

She was one of the strangest girls I had ever seen: dark blue jeans, black cotton exercise type T-shirt, ~~shortly~~ cropped black hair, and the most startlingly golden eyes I had ever seen. ~~...okay, so,~~ maybe she wasn't so strange, but the sword hanging at her hip was ~~I couldn't stop staring at the~~ black, leather-bound, silver handle above a black scabbard which hung to just below her knees. ~~...yeah,~~ ~~that was the strange part.~~ She was just standing there, in broad daylight, chattering away with some woman at a fruit stand, with a sword hanging from the belt off her left hip.

I was at the farmer's market, like I was every Saturday in the summer and fall months, with my feet propped up on a bench, —watching the people walk by my booth ~~who,~~ occasionally stopping stopped in to look at my goods. You see, I am a craftsman —taught by my uncle in all manner of leather and metal work. My wares usually include some everyday stuff, some shiny stuff, and some unique stuff that I come up with on my own.

Someone walked into my pavilion and began looking around. He asked a few questions. I don't really remember what because, two seconds later, that woman walked into view. She smiled brightly, resting her left arm on the sword's hilt and, chatting animatedly with the other hand. Captivated, I got was lost in a trance until —that is— the man in my pavilion cut off my long train of thoughts with a question that I didn't expect.

Comment [J1]: This doesn't sound like the opening sentence of a book to me. It would be better if you started out with Jarreth, setting up the scene by describing the setting and then moving into Jarreth seeing this "strange girl," followed by a description. This additional information doesn't need to be long, maybe just a short paragraph. This then gives the reader a clear idea of where they are and at least a basic idea of what's going on right away.

Comment [J2]: This is a long list of description. When describing characters, it's best to spread out the details through a couple of paragraphs, or even a couple of chapters. And it's helpful to occasionally remind the reader of certain details about the character's look/appearance throughout the book because they aren't going to remember everything.

Comment [J3]: As an author, it's very important that you sound like you're in control of your story. When you make a hesitant comment like this, it sounds like you don't actually know what you're writing about, and though this is in first-person perspective, readers still prefer the author to be definitive and certain in their writing. It gives them confidence in the author's story-telling abilities, whether they consciously know that or not.

Comment [J4]: A "T-shirt" seems very out of place in this quasi Victorian world. It would be better if you either called it something less modern-sounding or changed what she's wearing to better...

Comment [J5]: This is implied by the word "cropped"

Comment [J6]: You already used this phrase in the first sentence. It's best to avoid repeating words or phrases too close to each other.

Comment [J7]: Be definitive by avoiding the use of ellipsis in the narrative.

Comment [J8]: This sounds too conversational in the narrative, like the narrator, Jarreth, suddenly started talking directly to the audience. Most of you...

Comment [J9]: Again, too much description all at once.

Comment [J10]: These are sentence fragments and need to be rephrased so that they contain complete thoughts.

Comment [J11]: Specify which farmers' market this is (Ex. California Farmers' Market, Capital Region Farmers' Market, etc.) This will help you...

Comment [J12]: It would be better to give specific examples. In fiction, the more specific you can be in your details, the better.

Comment [J13]: Again, this isn't very specific. It would be better if you briefly described the person instead (Ex. An older bearded man walked...)

Comment [J14]: This statement makes the reader automatically distrust Jarreth's narration. It shows him to be what's called an unreliable narrator, and...

Comment [J15]: You used this same word earlier to describe her.

Comment [J16]: How can she be chatting with her hand? Rephrase for clarity.

Comment [J17]: Again, this seems a bit too conversational. Also, suspension points (. . .) are not really meant to be used in narrative.

“Would you be willing to do a job for me?”

I blinked, looking his way. “~~Em... I... uh...~~” I couldn’t formulate a response. I quickly tried to collect myself, and the first step ~~to which~~ was to actually look the man in the eye.

~~He~~ The man was old enough to be my father. ~~Though~~ I have to admit, he was built like a man that had worked out every day of his life, not like my own father who had long since let himself go.

