CHAPTER ONE

Jorie Wainright peered into the throat of the shrieking maelstrom. [While this should create anxiety and anticipation on the part of the reader, my feeling is that it may come across as a bit melodramatic, instead. Perhaps hone in on Jorie’s efforts to keep her car on the road, rather than taking the broader view of the “maelstrom.”] Gale-force winds threatened to shove her little Audi off the one-lane road. Rain battered [Not really in vain as it seems to have an impact on the soil.] the dense Tennessee clay soil, pooled, became rivulets, then streams that joined at the bottom of the mountain grade to create a river alongside her car. [Nicely observed.] Her wipers swept across the rain-sheeted windshield and gave her scant glimpses [Do words like “maelstrom” and “scant glimpses” represent Jorie’s voice/vernacular? Feels a little too intellectualized/authorial, though of course we haven’t gotten to know her yet.] of the outside world.

Newbury House should be right here. Or maybe a few hundred feet ahead.

Had she passed it?

“Lost on a one-lane road in a town of eighty-five people,” she muttered through gritted teeth.

Rugby, a historic district high in the Tennessee hills and its premiere hotel, Newbury House, were special places for Jorie. Special places she’d never needed more than right now. [It seems as though we could use a bit more of a sense that she’s returning to someplace she knows well. That the storm is so significant that she’d worry about passing a location to which she’s presumably been many, many times seems like something that could register more fully in her consciousness.]

She’d put off running to Clarie, her surrogate mother, for three long months because she felt she should be able to handle her troubles on her own. She was twenty-six, not sixteen.

A bolt of lightning x-rayed the sky. In its glare, Newbury House loomed like an ocean liner from the fog. Its windows, like the eyes of a blind man, were dark and blank above the long front porch. Before the image faded, she saw Clarie standing beneath the porch roof, and knew she would not go inside until Jorie arrived safely. [Could hone in on this image just a bit. Make it a little more eerie, provocative and/or dramatic.]

Thunder pounded the earth. The car lifted in the rising flood headed for deep water. [Could give us a deeper feel of this from Jorie’s perspective. What does it feel like to her inside the car? How difficult is it for her to maintain control over the vehicle?]

“No, no, no, no!”

A second flash seared the sky, and in it she saw Uncle Giles's sturdy frame straight ahead. She slammed her foot on the useless brake pedal. Uncle Giles grabbed the bumper and slung the car [That will be quite a feat! ☺]

Thanks so much for sharing your opening pages with me! The writing is adept and atmospheric, and you’ve done a nice job of weaving in bits of expository detail without weighing down the narrative or slowing the pace.

That said, I’m a bit concerned that this opening covers some already well-covered territory. It feels like something the reader will have experienced many times before—girl in need of a new lease on life, battling a storm or treacherous mountain road or other adverse element to return home. Is there an opportunity to begin the novel elsewhere, somewhere less expected and familiar? Is there further an opportunity to put us in a dramatic moment that reveals more about your protagonist’s depth of character?

Or can you take what feels like a trope and subvert it in some way? Instead of all the expected emotions she displays here, can you give us something unexpected—exhilaration or humor, perhaps? In other words, if this moment is the perfect one with which to begin the novel, can you find a way to play with what’s on the page to breathe new life into it?

Lastly, it feels as though we could be a bit more deeply embedded in Jorie’s perspective. Can the voice of the narrative feel a little more intimate, more reflective of Jorie’s voice and perspective? Can you put us a little more fully inside her body as she fights to maintain control of the car? While the storm is dramatic and the details sharp, the narrative kept me at a bit of a distance from her when I wished to be drawn closer. Really get us INSIDE of Jorie if you can, and I think the opening will lift off into something truly effective.

Hope this helps! Thanks so much again for sharing!

Lorin