

Sample Line Edit

Several days later, Penelope ~~found herself stopping~~ stopped for gas in a desolate little town in Kansas. ~~Away from the cities s~~She liked to take ~~the~~ country roads ~~on trips~~, and she was pretty sure this ~~town-one~~ wasn't on any map. ~~Solace, Kansas~~ the sign coming into town said. ~~-~~She wondered what ~~S~~solace any of the salt-of-the-earth locals had found in this place without shade, without water, without much of anything.

Penelope finished filling her gas tank and ambled inside to pay. The man behind the counter didn't look up from his magazine when the door chimed her entrance. She glanced around at the dusty Twinkie packages and expired soup cans, ~~and~~ ~~deciding~~ ~~ed~~ maybe this wasn't the place for a snack. She went to the counter and pulled out her wallet ~~to pay~~, but the man continued to ignore her.

"Excuse me," she said politely.

No response. Penelope ~~glanced~~ ~~looked~~ around ~~to see if for~~ anyone else ~~present~~ ~~was there~~. Maybe this man was deaf?

After a minute, she tried again. "I'd like to pay for my gas."

Nothing.

She huffed ~~to herself~~ in frustration and pulled three \$20 bills ~~from out of~~ her wallet. It ~~was~~ ~~at~~ least ~~ten~~ ~~10~~ bucks more than her gas, but she wasn't about to leave without paying, and ~~this guy~~ certainly wasn't ~~going to help~~ her. She left the money on the counter and ~~stalked~~ ~~walked~~ out.

Back in her car, Penelope ~~charitably~~ decided the clerk had some ~~sort of~~ developmental issue that prevented him from communicating with her. She was annoyed at her own condescension, but she also truly didn't feel he was being a jerk. She filed it away as a weird encounter in a weird little town and turned ~~her car out~~ onto the main street in town.

There ~~was no~~ traffic and only a few vehicles parked anywhere. ~~-~~. None ~~were~~ anything like new, and a few were ~~probably~~ even older than ~~her~~ ~~she was~~. Many of the storefronts were empty, and the few businesses that seemed to still be active were all closed. ~~At~~ the far end of what passed for downtown was a small cafe. In front ~~were~~ a ~~whole-whopping~~ four old pickup trucks. *This must be the hot spot in town*, she ~~thought~~.

Penelope parked in the tiny lot ~~next adjacent~~ to the cafe. ~~It looked like this business was open.~~
~~What the heck, she thought. Let's go meet some locals. Maybe these will be more friendly.~~

The door jingled as she walked in. The first thing Penelope ~~noticed~~ was how ~~the cafe looked like~~ a movie set for a cafe in a tiny town in the middle of nowhere ~~that this looked.~~ ~~Too perfectly.~~ Cheap wood-paneled walls, ~~plastic~~ press-in letters for the menu board, vinyl chairs that'd probably ~~had~~ been old by the time she was born. Those speckled, light-tan plates that most restaurants used decades ago,

Comment [GLE1]: There are both straight and curly quote marks throughout. This is a global formatting issue and doc should be revised for consistency.

Comment [GLE2]: This is still passive

Comment [GLE3]: Phrases like "this guy" and "that woman" can come off as aggressive. Call him what he is, e.g. "the station attendant".

Comment [GLE4]: A weak phrasing that wants more vivid language, i.e. "didn't seem interested in doing his job" or "lifting a finger" or "understand customer service".

Comment [GLE5]: In general, tell us what IS there, not what isn't.

Comment [GLE6]: Also, lots of passives in this paragraph

Comment [GLE7]: Technically "she was" is the correct option, but that's not what we hear in common usage. One of a writer's many responsibilities is not to use language that will distract the reader or sound "off", effectively pulling them out of the story.

Comment [GLE8]: "A small café sat at the far end of downtown ..."

Comment [GLE9]: More passive

Comment [GLE10]: Since this is her first thought in the text, lead with She thought, blah-blah-blah.

Comment [GLE11]: This should probably be dialogue.

Comment [GLE12]: filter

Comment [GLE13]: "A menu board with plastic press-in letters"

~~that the ones~~ no one missed after they quietly disappeared. ~~There was~~ nothing ~~to~~ indicated time had ever passed here, no ~~modern~~ product advertising, no new paint, not even updated ketchup bottles. Penelope ~~d~~ wondered ~~idly~~ if the food was as old as everything else.

Comment [GLE14]: Adding the “modern” here makes the description match grammatically with the other two in the sentence.

