

Devil's Chance

By Guy Mayhew

As the sun sank beneath the horizon, The Inferno (NAME OF BAR DOESN'T NEED QUOTE MARKS) cast a cool shadow across the (GIVE THE NAME OF THE STATE HERE TO BETTER SET THE SETTING OR IF YOU DON'T WANT TO NAME THE STATE THEN THE TERRAIN SUCH AS DESERT) highway. The bar's front door banged open as AN(monstrously UNNEEDED ADJECTIVE)overweight man (slid heavily USE A STRONGER VERB HERE TO BETTER DESCRIBE) LUMBERED into the bar. Around his neck he wore a red rag, sweaty and wrinkled. His short, black hair was slicked back with lard. He paused and scanned the common room, his tiny eyes sliding back and forth.

HARRY (LAST NAME) LOOKED UP FROM WHERE HE WAS TENDING THE BAR. DAMN. TROUBLE. IT ALWAYS CAME IN THREES. (THIS EST. THE POV— EVERY SCENE MUST HAVE A SINGULAR POV) HE RAN HIS GNARLED HAND OVER HIS GRIZZLED FACE AND SIGHED.

The room was large, with enough space to accommodate A dozen round tables. Dim lighting flickered between the barrel-sized posts, which thrust up through the floor(chaotically DON'T OVERUSE ADJECTIVES) IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER, bolstering the old ceiling. Tonight the bar was (SPACE) nearly empty, with only THREE (SPELL OUT NUMBERS) tables and a few scattered stools OCCUPIED (with people sitting at them. USE ONE WORD INSTEAD OF MANY—THIS WILL MAKE YOUR WRITING TIGHTER) LILY, (AGAIN GIVE THE CHARACTER A NAME. THIS IS

HARRY'S POV—HE KNOWS IT—DON'T USE OMNISCIENT POV) THE lone waitress huddled against the far wall, bored, with a yellowed paperback broken open between her elbows. The candle beside her flickered FROM THE sudden breeze THAT blew in through the open door. She glanced up, annoyed, but upon seeing the giant standing there, quickly lowered her head.

The man, satisfied with the look of things, shuffled forward and leaned heavily against the bar. It groaned in protest so loudly, a nearby table of card players looked up from their hands, startled. HARRY(The bartender was a grizzled, old man who SEE HOW I ADDED THIS EARLIER) walked over at the sound.

#(NEW PARAGRAPH WHEN A CHARACTER SPEAKS) “Can I help you?” he asked, THOUGH HE HAD A GOOD SUSPICION WHY THIS OAF WAS HERE..

“Morrison,” wheezed the giant. “Broken nose. Yellow hair. Beard.”

“Oh, right. (PERIOD)” HE nodded. He picked up a glass and began to clean it. “Rented room,(C0MMA) NUMBER 6, (C0MMA) upstairs.” He cocked his head up and to the rear.

The giant looked up and grimaced. Stairs led up to a balcony that ran along the second floor behind the bar. Room numbers were visible on several doors. “I was afraid of that.”

He moved to the foot of the stairs and began a slow, torturous journey upwards. At (NO CAP FOR T) the top, he paused and rested a hand on the banister to steady himself. He untied the rag around his neck and mopPED his face with it. (, quickly MOPPED SUGGESTS A QUICK ACTION CUT).

“Hey,” he said, looking down at HARRY.

“Yeah?”

“No one comes up.” He balled (up REDUNDANT CUT) a fist and shook it for emphasis, then walked down the hall, out of sight.

The next moment, a tall figure—a man draped in shadow—LEANED (PAST TENSE VERBS IN THE NARRATIVE) out from behind one of the massive posts and peered up to the hallway. His eyes narrowed in thought. He glanced about the room slowly. No one met his gaze.

The man stepped away from the shadows and walked quietly across the room. He looked as though he’d been recently beaten . (PERIOD) Blood crusted on the side of his head.

HARRY looked up as the man neared. “That him?” (the bartender asked. CUT HIS ACTIONS ARE ENOUGH OF A TAG)

#(NEW PARAGRAPH—DON’T PUT THE ACTIONS ON ONE CHARACTER IN THE SAME PARAGRAPH WITH THE DIALOGUE OF ANOTHER) The man nodded.

“Three others went up just before you got here. Room 6.”

#The man hesitated a moment and then made his way around the bar to the staircase. (He was halfway up when the bartender hissed a warning. THIS IS TELLING BEFORE YOU ACTION HAPPENS AND YOU CAN’T “HISS” DIALOGUE UNLESS IT HAS THE “S” SOUND IN IT)

“Kane,” HARRY CALLED IN WARNING WHEN THE MAN WAS HALFWAY UP. AS IF HE HADN’T HEARD HIM, the man continued to move up the stairs.

“Kane!”

RILEY KANE stopped.

“You’re going to get killed. And probably destroy my bar.”

KANE leaned over the railing and looked down. The corners of his mouth turned up IN A SMIRK. “Relax, (COMMA) Harry. (PERIOD)(Riley Kane smirked. CUT)This is like taking candy from a baby.” Winking, he moved on into the hallway and drew his gun. “Right,” Harry murmured. He sighed deeply, turned back to the bar and began taking the bottles and glasses off the counter to safety.

Kane slipped down the hallway, staying close against the wall. He stopped at each door, listening. Behind the door to Room (CAP) 6,(he could detect TELLING) muffled voices WERE punctuated by the fat man’s rumbling wheeze. Kane moved forward to the next door and checked it. It opened easily. Beyond lay a small, unoccupied room, empty. HE (ONCE POV EST. USE PRONOUNS FOR THE POV CHARACTER’S NAME IN THE NARRATIVE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE) crossed over to the far window, opened it, and peered out. Beyond was DARKNESS, nothing but desert. HE looked left and right, then hopped over the windowsill onto the ground outside. He walked quietly over to the window of Room (CAP) 6, listening. It began to rain, bringing with it the evening cold. HE grimaced.

Hi Guy

You have the opening of a great story here. I love the “honky-tonk” atmosphere you have instantly created. In fact, the setting and character descriptions are very actively done and visual. Your dialogue is most appropriate—as sparing as the story ambience dictates. The story pacing and sense of scene is well done as well.

However, there is much you need to work on. First of all, POV—point of view. The rule of good fiction writing is that each scene must have a chosen POV—one perspective that best conveys the events taking place in that scene. What you did in the first scene was use an omniscient POV. This doesn't draw in the reader as effectively as using the bartender's POV. See what I have added in the text to first establish and then develop his POV. Also note how his introspection at this point adds to the building tension of the scene.

Next, I want you to pay special attention to the rule of fiction writing—show don't tell. Note in the second scene—Kane's POV—you write—he could detect. This is telling. Why? Of course, he could detect it if you describe what happens. See how I changed this sentence to take out telling and making it showing—which makes for a more active sentence as well. Watch for telling phrases such as he knew, he felt, heard, he saw, he realized, he wondered—these are the most common ones.

Write efficiently to be effective. Don't overuse adjective or adverbs. Instead use stronger verbs to create the picture you want. Also, if you can use one strong descriptive word in place of a longer phrase, do it.

I would also like you to pinpoint the setting a little more in the beginning. Add a single descriptive word before highway in that first paragraph—Arizona or desert for example--would really make the visual clearer.

Finally, you have a lot of typos/misspellings. Your punctuation needs a lot of work, as does your paragraphing. Note all of the changes in the text. The idea of punctuation and paragraphing is to make the read as smooth and clear as possible. I have truly enjoyed

working with you on this project. If my comments or suggestions give rise to questions,
please feel free to ask them.

Terri Valentine