

## DISCONNECT

öI love how she stretches every morning, like a cat.ö

Sara rolls her eyes. öHonestly, (HAVE HER CALL POV CHARACTER BY NAME HERE SO WE CAN IDENTIFY) is that all you can tell us? Seriously, youöve been dating this woman for a month and all you can tell us is that she likes to stretch. I like to stretch. Steph likes to stretch. Thatø not particularly noteworthy. Give us something worthwhile, would you?ö

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öI didnøt say she likes to stretch. I said that I like how she does it. Donøt you see the difference? Itø how I feel about her when she moves that way. I thought you would appreciate that.ö

Sara starts tapping her fingernails on the table, emphasizing her disdain. It reminds me why I hate talking. At some level, we are always judging each other.

Comment [t1]: öyouøreö is 2<sup>nd</sup> Person

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#öWhat Iø'm looking for,ö she says, öis some little tidbit of information about what

Comment [t2]: New Paragraph

she does, where she works, what she looks like. Itø hard for us to get excited for you when your -girlfriendøbarely seems to exist.ö

Sara pauses in her rebuke when Kevin walks up.

#Kevin is our server. Heø always our server, it seems. He dropped out of BC his freshman year. Drugs or something. Went to work at his dadø diner to get his head on straight. That was two years ago and heø still here. Tall, kind of thin, his eyes are just a bit too pale. He has longish blond hair that his dad makes him tuck up under a ball cap when heø working. Always grinning, too, but one of those tight little grins that makes me wonder if he goes out and shoots cats at night with a BB gun. Kind of a Malcolm-

Comment [t3]: New Paragraph

Comment [t4]: öandö is awkward phrasing

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Comment [t5]: öyou thinkö is 2<sup>nd</sup> Person

McDowell-in-Clockwork-Orange sort of grin. **COMMENT: GREAT VOICE BUT**

**CHOPPY BECAUSE OF ALL THE INCOMPLETE SENTENCES.**

I figure he is probably an evil son of a bitch.

**Comment [t6]:** ðthought he wasö  
Donðswitch your narrative verb tense

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But not Sara. Oh no. She thinks he's hot. That's the word she used. Hot. She

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insists there is something about him, not quite heroin chic, but similar. Like he is kind of

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dying a little and there is something tragic and sexy about that. **COMMENT:**

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**DELETED "SHE THOUGHT" BECAUSE IT'S TELLING AND PASSIVE**

And this is the woman who wants to grill me about my girl.

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I just don't like to talk is all. But I have a couple of friends who get that, I guess.

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and they let me hang with them cause I'm a good listener. That's what Sara says

anyway.

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Sara is tall. Maybe five nine. That's tall for a girl. **COMMENT: DELETED**

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**"ANYWAY" REPETITIVE WORDING CUT.** She's got these crazy freckles all over

her body. **COMMENT: DELETED "AND". DON'T START SENTENCES WITH**

**AND.** When I was little I thought freckles were something that afflicted kids then

eventually went away. No such luck for Sara. She's twenty-two and just as speckled as

ever. But she's okay. Good smile. Good body. But otherwise, kind of shrug-worthy. That

probably sounds mean. She let's me hang with her, so that gives me something to do on

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the weekends. **COMMENT: DELETED "ANYWAY". REPETITIVE CUT.**

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#Oh, and she thinks I'm funny. She seems to laugh at me a lot, which I find a

**Comment [t7]:** New Paragraph

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little suspicious. **COMMENT: DELETED "ANYWAY" CUT THE FOURTH**

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**TIME YOU USED THIS WORD.** But she swears she's laughing with me not at me.

I think Steph hates me. I don't know why. She just stares whenever I bother to say something. Then there's a weird pause. She grins and starts talking to Sara like I never actually opened my mouth. I think she was probably abused as a child, so maybe she just doesn't like guys. She's got good hair though. And she seems okay with us all eating together.