At the counter ~~like~~ perched four old men, likely the owners of the four trucks parked outside. None had food, but ~~they~~ each nursed a cup of coffee. Despite ~~the it being~~ scorching mid-summer heat, they wore long flannel shirts and thick jeans. She could ~~ve have~~ sworn they'd been talking when she first opened the door, but all conversation stopped. The old men turned in unison ~~to look~~ at her ~~entrance~~. ~~and~~, apparently realizing she wasn't a local, ~~they~~ turned back to their coffees in silence.

What a friendly town, she thought ~~grimly~~.

Just then, a waitress came out from the back. ~~The woman was~~ nearly as old as the men, ~~and she~~ wore a yellow server uniform just as ~~old dated~~ as the rest of the décor. ~~, but s~~ She came directly over to Penelope with a big smile on her face.

Comment [GLE15]: Comma splice

“Hello, darlin! We don't get too many visitors! What a pleasant change from these old coots,” She said ~~enthusiastically~~ ~~enthusiastically~~, hooking a thumb towards the men at the counter.

Comment [GLE16]: Adverbs are a personal choice, but 1 or 2 should be the limit for any given page.

“I'm pretty sure this town isn't on any map,” Penelope said.

“Oh, don't you know it! We've technically been a ghost town for— Jim, when did they annex us? —~~Oh i~~ It must ~~ve have~~ been 20 years ago now,” said the waitress.

Jim grunted. Penelope ~~took it as~~ ~~guessed this was~~ ~~some sort of~~ agreement.

Comment [GLE17]: Try to avoid vagueness

“My name's Doralee,” the waitress continued. “Have a seat anywhere you like, I'll grab you a menu and some coffee.”

Comment [GLE18]: Another comma splice. Either add “and” or make this two sentences.

“Thanks.”

Penelope settled herself into a booth by a window ~~over~~, looking ~~out down~~ the town's ~~main~~ street. After some cautious questioning ~~with the waitress~~, she ~~guessed~~ ~~took a stab~~ at what was least likely to give her food poisoning and ordered a grilled cheese sandwich. Doralee hollered the order through the kitchen pass-through, clearly excited to do more than just pour coffee for old men. Penelope wondered if eating here would be another of her ill-fated decisions.

Doralee came over and sat down across from Penelope, ~~obviously~~ ~~wanting~~ conversation.

Comment [GLE19]: This is real close to a head-hop.

“So, um, how many people still live around here?” Penelope asked ~~dutifully~~.

“Not so many as we used to have. The annex happened when we dropped under ~~100~~ a hundred, it's probably under ~~50~~ fifty now. We do the best we can.”

“Where do people live? No offense, but there don't seem to be houses for ~~50~~ fifty people let alone ~~a town of~~ more.”

Doralee laughed. “Oh honey, we got farmers come from ~~20~~ ~~twenny~~ miles around. Ain't nobody mostly ever lived in town.”

Comment [GLE20]: Intentionally misspelled to maintain dialect.

Editor's Notes

Technical Items:

- 10+ adverbs remain outside of dialogue. This is a lot, and the author should to work to reduce that number to roughly 1 or 2 per page. Some adverbs, such as “truly” and “only”, act differently than regular adverbs and can be counted separately (N.B. they should also be limited to the same degree, if not more). In this document, several could be cut wholesale, but thorough rephrasing is the purview of the author’s rewrite.
- Contractions help readability. Their use can speed up a sentence and their absence can slow it down.
- Be aware of comma splices. A splice is when two independent clauses are joined with a comma and no conjunction (“and”, “but”, etc.). While the grammar police would ban every usage, some such as the above “Nearly as old as the men, the waitress wore a yellow server uniform,” can often slide through in fiction because both clauses refer to the same subject. A splice that said, “The trucks outside were dusty, the server wore a yellow uniform,” would not pass muster.

Plot, Pacing, and Character:

There isn't a lot of space in two pages to develop plot. In this short space, though, I can see something is “off” about the town. With the attention the author has put on the weirdness, the expectation is set for it to be a plot point.

Pacing can be tricky when a main character is travelling alone. This text avoids the traps of navel gazing, stream-of-consciousness reporting, and on-the-nose reporting of the MC's actions. I followed the MC with interest as she explored this strange little town.

The characterizations are excellent. Doralee jumps off the page, as do her taciturn old men. Even the gas station and its catatonic attendant are described in vivid, but not overbearing, detail. There's a line between recognizable archetype and cliché, and I think these characters stay safely on the right side.