The man had this thin, graying beard that reminded me of finely ground pepper. His silver eyes ~~—~~ yes, I said silver ~~—~~ stared at me from under a darkly furrowed brow. The stance he took with me reminded me of my uncle right before he gave me a stern talking to. I even expected him to go off on some tirade, and but then I noticed ~~the fact that~~ he wore a broad grin.

Comment [J18]: Try to avoid using fragmented speech like this too often and too excessively when you do use it. Your characters should be able to finish their sentences.

Comment [J19]: Give your sentences variety by not starting so many words with the word “I” followed by a verb and by varying sentence length and complexity rather than using so many simple sentences.

Comment [J20]: This is phrased really awkwardly. I have suggested a better way to write this, though it is by no means the only way.

Comment [J21]: Make sure you always tell your reader who you are talking about in each new paragraph rather than using a pronoun. You do this repeatedly throughout your story and need to make sure to redefine your pronouns before using any of them. This means that you need to use the character’s name or a short description of the character (Ex. the gray-bearded man) before you use a pronoun in place of the character’s name or description.

Comment [J22]: Whenever you can cut out unnecessary words or phrases, it’s best to do so. It makes your writing flow more smoothly and helps prevent the reader from getting confused.

“Well?” One of ~~his~~ the man’s dark eyebrows ~~raised~~ rose, ~~hiding only slightly~~ disappearing under a dark curl of hair that my mom would say, “~~H~~ung just a little too low to be proper.”

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Comment [J23]: It’s helpful to reestablish the reader with the character rather than using single lines of dialogue like this often. Show the reader the character’s thoughts, impressions, what they’re doing, etc. in conjunction with the dialogue whenever appropriate.

“~~Yes... uh... sir. What do you have in mind?~~”

~~He~~ The man pulled a black notebook out of his satchel bag and began regaling the details of what he had in mind. I tried, in vain, to look over his shoulder at the marketplace behind. It was no use ~~—~~ the girl was gone. And so, I did my best to pay attention to what he was saying, but... to no avail.

I found my mind wandering back to the image of the woman with the beautiful sword.

Comment [J24]: Why not let the reader know the full extent of this job right away? As an author, you should try to avoid hiding or avoiding explanations or descriptions. We want to know what Jarreth is getting himself into and why.

Comment [J25]: It is usually best to use either semicolons or dashes. You can use both, but you have a tendency to use a lot of both semicolons and dashes, so it would be best to stay consistent by just using one or the other. Also, semicolons tend to convey a more formal tone while dashes are more informal, so dashes suit the overall tone of your story/writing style much better.

Comment [J26]: This saying seems rather old-fashioned and therefore a bit out of place with this character. It would work better to remove this completely and skip right to the point you are trying to make.

When ~~he~~ the man finished and asked me about how much the job would cost, I was at a total loss. I couldn't tell him, and, honestly, I had no idea how much a project as complex as the one he seemed to have had in mind would cost. Looking over his notes, I finally noticed the interesting specifics of what he wanted: a suit of light leather armor, intricate in every detail right down to the etching on the borders of the chest plate.

Comment [J27]: Be definitive.

Comment [J28]: Why wouldn't Jarreth know this information? Leather-working is his trade, so it does not seem very realistic that he would be unable to figure out how much a job would cost.

Comment [J29]: What do you mean by this? Be specific, and let your readers know why this armor is so unusual. Does Jarreth not usually work with armor? Is there something about the suit that's unique?

I shrugged. "You got me, sir. What kind of leather did you say you wanted?"

The man smirked. "I'll provide the material. Just tell me about how much would you expect for the work. Don't be afraid to overestimate."

Comment [J30]: This seems an unusual comment for someone to make. Usually, he'd be trying to bargain down, not encouraging Jarreth to overestimate.

I swallowed hard and took a closer look at the highly detailed sketch. and I found myself more fascinated by the figure he had drawn wearing the body armor than the armor itself. She looked *exactly* like the woman with the golden eyes.

I spat out some random number to the man, who nodded understandingly.

Comment [J31]: Again, why keep this information from your reader? It would be helpful for us to know the amount Jarreth is asking, as well as how much that amount is in relationship to your world's monetary system. Let us know just how much this armor is worth.

