

DEVELOPMENTAL REPORT

TITLE XXXX

GENRE Historical fiction*

*Also contains elements of romance, mystery and comedy, which means it could be classified as *humorous historical romantic mystery*. I'd suggest further research into how authors have classified novels similar to this story. When it comes to submitting to publishers, nailing the genre is crucial.

OVERVIEW

There are so many things I loved about this story! The humour in particular was a wonderful surprise. From the hilarious opening scene to Sally's quirky habits to the way Alice disguised herself as Alex, I loved it all!

Your voice and the language used is very well-suited to the historical setting, though I loved that Alice was not afraid to speak her mind. You balanced the characteristics of a strong female lead well with the societal norms of the time period.

The romantic tension between Alice and Henry—growing from cheeky, innocent flirting to intense emotion-filled moments—was expertly handled and their relationship grew at a believable pace. I loved this element of the story!

You mentioned in your emails that your main concerns are character motivations, plot holes relating to Eric, and whether there is enough “story”. Funnily enough, these elements are connected. If one is lacking, the others will be affected. By addressing issues related to character and plot structure, the story will evolve naturally. I feel I have addressed these in the contents of this report, but if you have questions or need anything clarified, don't hesitate to get in touch.

THEME

I would suggest that, besides being a hugely entertaining read, XXXX is a story that explores women's rights and gender equality. Alice struggles with her belief that having a husband means she must forfeit her rights and the freedom she currently enjoys. In Henry, she finds a man who values her strengths and abilities, as much as they drive him crazy, and she must learn to trust and be vulnerable in order to find happiness.

CHARACTERS

For the purposes of this assessment, I feel it is necessary to focus on the protagonist. I have analysed her goals and motivation and the conflict that can and should arise from the events that unfold.

ALICE

As mentioned above, Alice is a strong female lead. She knows what she wants and isn't afraid to go after it. However, her goals and motivations aren't always clear. This may be why you've received feedback stating that the story meanders, because the events that occur don't appear to move Alice towards her goals. In actual fact, I don't think this is the case at all; instead, the issue lies in her goals and motivations not being made clear, or not being made clear early enough.

GOALS AND MOTIVATION

At the end of the opening scene the reader is told: XXXX. From that point, the reader is going to assume this is the goal Alice will be working towards throughout the novel, yet none of the subsequent plot events move her closer to achieving that goal. This gives the appearance that random events have been included, causing the story to meander aimlessly. In other words, reader expectations are established, but the story heads in another direction.

Consider, instead, if at the end of that first scene, Alice determines that she will *not* be sent abroad, husband or no husband. Her goal is to stay in London, which is mentioned, except the reader's expectations have already been set—they're expecting Alice to find Eric. Her motivation for wanting to stay in London has already been made clear—she loves her life and the work she does, which she can't do abroad. Events relating to the XXXX subplot help her move towards this goal—if she can make a name for herself (another external goal), it will lead to more work, which will allow her to support herself in London and maintain the lifestyle she's grown to love (motivation). In short, you've already done a lot of the hard work to establish these as her goals. Reviewing the early scenes and correctly setting up Alice's external goals is the first step in resolving the issue of the "meandering" plot.

An internal goal that can be made clear in conjunction with the external one above is Alice's desire for independence and freedom. It's not until the 86% mark that we learn this goal is what's preventing her from accepting Henry's proposal and is her motivation for trying to repel men. However, a character's goals should be made clear in the story's setup so that the reader knows what the character will be working towards and understands the internal conflicts that arise (discussed further in the 'Plot and Structure' section).

Motivation for Alice's desire for freedom is likely linked to her mother's experiences, which are alluded to in chapter six as her motivation for helping Jennifer. However, if this *is* Alice's motivation for wanting to maintain her independence, she needs to reflect on this as the driving force behind her decisions at key moments when her achievement of her goal is threatened. As it stands, this is the only instance of it being mentioned.

Another internal goal that Alice discovers along the way is her desire to be protected and loved. She doesn't realise how badly she wants this until she experiences it for the first time with Henry. Her motivation becomes clear once it's revealed that Eric would recoil from her touch on account of his XXXX. Perhaps there's more than that motivating her though. Not much is revealed about Alice's upbringing, but given the hints of her mother's struggles, perhaps she never experienced much love and protection during her early life. This may be an avenue worth exploring.

