

Editorial Letter:

Thank you for allowing me to read the first chapter of *A TOUR OF MY HEART*. This opening wastes no time setting up the inciting incident of the story, and you've created a protagonist to root for. I have some suggestions on how to sharpen this opening to make it work even harder for your story.

Plot and Pacing: This opening hits most of the beats readers want to see at the story's beginning. Establishing the main character (more on that later), a strong opening image (Macy sitting down at the piano), and the catalyst that kicks off the whole story, complete with a catch. The inciting incident—Lucas asking Macy to come to a wedding with him—happens at the bottom of page two. This shows me that you're starting your story in the right spot instead of spinning your wheels for a few pages/chapters before getting to the “meat” of the story. The “catch” of it being not just a date but a road trip adds a LOT of pressure, heightening the tension immediately.

The big missed opportunity I see right now is the text exchange between Macy and Lucas. It takes up a lot of real estate in this initial pages, and I think you can make it do more work for the story. Right now Macy is egging on a pointless (but adorably banter-y) conversation with Lucas just so she can keep talking to him. We've all been there! But the back and forth about French fries doesn't tell us anything about their relationship history beyond giving us a glimpse into how they speak to one another. I made some example changes in-line to show how you could pull Macy/Lucas's history forward in the exchange: by making one of Lucas's top favorite fries from a restaurant he and Macy have both been to...possibly together when they were in college? This is just an example—do what feels right to you—but this would give Macy an opportunity to reflect on a potential date with Lucas and connect us to their time together at school.

Character: We meet three characters in this opening chapter (though Macy is the only one we actually see), and I can already tell I'm going to love them.

Macy: Oh, sweet Macy. As someone who also did choir and musicals in high school but gave it up in college, I feel for her immediately. She's downplaying her musical abilities right from the opening paragraphs (“passable piano skills” “one of us is qualified to belt out show tunes and the other isn't”)—there's a definite insecurity there. But in her text exchange with Lucas, she comes across as confident and a little snarky. Their back-and-forth texting seems like a comfortable banter...is talking to him easy for her, or is she obsessing over making herself seem calm? In the next chapters I'm curious to see how she portrays herself outwardly, since we don't see her interact face-to-face with any other characters.

The chapter ends just before we get clarity on what Macy wants out of the inciting incident (aka Lucas's invitation to the wedding): does she want to date Lucas? Prove something to him? She's described herself as desperate to keep their texting conversation going, so I'm leaning toward she does want to go on this roadtrip with him, but a touch more clarity on why she's staying in touch with him wouldn't hurt.

Lucas: I find it fascinating that Macy refers to Lucas by his full name in her head three times. Almost like a celebrity or a title. It's less familiar and creates some distance. Is that how she views him? On a pedestal of some kind? Similarly, his contact name in her phone seems like a title/nickname, and she awards him the title of "Not A Relationship Guy"—which sounds like something he told her at some point in their history. We only get clues to their history at this point, but it sounds like Lucas brushed off the idea of a relationship with Macy and just wanted to be friends.

Milo: At this point, I'm still not positive who Milo is. He and Macy live together and have a good relationship—though she is keeping the secret of her music from him, and it feels like she is comparing herself to him and falling short—but are they best friends? Brother and sister? Since this chapter is very short, you don't need to bog it down with too much background, just one or two clarifying details.

Setting and world-building: The chapter needs a bit more grounding in micro setting. As the scene opens, Macy is in the apartment she shares with Milo, but we don't get much more that anchors readers in the setting. Macy is so focused on her phone and the text exchange with Lucas, she's not taking in much around her (she doesn't realize she never left her bedroom after taking her notebook back), so we obviously don't want her observing everything just for the sake of giving the reader setting details. Maybe she notices some of Milo's theatre decor (playbills from other shows he's been in on the wall) before she sits down at his piano, which makes her feel a little inferior as a performer? This could also be the chance to quickly show us her relationship with Milo—via a framed photo or some other type of high school memory on display.

As for the bigger world around Macy, she's moved back to her "adorable small town" (Cornelia) near her family in Southeastern PA. I don't think we need too much more than that, since this entire scene takes place in her apartment.

Voice: The first person POV works well, especially since we're in Macy's head almost entirely in this first chapter. I mentioned this in Macy's character section, but her internal voice shows a bit of insecurity around music, while in her texts with Lucas she seems comfortable and confident. Your voice as the author is approachable, and the prose is sharp.

Other notes: One of the most important jobs of the opening chapter is correctly setting the reader's expectations for the story they are about to read. You mentioned the manuscript is tentatively titled A TOUR OF MY HEART, so that tells me tour guiding is most likely a large part of the story. But right now, because we open with Macy composing a song at the piano and thinking about show tunes and Milo's current production, this seems like more of a music-focused story. The references to tour guides are, seemingly, the plot of her musical ("two campus tour guides as they find themselves and fall in love") and Lucas's contact name in her phone. You may consider weaving one or two more references to tour guiding (for example: does she reflect on how his contact name got into her phone that way?)...if that is indeed the focus of your story. Otherwise you may want to reconsider the title down the road.

I hope these comments help as you edit your book opening. Please let me know if anything is unclear or you have questions — again, I enjoyed reading your first chapter so much!

Kaitlin