"Good! Good, very good," ~~he~~ the man muttered, clasping his hands excitedly.

Comment [J32]: What does this look like? Be specific by avoiding the use of adverbs. Adverbs are good, but you will find that by avoiding using them, you will have to write much more descriptively, which will help your reader visualize more clearly.

"So..." I said, half-trying to think of something more to say and secretly hoping that the man would have something else to add. My wish was granted I was relieved when he spoke again.

Comment [J33]: Drawing words out like this is generally not done in traditional writing. The best way to indicate this is by using descriptive words to tell your readers how the word was said.

"So, if you're going to take this job, you might as well start packing your things now. We

Comment [J34]: This sounds very cliché. Whenever you are writing any kind of fiction, you should try to avoid using clichés. Again, this will force you to be more descriptive, and it also keeps your writing fresh and interesting for the reader.

leave in about an hour.”

I gave him a puzzled look. “Excuse me?”

The man’s smile brightened as he wandered around my pavilion, looking at more of my wares.

“You, me, and my daughter are leaving in one hour for *The Helmstaar*. And don’t worry, Jarreth,

Your uncle already knows.”

A little in shock over the fact that the man knew my name, I stood and handed his notebook

back to him. “I guess...uh...that I should start packing up the camp, then, huh?”

“No time.” The man waved his hand at me as he stowed the notebook back in his satchel bag.

“I’ll send a crew in to pack up and bring your things by later. Just...just go get your brother to run

your shop, for now, and pack what you need. Don’t worry.” He gave me a look that somehow came

off as both mischievous and reassuring. “I’m not going to take anything.”

I blinked at him, dumbfounded. Who was this guy? Where was he from, and how did he know

me? Apparently, the questions were written all over my face because he gave me a funny look with

both eyebrows raised. A look of expectancy hid ~~Somehow~~ in his silvery eyes ~~hid a look of expectancy~~.

I inhaled deeply, shaking my head and letting myself fall back into reality.

“Right...right,” I mused, still unsure of how to react. “I...I’ll go do that, then.”

Comment [J35]: This does not seem realistic for him to demand a tradesman to leave his work to fly around on an airship for who knows how long. It would be better if you could have him bargain with Jarreth or something along those lines so it is Jarreth’s idea to go on the airship rather than him being dragged along without a choice.

Comment [J36]: Again, be specific. Is there something in particular that the man picks up or is looking at?

Comment [J37]: It seems very odd that Jarreth would accept this without question. You need to either show Jarreth’s thought process or have him ask this man some questions about what’s going on.

Comment [J38]: In dialogue, you need to start a new paragraph whenever a new character does or says something.

Comment [J39]: What are you trying to convey with this gesture? Be more specific.

Comment [J40]: “Somehow” is not very descriptive. Try to be more specific in what you mean by this statement by explaining what is giving Jarreth this idea. In other words, show, don’t tell.

Comment [J41]: Describe this.

Comment [J42]: Again, it seems unlikely that Jarreth would just accept all of this without any kind of reaction, especially since this man seems to know everything about him and his family. Show Jarreth reacting.

Backing out of my pavilion, I found my brother, Cadence, sitting under a shade, reading a book and eating a snow cone.

Comment [J43]: What is this? Describe and/or explain it.

"Cadence, I need you to cover me for a while."

Comment [J44]: This seems like a very modern thing to see in this universe. I would strongly suggest either establishing a more modern setting earlier or changing this to something else.

The Cadence answered came in Cadence's his *I'm not really paying attention* voice. "Yeah, in a minute."

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I shook my head, "No, Cade, as in right now."

He blinked up at me like a small startled creature, nodded once, and ducked inside the pavilion, tucking his book under his arm. What was his deal? For ~~only~~ being ~~only~~ three years younger than me, Cadence seemed a lot less mature. I ~~don't~~ ~~didn't~~ really know what it was, ~~h~~He just didn't seem ~~to~~ all there. The gap between twenty and twenty-three wasn't that big, ~~a gap~~ was it?

Comment [J45]: What kind of creature? This is a great opportunity to not only give your readers some description of Cadence but also to share a small detail about an animal that lives in your universe.