CONFLICT

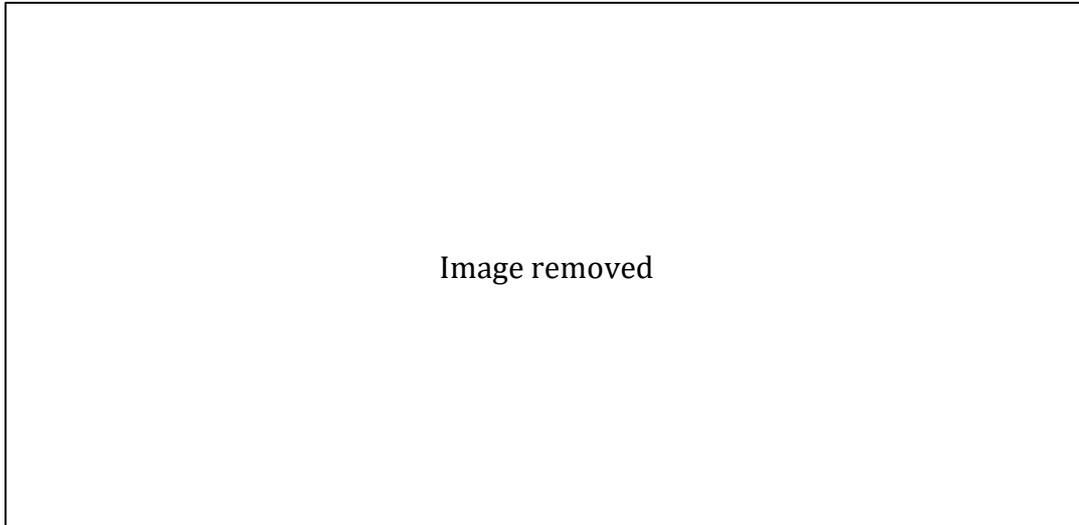
Alice wants to make a name for herself so she can stay in London, and her best chance of doing so is finding the XXXX. It's made clear throughout the novel that she wants to be the first to find it, yet she believes Henry is also searching for it. If he were to find it first, it would ruin her chances of achieving her goal—this could be further explored. Also, when Henry suggest they share information, she agrees but determines to do no such thing. If she were to verbally knock back Henry's proposal, consider the conflict that would arise when she needs his help finding Kristy—she'd need to swallow her pride in order to get his help.

Alice's desire for independence and freedom is sure to create internal conflict in relation to Eric. At one point, Alice notes that "Eric would never allow her to continue her work", work that she loves. Would it not stand, then, that she'd be conflicted about whether or not she wants Eric to be found? Presumably, they were at least friends and she wishes him well (discussed further in 'Plot Issues' section), but Eric coming back will essentially have the same consequences for Alice as being sent to Carlisle, hence the internal conflict.

Alice's two internal goals—to maintain her independence and freedom, and to be loved and protected—are in direct opposition to one another. To achieve one, she'll have to sacrifice the other; at least, this is what she believes. Further exploration could be given into this internal conflict. As her feelings for Henry grow, the reader should know this is what's holding her back.

PLOT AND STRUCTURE

I use Michael Hauge's "Six Stage Plot Structure" to demonstrate how improvements can be made to a story's plot development and structure. Regardless of the strategy a writer uses to plot, every story tends to follow the structure he outlines.



The diagram above shows us three things:

1. The story's stages or plot events that occur to help the protagonist journey towards their goal;
2. The turning points that should occur as the story progresses (note the percentage marks) to ensure the reader doesn't lose interest and keeps turning pages;
3. The protagonist's internal character arc.

On the following pages, I have outlined the recommended stages and turning points from the above structure (see bold, italicised headings). I have then outlined the events that occur in each stage of your story and have made suggestions where necessary. Bear in mind, these are only suggestions. I make them based on my knowledge of character development and story structure. It is not my intent to stifle your creativity, but to help you see other possibilities.

ACT I

Stage I – Setup

This section of a story is designed to introduce the character, to show the reader what the character’s life is like as the story begins and to establish their goals. You have done a superb job at introducing Alice. It’s clear from the outset that she is not a meek, mild-mannered lady. She’s bold and independent, is clearly loved and respected by her employees, despite their cheekiness, and will willingly put herself in odd predicaments if the situation calls for it, such as XXXX!

Improvements can be made by clarifying her goals. In the ‘Character’ section above, Alice’s four goals were outlined. She wants to: 1) stay in London; 2) make a name for herself; 3) maintain her independence; 4) be loved and protected. You’ve already successfully established goals 1 and 2, though mention of finding Eric (as a goal) should be removed to avoid misdirecting the reader.

The odd way Alice dresses and the XXXX she sometimes wears are hints for goal 3—it’s briefly mentioned that she’s trying to avoid unwarranted attention. But this alone does not make goal 3 clear. In not clarifying this goal in the story’s setup, the reasons for Alice’s internal conflict once she acknowledges her feelings for Henry and for rejecting Henry’s proposal later on aren’t clear.

