“Your daddy is back,” his grandmother said. [This is more of a personal, reader’s preference, but I find it a little jarring when narratives start with dialogue. I appreciate being grounded in time and place first, brought into a story through the flow of narrative language and a compelling idea or bit of action.]

Anger erupted like a flash fire throughout Connie’s body. Followed by a surprising wave of pain. But he caught it. Slammed the hurt away as hard as he’d hit that home run on his thirteenth birthday. [Here we have three different figurative ideas: a fire; a wave; a home run. Might come up with one consistent metaphor to expand upon here.] At the game his daddy was supposed to attend. On the day the old man was arrested. In the week the bastard deserted them. [Compelling]

“He’s trying to tell me something but I can’t make it out.” His grandma’s voice on the phone was plaintive.

She’d called him this morning, and he picked it up in a panic. She never called him. She always waited for what she called their Friday night visits. Her in the hills of southern Ohio and him in Austin, Texas. [Might rework this as the lead-in to the opening. And might rework the syntax a bit to avoid the repetition of “she” to begin each sentence. Perhaps combine the two last sentences into one idea, “Except for what she called their “Friday night visits,” she never called him.”]

“It’s all right, Nana. It’s just a dream,” he soothed her as the adrenaline left his body. [Would love this feeling to be tied to the internal recognition that she’s talking about a dream. Fill in that beat for the reader.] He put one elbow on the kitchen counter and ran his fingers through his hair with his free hand.

“No! You didn’t hear him! I did!”

Connie calmed himself so he could calm her. [Great] He made his voice gentle and even. “Are you taking your pills?”

“You think I’m having one of my crazy spells.”

“Things that aren’t real can seem like they are. It happened to me, when I got back from Iraq. I told you about it.” [Somewhere we could use some sense of Connie as an adult. The reference to his thirteenth birthday, above, felt fresh. I had an expectation that this was a YA or older MG novel, that Connie was a teen.

Because we’re not grounded in time and place, words like “daddy,” “grandma,” and “nana” run the risk of creating an assumption that Connie is juvenile. If you can find a way to give him an adult’s perspective or language early on in the narrative, you’ll help orient the reader to his age and to the story’s genre.]

“I don’t have no PSPD.”

Connie felt his face relax. “PTSD.”

“Whatever.”

Thanks so much for sharing this page, Anna! The writing is beautifully controlled, nicely paced, and creates a powerful emotional landscape for us.

In terms of content, you’ve done all the right things—given us conflict early on and an emotional mystery w/r/t Connie’s antipathy for his imprisoned father. The reader will want to continue on in the narrative to find answers to the questions you raise, subtly, here.

Per my above concern, I felt you had opportunities to flesh out the narrative just a bit—to better ground us in Connie as an an adult, engaged in adult actions, living on his own, etc. The narrative could use just a drop more interiority to give Connie a bit more life and could use a bit more sensory detail, a hint of time and place to orient the reader.

Over all, nicely done! Thanks again for offering it up for feedback!

All best,Lorin