[Please note that a double forward slash--//--indicates a suggestion for deleting verbiage or punctuation.]

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**6/13**

**BONACK PLACE**

How hard could it be to kill someone? [Intriguing opening line] [//// – This dilutes the impact of the preceding line. You might consider isolating that in a paragraph of its own and then moving us right along to the following.]

The idea hadn’t occurred to me--killing Richard--until I stumbled upon a book at my local library. How could the title, *Pretty Poisons*, not have caught my eye? [This feels a little bit labored in its expression. Perhaps, “Of course its title, *Pretty Poisons*, caught my eye.”] That gorgeous photograph of a purple Bittersweet flower extending its blood-red teardrop of a berry! I love books, and I had a feeling this one might become a favorite. [Really great opening. Would maintain the simple past tense here, as moving us into the present jars us from the flow of the narrative.]

I didn’t always hate my husband. We started out happy as most couples do[//.//] We both came from wealth--extreme wealth--on what used to be called the Gold Coast of Long Island[//], now “the Hamptons.” The house in which I grew up actually had a name. FW Woolworth had Winfield. JP Morgan had Matinecock Point. And LA Meyers, my grandfather, had Bonack Place.

[I’m afraid as a reader, I find my interest waning here. It’s so early on to be giving us back story into her family history. I would much rather be immersed in some scene of dramatic, observable action and allow for the back story to emerge later on in the piece.] My father inherited that house, which now seems like a palace to me, but back then it was just our home. [//// Exposition feels a little labored, diluting the potency of the narrative and diluting the passage’s focus.] ]We actually had parlor maids who cut fresh flowers from the gardens during the spring and summer, and in colder months gathered hibiscus and jasmine from the greenhouses. [Great] A chauffeur minded my father’s gleaming Town Car, and always had it ready to pull out from under a porte-cochere. I can’t imagine him stepping foot into my ten-year-old Honda now . . . [Nice]

Thanks so much for sharing your opening with me, Andra!

You certainly begin with a compelling idea—that of the narrator preparing to kill her husband. The voice is lucid and engaging, and the tone feels perfectly, lightly, ominous. Really nice.

As mentioned in the above, my one real concern, after the introduction of the idea of poisoning her husband, is that we move into a long expository passage about her upbringing and her childhood home. Really, though, the “topic sentence” of the paragraph leading us there is the idea that she once loved her husband. As such, if you’re going to slow things down with an expository passage—and I don’t necessarily recommend that—you might at least keep it more tightly focused on her husband and their relationship. How would she describe it now, perhaps, compared to its early days? What, if anything, does she still love, would she still miss? Is there something unexpected you can present here—the fact that she is considering killing him for a reason that’s surprising and unexpected, perhaps?

Another idea, of course, would be to put us somewhere more concrete, into a world and a scene in which she has a specific, tangible goal and is faced with obstacles along the way. Though the ideas presented here are compelling ones, they’re not quite as compelling, I believe, as a scene in which we’re mentally engaged in actual physical behavior along with her, fully inside her body as well as her thoughts and intentions.

In other words, rather than having her think about poisoning her husband, could we enter the story at the point in which she’s preparing the poison to give to him? Or conducting the clandestine transaction to purchase the substance? Put us in a tangible, active moment, rather than in her thoughts alone, and I think this opening will really sizzle.

All best, and thanks again!

Lorin