In order to properly establish goal 3, and goal 4 indirectly, is to reveal more details about Alice’s history with Eric. One of the first lessons a writer learns is to “cut the backstory”; however, complete removal is to the detriment of the story. Backstory is important as it’s where our characters’ motivations come from. What should be avoided are the infodumps, and you certainly do not have any infodumps in your manuscript—congratulations! The trick then, comes in learning how to weave in backstory concisely at times when the information is relevant to what’s occurring in the story. In the opening scenes, when Ben informs her that she must move abroad, and when she’s chatting with Clara, it’s important to answer a few questions for the reader:

- How/when did Eric go missing?
- How does Alice feel about his missing status?

With this last answer, the reader should be able to glean something about the dynamics of their relationship—perhaps he allowed her freedoms another man would not; while they hadn’t been in love, they respected one another. Giving the reader this information means you can establish goal 3—Alice had independence as Eric’s wife, and she’s been independent since he went missing; remarrying would certainly mean sacrificing the independence she craves for reasons discussed in the ‘Character’ section. Also, by clarifying Alice and Eric hadn’t been in love, it sets things up for eventually revealing his XXXX and gives the reader an understanding of why she isn’t mourning his loss as much as she would be otherwise. A loveless marriage also sets things up perfectly for when Alice realises how much she wants to be loved and protected (goal 4).

Turning Point #1 – Opportunity

At the 10% mark of the novel, Alice takes on the task of finding the XXXX. She sees it as an opportunity to achieve goal 2 (making a name for herself), which will then allow her to achieve goal 1 (staying in London). In order to make a name for herself, it's essential that Alice be the one to recover the XXXX; however, Owen and Susan have also recruited Henry and Mason in the mission to find the XXXX. I would suggest further exploring Alice's reaction/thoughts to not being the only one on the hunt for it, as this will help to establish conflict between Alice and Henry, which is essential for the early development of their relationship. The conflict arising from her belief that he is a philanderer is a great element of the story (insert lots of fun, flirty banter!), but it's not at the heart of the romantic conflict—Alice's need for independence (goal 3) is what's truly keeping them apart. However, if she believes herself to be in direct competition with him in the race to find the XXXX, he stands in the way of her achieving goals 1 and 2 as well.

Stage II – New Situation

During this stage, Alice enters a new situation when she embarks on the hunt for the XXXX. She begins by visiting Thomas and later interviews Niles. These plot events allow her to take active steps towards achieving goal 2 and therefore goal 1.

Another new situation she finds herself in is her association with Henry. Upon finding him in her dining room, they engage in flirty banter, and though she's attracted to him, she's determined not to fall under his spell because of goal 3. As mentioned previously, in order to increase conflict, I'd suggest she doesn't agree to work with Henry, whether she determines not to in her own mind or not. I don't think this needs to change to dynamics between them—Henry's ego is big enough that he's unlikely to take offence ;) —but it means Alice will have to grovel when she eventually needs his help.

Turning Point #2 – Change of Plans

The story's second turning point, found at the 25% mark of the novel, occurs when Jennifer asks for Alice's help in finding Kristy. Now, this event doesn't currently move Alice towards any of her goals; in fact, it detracts from Alice finding the XXXX, which is how she intends to achieve goals 1 and 2. This, then, may be another reason for the “meandering storyline” feedback.

Does this mean you need to remove the Jennifer/Kristy subplot? I don't believe so. Instead, review Alice's motivation for agreeing to help. At present, her motivation is completely altruistic—she feels sorry for Jennifer, which is, of course, a completely legitimate reason to help. But does it have to be the only reason?

Every turning point in a story should directly relate to the character's goals, either by giving them an opportunity to achieve them or by presenting an obstacle that gets in their way. So how will agreeing to assist Jennifer help Alice achieve her goals? Consider what finding a missing person could mean for her career. If she finds Kristy as well as the XXXX, she'll double her list of

accomplishments and prove herself even more capable. Plus, she hasn't been able to find Eric, so in finding Kristy, perhaps she stands to prove something to herself ...

ACT II

Stage III – Progress

Events in this stage are mostly dedicated to finding Kristy—Alice pays Rachael a visit, learns (via John) that Rachael runs a XXXX, asks Henry for help, disguises herself as Alex and attends the XXXX with Henry.