Same old Saturday, really. Same brunch, same restaurant, same server, same people, same city. It gets old sometimes. Depressing even. At one point, it got so bad I thought I might throw myself off a bridge. I probably would have if it weren't for Jia.

Jia's my girl. I let it slip a few weeks ago. I was so bored, eating eggs and listening to Sara and Steph talk. So I just put it out there.

#Hey, I'm seeing this girl.

#Dead silence. Like I just stood up and dropped trou. Then the questions started.

Who is she? Where did you meet her? What does she look like? But I don't want to talk about it. It's tiring because I have to make sure everything lines up with how they want it.

Otherwise, they say she's not good enough, or I'm not good enough, or whatever. It's like being in a relationship that I know is shaky and so I self-edit to try and make sure I am saying exactly what they want to hear. It depresses me, doing that.

But Jia is something. She's Chinese. Or Asian, anyway. Gorgeous. Short dark hair. Shiny, like it's wet, but it's not. She's an athlete. Firm body, toned muscle. I love never seen her work out, so how she gets it that way is a bit of a mystery. When she wakes up in the morning, she pushes back the covers and arches her back, moaning a little. Then she stretches out her arms, hands curled into little fists and turns her head

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Comment [t8]: Make this dialogue

Comment [t9]: New paragraph

Comment [t10]: Not sure what you are trying to say. Drop my trousers?

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Comment [t11]: oYouo is 2<sup>nd</sup> Person

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Comment [t12]: oI'm not ever sure she works outo is awkward

from side to side. She's naked, of course. It's the same every morning, but watching her do this one thing, I never tire of.

What's best about Jia is that she doesn't mind that I don't like to talk. She appreciates the quiet moments we have together before she leaves for work and after she comes home. I look forward to those times, more so than I've ever looked forward to time with anyone. Sometimes I'll just sit and watch her read a book, or eat dinner, or try on clothes. Like I said, she doesn't seem to mind.

She brought another guy home from work once and it made me crazy jealous. Not that there was anything going on, but I didn't like the way he looked at her, staring at her butt when she got up to go to the kitchen. That sort of thing. He could care less that I was right there. And he would flirt with her. I suppose he felt like he could get away with it, since I never said anything. Stupid me.

Sara snaps her fingers in front of my eyes. "Hey, are you even listening? Geez, sometimes I think you must be retarded or something."

I focus on her. "What?"

"Since you've got nothing else to say about your friend, and we're done eating, Steph and I are going shopping. Wanna come?" She looks almost hopeful.

"Nah. It's Saturday. Jia will be getting home soon and I want to be there to see her. You guys have fun though." I pull ten dollars from my wallet and add it to their crumpled little pile of cash. Kevin walks over and picks it up along with the check. He shuffles today, like he's got a hangover, or maybe a cold. He's still wearing that weird smile though. Steph tells him to keep the change, without even asking me. Kevin

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murmurs his thanks and walks away. **COMMENT: SHOW DON'T TELL. PUT THIS IN DIALOGUE.**

We push our way out of the booth and walk outside. Sara gives me a quick hug and even a peck on the cheek.

#öBye,ö she says.

**Comment [t13]:** New paragraph

#Steph hangs back, but waves casually. öSee ya.ö

**Comment [t14]:** New paragraph

#Then, they leave to go shopping. For shoes, I suppose.

**Comment [t15]:** New paragraph

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**COMMENT: NOTE PARAGRAPHING WHEN YOU HAVE MORE THAN ONE CHARACTER SPEAKING.**

It's nearly one-thirty. Clouds are moving across the sky like a scurry of lemur headed to their doom. I start to walk back to my apartment, then start hustling a little bit so that I can be sure to beat Jia home. It's never as nice when I get there after she does. I round the corner of Centre and Mass Ave, slowing down for just a beat to check my hair in the window of Coagie's Barber Shop, a real barber shop where they do shaves and everything. My hair is messy. Probably needs washed. But it looks pretty good. Spiky and black. But I have circles under my eyes. I sleep a lot, but not very well. I could probably stand to eat a little bit more as well. My t-shirt is kind of just hanging there. My mom would have said I looked sketchy, but we don't talk anymore, so it doesn't matter. Jia won't care what I look like.

