in the plot as it could. We should see more examples of Arturo not listening/sympathizing with Evie when she's upset, and more examples of Alex being a really good listener when she needs someone to talk to. Also, can Evie do something sweet to get Alex back? Their breakup is surely not all her fault, but what she did wasn't very nice either. She can still stick to her guns that he should treat her more like a girlfriend, but she should also do something to tell him that she likes *him* and isn't trying to change him. What's going to happen after the book ends? Is their relationship going to change or be exactly the way it was? Alex needs to really convince the reader that his genuinely annoying behavior needs to stop (although Evie can be too demanding, any girl would be annoyed by how he acts).

The "date" with Mondo, by the way, is fantastic. I love it!

Hula auana

This is cute, but there's no conclusion to this story. Originally it seemed like this dance might have been brought up as a vehicle through which to say something about the three girls' friendship, but then this storyline pretty much disappears when we don't actually

see the girls do the dance at the party. If this is going to stay in the story, there needs to be a payoff at the end. Does Evie decide to do the dance and just have fun with it and stop comparing herself to other people who might do it better? Either there should be a little bit more on the dance, or it should be cut.

The Ending

The ending still needs a lot of work. Most of the elements are here, but they need a lot more fleshing out. As is, it feels like everything wraps up too quickly all within twenty pages. In places it reads more like an outline than actual chapters in a book. Also, the lesson at the very end doesn't feel fully earned and therefore feels tacked on.

Why didn't Evie do better on her Quality Check? It feels like a letdown that she isn't the one who earns the party for herself. If we want to show how upset she is, she can earn the party and at first feel like she doesn't care. Feel like the party no longer matters in light of everything else that is going on. But, Grandma Vino's stepping in and demanding of her party makes it feel like everything Evie did for the entire book was for nothing – she would have gotten the party regardless. We want to feel like Evie earned something with all her hard work!

There are still a lot of unanswered questions here.

How does Raquel feel about being sent away?

Does Raquel have any new thoughts about Jose at the end of the book?

I'm not sure if she should stop at the campsite on her way to visit Raquel. Also, the Raquel visit will be more meaningful if Raquel spends more time, throughout the book, talking about how excited she is for the party. She'll still have to miss the actual party, of course, but we want to feel like Evie is really making a sacrifice for a friend she cares about how will really appreciate the specific gesture.

And finally, the message at the very end is nice, but as is it feels a little tacked on. If the theme—Evie wondering if she's a good person – is threaded throughout the story, the lesson at the end will feel more earned. This can be added in during the parts where Evie feels bad about not being as suprema as Suprema.

Below please find a few smaller notes. This is a very incomplete list (most of my smaller notes I wrote on the actual manuscript, which you will be receiving in the mail on Saturday).

13 – Is this enough to make E's party the talk of Villy? Would kids who don't know Evie care about the dance they're doing? Also, sounds a little out of character for Raquel to be so supportive of doing the dance...

20 – "Evie couldn't understand why [Lindsay] showed up on foot. 'Lindsay,' Evie started. 'Why didn't you just drive your car?'" Be careful of introducing a thought before you express it in dialogue. This gets repetitive! Please keep an eye out for this throughout.

26 – Lindsay’s story is confusing. How would Lindsay know that Evie’s parents hadn’t ALREADY seen Molesto (thereby making it obvious their story is false?)

27 – We need to see more emotion from Evie here! She was so worried she was going to get into trouble and should be VERY relieved.

31 – Evie *really needs to believe* her parents might not let her have the party. As is, they just sound too nice and like there is no way they’d actually cancel it. They should mention that they know Evie thinks they won’t really cancel...but they will if she doesn’t shape up.

43 – As noted in the text, this would be a good time to build up Raquel’s drug problem. Maybe after the sentence, “Raquel had upgraded from last semester’s diem bags to this semester’s bountiful purchases....”

Dee Dee’s mom – do we ever explain that she passed away? I’m not sure it’s mentioned in this book.

83 – We still need to feel a greater sense of urgency about Evie’s party!

83 – Occasionally this sounds too summary, ex on page 83 “One afternoon at the reserve”. This book happens over an extremely short time span, so you should say specifically when everything happens (at least say what day of the week it is)

226 – We should play up this moment a little bit more: “No. I mean, yes. Dee Dee might be going away too. I don’t know Arturo. I’ve just got a lot of things on my mind and my birthday is coming up and I don’t think I’m gonna be getting the party I wanted. Everything is just a mess.”

“Your birthday?” he asked. “When is your birthday?”

At the end of the chapter Evie realizes that she wants to be with Alex because he’s a good shoulder to lean on. We should have a moment here of Evie feeling real emotion and hoping Arturo will be understanding. She should notice when he jumps right

I’ll be receiving another set of notes from the publisher by Monday, and will pass them along to you.

As discussed, I’ll need to get this back from you 12/4. This is your last significant revision. After this you’ll have from 12/22 – 1/8 to input final tiny adds from the publisher, but you should really consider this your last real chance to make any big changes. Totally excited to see the next draft! I just know that with some work this book is going to be as fantastic as our beloved HBC! I’ll be at my desk all day tomorrow. Whenever you have a minute between readings, call me and we can discuss. Thanks!

All best,
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