Among these events, Alice also pays Diana a visit (chapter 8). This chapter, however, opens upon Alice's arrival at the residence of Lady Elizabeth, the name mentioned by Jennifer as the person for whom Kristy was meant to be working. The reader will then assume that Alice's reason for visiting is to further investigate Kristy's disappearance, especially as she arrives immediately after her visit with Rachael and doesn't appear to know who is in residence.

When Diana reveals herself, as Lady Elizabeth's niece, to be the lady in residence, Alice doesn't seem surprised to see her, then begins to question her about Aaron and the night the XXXX went missing. Her goal, then, is unclear for much of the scene, which means the reader will be confused as to which subplot is being explored. To rectify the issue, infuse Alice's thoughts throughout the scene to clarify her reason for visiting and her surprise that Diana is connected to both cases—that of the missing XXXX *and* the missing person.

Also, when Diana and her siblings confirm they did business with Rachael, Alice questions the chances, as if she's surprised the household is connected to Rachael, but this contradicts the earlier indication that Alice is visiting to investigate Kristy's disappearance—unless I'm missing something or have misunderstood the situation. Either way, the scene is worth revisiting.

Turning Point #3 – Point of No Return

The midway point in the novel occurs during Kristy's rescue—Alice realises her feelings toward Henry have changed. This prompts her to do whatever it takes to ensure he, and Kristy, get out of Rachael's XXXX safely. She is one step closer to achieving her unacknowledged fourth goal: to be loved and protected.

Stage IV – Complications & Higher Stakes

If part of Alice's motivation for finding Kristy is to prove herself, then I would suggest she be acknowledged for her involvement in the rescue in some way during this stage of the story, as this is one way the stakes can be raised. The perfect opportunity arises when she and Henry take their information about Rachael to Aaron. I understand that, as a suspect, Aaron is something of a red herring. However, if someone with the power to employ Alice's services were to acknowledge and be impressed by her involvement, then suddenly it becomes all the more pressing that she finds the XXXX. If this were to occur, the stakes

are raised, Alice is closer to achieving goals 1 and 2, and the Jennifer/Kristy subplot is now integral to the story.

Alice faces more obstacles in relation to the XXXX subplot when she and the others fail to capture the person responsible for its theft, and she gets knocked out at the XXXX.

Further complications arise in her fight to maintain her independence when she spends time convalescing in Henry's home and he kisses her. Of course, this is moving her closer to her fourth goal when she experiences what it is to be loved and protected for the first time. As mentioned, further exploration could be given to the internal conflict that would arise with these two goals being in direction opposition to one another.

When Henry proposes for the first time, there is an element of contradiction in Alice's refusal. During that scene, she vehemently states: XXXX However, after the XXXX and Kristy's rescue, Alice learned Henry's true character, and deep down, she knows he's not that kind of man at all. After leaving the XXXX, she acknowledged it: XXXX. So perhaps when he proposes, instead of stating her steadfast belief that he is actually a philanderer, she can claim weakly that his reputation is the reason for her refusal, when in fact it's her desire for independence that is keeping her from letting him into her heart. This, then, still gives him a reason to introduce her to Erin.

In meeting Erin, Alice learns that Henry's reputation as a philanderer is completely unwarranted, that his actions were those of a friend. Not only that, but it's clear Henry has true feelings for her—Erin reveals her promise to Henry that she'd share their reason for staging the public ruination of both their reputations should he ever bring someone to meet her. The discovery is enough to crumble the walls around her heart, and she appears ready to let him in.

Turning Point #4 - Major Setback

At the 75% mark of the novel, Alice suffers a major setback in her fight to achieve her goals. On the brink of moving forward into a relationship with Henry, she discovers his betrayal when John brings news of his request to have Eric declared dead, that he works for XXXX and has an official role in the search for the XXXX, and he's been using her as bait to flush out a member of XXXX. She also learns that Eric is, in fact, dead. This news throws achievement of all four of Alice's goals in doubt.

ACT III

Stage V - Final Push

This section of the novel sees Alice in a final fight to achieve her goals. She is once more protecting herself against Henry's advances, though she experiences her black moment when he confronts her at XXXX, explains the situation from

his perspective, tells her how he feels about her and once more proposes. It takes all her strength to once more refuse.

Alice then attempts to flush out the XXXX thief by having Lily wear a replica of the XXXX. She then takes it and conspicuously leaves.

Turning Point #5 – Climax

At the 92% mark of the novel, Mason is revealed as the XXXX thief when he arrives at Alice's wielding a knife. Henry arrives, attempting to protect Alice, but she's the one who shoots Mason and puts an end to his violent tirade.