Shaking my head, I proceeded to our trailer, the one ~~that~~ I practically ~~lived~~ ~~camped out~~ in on the weekends. It was easier than manning the pavilion all day, ~~packing~~ it up, and then coming home only to go back early the next morning and ~~unpack~~ it all over again. In a flustered rush, I ~~packed~~ the essentials: three sets of clothes, ~~extra underwear~~, and all the toiletries. They fit in a back ~~pack~~.

Comment [J46]: Why is this detail necessary? If you want to keep it in here, I would suggest having Jarreth insert a short anecdote about why this is important to him.

As I exited my trailer, ~~the man I was caught by the man~~ ~~me by the elbow~~. He ~~snatched my elbow~~ ~~and~~ pulled me along, his attitude less genial than it had been only moments before. ~~A lot less genial.~~

Comment [J47]: Why would Jarreth take this without fighting it? If this was happening to me, I would recoil or try to get my elbow free. This also makes me wonder why Jarreth would continue to go along with this if the man's attitude has suddenly changed from genial to somewhat dangerous. It makes Jarreth seem both weak and clueless, which I know is not who he is. Jarreth needs to react to this in some way, even if it's only in his head.

I dared ask another question. ~~...again.~~ “Where are we going?”

The answer was short. “The Helmstaar.”

“Right,” I said incredulously, ~~then -and-continued to-~~ muttered under my breath. “Of course we are.”

Comment [J48]: This word does not seem to suit the situation. I would think Jarreth would be more uncertain or questioning or something along those lines. Also, why doesn't Jarreth ask what *The Helmstaar* is? If he's going to be living on it for the next while, it seems likely that he would want to know.

To Ddistracting myself, I started devoting devoted my attention to the craftsmanship of the satchel bag that hung between us. It was just as detailed as the drawings ~~that~~ he had shown me.

Intricate designs and emblems danced across the finely crafted leather. The bag so intrigued me that I

completely lost track of where we were going and nearly tripped over my feet... more than a few times.

Comment [J49]: What do these look like? Do they resemble anything? Do they remind Jarreth of anything in particular?

Comment [J50]: This seems unlikely. It almost seems to me that Jarreth is being kidnapped and/or brainwashed, and it is not realistic that he would not be having similar thoughts, or at least be concerned about this.

The next thing I knew, the man had let go of my arm, and I was being propelled up the boarding steps. onto an airship. It had been a long time since I had seen an airship in Pacifica, even if it was one

Comment [J51]: Since Pacifica is a real place in California, it would really help your readers to, first, include this information much earlier so your readers know where this is all taking place, and second, include specific details about Pacifica that really ground us in this place. Do some research and find out some information about this place that will help you make this place real to your readers.

of the largest ports in California. A long, *long* time. Hesitantly, I walked up the stairs, watching where I was going. ~~and I was~~ paying more attention to the ship than to ~~whom~~ who was waiting for me on deck.

Comment [J52]: This is confusing because you have not given your reader any description of what the ship looks like. I assumed that he would be standing right in front of the woman, therefore looking up at her rather than down. Make sure to describe the setting to your readers so we can see where everyone and everything is, just don't do it all in one clump and then never make reference to it again. Insert the description in a little at a time, then just remind your readers of specific, important details every once in a while.

By the time I looked down, I was standing directly in front of ~~that the~~ woman. ~~...the one~~ with the sword.

Comment [J53]: It's best to avoid making reference to people, places, or things that the reader is not yet aware of. Just say exactly what is happening for clarity.

I caught myself ~~looking down at her~~, staring at her golden eyes and nearly tripped over myself again.

Comment [J54]: Do you intend to make Jarreth seem very clutzy/air headed? If not, remove some of the instances where he almost or does trip over himself because he's not paying attention.

Comment [J55]: This is a very strange and abrupt way to end your chapter. It cuts off right when readers are expecting more, especially since you have yet to explain who any of these people are and what's going on. I would strongly suggest continuing one or two paragraphs further where you show Jarreth get introduced to the woman/the ship. The other option is to write something in here that is a cliff-hanger, something memorable that will make the reader want to keep reading.