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**Comment [t16]:** See how this adds visual?

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**Comment [t17]:** öcan'tö suggests she is dead where as ödon'tö would suggest conflict between then

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I walk up the steps to my apartment building and unlock the door. I'm tired, so I take the elevator up to the fourth floor. The elevator smells funny, so the ride is uncomfortable. Funny how smells can make a space more claustrophobic. The doors

open and I get out, walk down the hall, plug my key into the lock, let myself in and turn out the lights. Stupid that I left them on, really.

I go into the bathroom and grab an Effexor from the medicine cabinet and down it with some water from the sink. I drink the water from my cupped hands. Then I head into my room and grab the binoculars from under the bed. The blinds are drawn, but Iøve got them warped just enough so that a small crack sits about midway up at eye level when Iøm sitting in my favorite chair. A few feet back into the room with the lights off and Iøm invisible, especially with the clouds settling in, deepening the shadows of the alley.

I pull the binoculars to my eyes and stare through the blinds at the window across the way. The shades are open, as usual. Today the window is open too. Iøm just in time. The lights in the apartment come on. I quickly adjust the focus knob. My girl walks in with a Macyø bag in one hand, her bright pink purse in the other. She throws them both on the floor next to her favorite chair and kicks off her shoes. She walks into the kitchen and I lose sight of her. I start to fear the worst, but a few moments later, she reappears with a glass of wine in her hand. She turns on the stereo and sways a little bit to the music.

I watch my Jia and dream that we are dancing. She is my girl. I sit and I watch until the lights go out.

## COMMENTS:

Hi John

You truly have an excellent ðfeelö for writing short stories, getting every bit of emotion, characterization and voice into a mere 5 pages. Your narrative voice especially

impressed me, and I felt as if I was right there in the protagonist's head. The twist at the end of the story was perfect and I loved how you managed to foreshadow it without giving it away. There was truly that 'aha' moment when as a reader I realized how cleverly you had set this up - the clues were all there and yet disguised. Your dialogue moved the story forward and aided perfectly in your plotting and your opening hook said it all - it was the ultimate clue to the twist.

What I feel your story needs is just polish and a final editing, which is what I have done. Let me explain what is behind some of the more important changes.

First, you want the reader to connect with your protagonist, so let me suggest you give him a first name in Sara's opening dialogue. That will make him more 'real' for the reader.

Show don't tell. I can't stress enough this all important rule of good fiction writing. There are a couple of places where I feel you should use dialogue over narrative to show what your characters say. This really won't add to the final word count, which I know is important when writing fiction. The use of dialogue is far more active than narrative. As well, avoid what I call 'telling phrases' such as I know, I feel, I hear, I see, I wonder, I realize, I think. Nine times out of ten when you use this kind of phrasing you are telling. You don't have to keep reinforcing your POV - which is what this kind of phrasing does.

I am an advocate of using sentence length and variation of style to add flow to the read, but be careful of the overuse of incomplete sentences. They are effective when laced into narrative and add voice. Too many of them in a row makes the read choppy and destroys the flow.

Be careful to maintain your chosen narrative verb tense. Your story is written in present tense yet on page 2 you switched to past tense for a sentence.

Repetitive wording. When you use a key or unique word over and over, especially in a sentence or paragraph this dulls your writing.

Finally, don't be afraid to use occasional similes to enhance the visional in your descriptions. Again, don't overuse them, but a well placed one can leave the reader with a real sense of action. I will say you did a great job of using strong verbs to create the active voice.

I have truly enjoyed working with you on this delightful story and wish you the very best in your writing career. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them.

Terri Valentine