Stage VI – Aftermath

Following Mason's attack, Henry once again explains himself and tells Alice how he feels. This time, Alice determines that life is for living and she won't pass up the opportunity to be happy with Henry.

They head to XXXX where Henry gladly stands back to watch Alice locate the XXXX. Once she does, she proposes to him. Through these events, it's clear that as Henry's wife, Alice will achieve three of her goals: she'll get to stay in London (goal 1); she won't be sacrificing her independence because he values her skills and abilities (goal 3); and she'll find love and protection (goal4).

What isn't clear is how or if she achieves goal 2: making a name for herself. This was her motivation for searching for the XXXX, so it should be resolved. Authorities clearly aware of the XXXX's disappearance, so, as with the suggestion to have Alice's involvement in Kristy's rescue acknowledged, finding the XXXX should offer Alice an opportunity to continue working, thereby achieving her final goal.

PLOT ISSUES

Below is a list of issues that caused reader confusion:

- Alice and Susan appear to be close friends. Wouldn't Alice then be invited to the dinner party? There needs to be a reason she wasn't invited or couldn't attend.
- In the scene where the XXXX is announced missing, Susan tells Alice: XXXX, which makes it sound as if she has no control over who is told. But when they enter the room, it becomes clear Owen isn't aware of the theft; Susan tells him after XXXX. Why, then, did she decide to include Mason and Henry in the conversation? If she didn't want to be excluded, she could have just told Alice. The reason Mason and Henry are recruited to search needs to be made clear.
- Why is Henry in the unsavoury area outside Thomas's? Without a reason, it seems a convenient way for him to run into Alice.
- What are the details of Alice's upbringing? Her mother's experiences are hinted at, though it sounded as if XXXX. And yet, at another point, it's

mentioned Alice was XXXX. These two elements of her backstory seem in contradiction with one another.

- After Kristy is rescued, Alice tells Henry that she'll bring Jennifer and clothes for Kristy to his home the next day, but in the scene that follows, Henry and Kristy go to Alice's and Jennifer is fetched by Jed.
- During the XXXX, what was the point of Alice and Susan watching from the carriage? Were they meant to keep an eye out for the person collecting the money? It's never clarified.
- It's never revealed how Henry and John knew each other, only that it was from "before".
- Despite their punch-up when John reveals all of Henry's secrets, Henry tells Alice in a subsequent scene that John told him about her going abroad—how were they suddenly on speaking terms?
- When Alice arrives at XXXX in chapter two, it's stated: XXXX. Yet when she enters XXXX in chapter twenty-two and claims she needs the water closet, it's as if she hasn't visited Susan's rooms before as it is stated: XXXX. Alice then enters the rooms and is in awe of the furnishings.
- The Eric subplot was resolved (this was one of your concerns), but more insight could be given in the story's setup about when/how he disappeared as well as the nature of Alice's relationship with him—were they at least friends, did they get along?

BONUS NOTES

- The narrative is incredibly easy to read, making it a thoroughly enjoyable experience.
- The opening scene was fantastic! You made me laugh, showed Alice's character, *and* set things up for the main story problem. Well done!
- Another great scene was when Henry and John came to blows. It was well choreographed, and the dialogue made it seem as if they were two boys battling it out in the playground. I loved it!
- Mason is also referred to once as Mark and once as Marcus at different points in the MS.
- You have a tendency to show a character's emotions/thought through movement of their eyebrows. This is definitely a useful way to communicate things to the reader, but if such an action is overused, it tends to stand out and become cliché.
- There are times when a character's action is separated from their dialogue with a paragraph break, which isn't necessary.
- The word "bought" was used on several occasions, when instead it should be "brought".

EDITORIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To break down the contents of this report into manageable steps, I would suggest you take the following actions in the order listed:

1. Outline Alice's goals and her motivation for wanting to achieve each of them.
2. Determine how each of the story's turning points will move Alice closer to achieving her goals, or how they'll hinder her efforts.
3. As you revise, reveal crucial information about Alice's marriage to Eric and her upbringing at moments when it's relevant to better ensure the reader understands her motives for wanting to achieve her goals.
4. Ensure each turning point and plot event, particularly those aligned with the Jennifer/Kristy subplot, is connected to Alice's goals.
5. Infuse the narrative with Alice's thoughts to make her goals and motivation clear, as well as the internal conflict that arises throughout the story.

Overall, the manuscript is in good shape structurally. By clarifying Alice's goals and motivation, the reader will see a clear path ahead, and by connecting each turning point and plot event to Alice's goals, you will eliminate the "meandering plot" issue.

If there is anything contained in this report that you need clarified or wish to discuss further, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Wishing you the best of luck with your revisions.