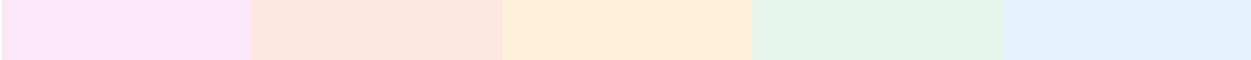


Thank You



Manuscript: *Into The Forest*

Genre: Fantasy adventure

Focus: Reader orientation, structure, emotional stakes, worldbuilding clarity, and next revision priorities

Hi Mary!

First off, what an amazing story idea. The world already feels alive, fresh, and full of potential, and I absolutely adore the concept of an Indiana Jones-style adventure with magical creatures. That is such a strong, immediate hook.

Where I think the manuscript could become much stronger is in **reader orientation and engagement**. The biggest questions that need clearer answers are: who we are meant to attach to, what the immediate goal is, what the danger is, and why this particular adventure matters to Jessica personally.

Main issue: the story has strong ingredients, but the reader needs a clearer path

The core idea is genuinely exciting. You have the bones of a magical adventure story with suspense, danger, history, and a strong sense of discovery. John already feels vivid, the world has promise, and the atmosphere is doing a lot of good work.

The main issue is that the manuscript sometimes forgets to tell us why characters are making certain choices, and what the cost of those choices are. That means the adventure is interesting, but the reader does not always know what to care about most.

This shows up in a few connected places:

- Jessica's perspective could be more firmly established as the central "camera lens."
- The adventure goal needs to be named sooner and more clearly.
- The magical reality of the world needs to be seeded earlier.
- Fred and Jessica's relationship needs more emotional grounding.

Character and emotional grounding

John's characterisation is chef's kiss. He comes alive on the page very quickly, especially through his mannerisms and little quirks. I could picture him clearly, and he brings a nice energy to the story.

Fred and Jessica's relationship could use more emotional grounding. We can tell Jessica admires Fred, but I do not yet feel the lived-in love between them as strongly as I think the story wants me to. Do they have inside jokes? A shared ritual? What have they done for years that just happens, as it always has?

This matters because Fred is kidnapped at the inciting incident point, and Jessica does not show much emotion around the loss. Because that bond has not been strongly seeded earlier, the reader does not care about the story goal enough yet: get Fred back.

I would add one strong moment early where Jessica notices Fred's age catching up with him, and how little time they may have left. Add a few little quirks, shared habits, or inside jokes too. The goal is to make the relationship feel lived-in before the plot asks us to fear losing it.

Goal, motivation, and stakes

You do a lovely job building visual and sensory suspense, but the manuscript needs clearer named stakes. The adventure goal is not always clear enough on the page.

We know they are exploring by the time we hit the midway point, but we are not told early enough what they are hoping to find, what danger to watch for, or what happens if they fail.

Every time there is something new Jessica wants, make sure it is stated on the page, and make sure the loss if she does not get it is clear. This is the strongest revision you could make.

Worldbuilding and magical creatures

This world feels epic. You can tell it has been thought about carefully, and it already has the feeling of a place with old histories and societies. That is excellent.

The main worldbuilding issue is clarity. We need to know why creatures are dangerous before any become dangerous. A possible fix would be to place one small magical creature or magical sign earlier in the manuscript. That would make later creature moments feel like payoff rather than surprise.

Ending, theme, and payoff

The ending has a lot of strong material in it, but right now it does not quite feel like it is answering the same question the story has been asking.

For most of the manuscript, the emotional pull seems to be about Jessica learning what courage, loyalty, and discovery cost her personally. By the ending, though, the resolution leans more heavily on the external adventure problem than on Jessica's internal change. The plot technically resolves, but the theme feels slightly unfinished.

I would look at what the story is really promising in Act 1. Is this about bravery? Family legacy? Trusting old stories? Choosing people over discovery? Whatever the true emotional question is, the final choice should force Jessica to answer it clearly on the page.

Essentially, Jessica should tell the reader why she makes the final choice she does in a way that reflects the Act 1 promise.

What I would revise first

If this were my manuscript to revise, I would focus on these three things first:

1. Ground the story more firmly right away in Jessica's perspective with stronger goal, motivation, foreshadowing, and conflict.
2. Seed the magical creature reality earlier so later moments feel like payoff.
3. Add a late-Act-2 scene, around the turn into Act 3, where Jessica chooses the skull artifact over Fred's safety and sees the cost of that choice. Have her think about it in the moment, and again at the end when she makes the choice that saves the villagers' lives.

Recommended next step

I would not start with a line edit yet. The bigger opportunity is developmental: goal, motivation, conflict, reader orientation, and the order in which worldbuilding information is revealed.

I would do one pass looking to put foreshadowing, symbolism, and spoken goal on the page with future events in mind. Then I would ship this off to beta readers to see what they think. At that point, if feedback is mostly positive, you may be ready for a copyeditor. A copyedit can help tighten the rhythm and clarity of the story before the final proof.

Suggested resources

To support your next revision pass, I would focus on resources that help with structure, character motivation, and payoff:

- *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel* by Jessica Brody — for checking whether the major story beats are landing in the right order.
- *The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby — for connecting the adventure plot to Jessica's internal change and final choice.
- *Story Genius* by Lisa Cron — for strengthening Jessica's personal motivation and making the story goal feel emotionally necessary.

If you do another pass and would like a full Manuscript Review or Developmental Edit later please let me know within 90 days that this is your plan. Half the cost of this edit (\$400) can go towards the in depth pass.