

CHAPTER SIX

Overall Impression

This is a lighter chapter and it serves a real purpose , after the emotional weight of Phil and June on that bench, the story needed to breathe. You've given Liz her own space finally, and the record store setting is charming. But this chapter has a structural problem that needs addressing directly.

What's Working

Liz finally feels like a person here. The DVD price tag moment , picking it up, seeing thirty dollars, putting it back quickly like holding it costs money , is your most economical piece of character writing yet. One small action tells us everything about her financial situation, her passion, and her pride. That's exactly the kind of detail that makes readers love a character.

The Liz and Claire dynamic has natural energy. Their banter is easy and funny without trying too hard. The "between your mom's legs" exchange is juvenile in exactly the right way for two college girls in a record store. It feels real.

Glenn is sketched efficiently. The detail about not dumbing down his music for popularity tells us who he is faster than a paragraph of biography would. That's good instinct.

"As if she were an archaeologist trying to uncover an ancient treasure" , this is a lovely image that fits Liz perfectly as a character. Keep this kind of specific metaphor work.

The future plans exchange , Liz in film, Claire in the WNBA, front row tickets , is warm and tender underneath the jokes. It shows genuine friendship and gives both characters dimension simultaneously.

What Needs Work

This chapter has no tension

This is the core problem. Every chapter so far has had something at stake , a breakup, a math test, a computer dying, a being-watched feeling, a friend in crisis. This chapter is just three people in a record store having a nice time. That's fine occasionally in a longer novel, but at chapter six, when you're still establishing your story, every scene needs to be doing more than one thing. Right now this chapter is only doing one thing , introducing Liz's world. Ask yourself: what could go *wrong* here, or what could this scene *reveal* that matters to the larger story?

Claire gets a backstory paragraph, Phil-style

Just like June and Liz in Chapter 2, Claire arrives and the story immediately pauses to give us her athletic scholarship, mediocre grades, and gym hours. You've done this with almost every new character and it's becoming a habit that consistently stops your narrative momentum cold. We're in a record store with these people , let Claire *be* someone in this scene. We don't need her academic history right now.

The being-watched thread is completely absent again

Two chapters now without it. In Chapter 4, Liz felt Jacob's eyes on her in a way that made her uneasy. Jacob was set up as potentially significant. Now Liz is in a whole chapter of her own and Jacob doesn't even cross her mind. Either that moment meant something or it didn't. If it did, Liz should still be carrying a residue of that feeling.

Glenn is physically described as looking like "nearly every other boy on campus"

This is a clever way to suggest a certain type, and it works as a quick sketch. But Liz loves this person. The narration describing her boyfriend as generically indistinguishable from his peers is a strange choice for a point of view that should reflect how Liz sees the world. Even one detail that only *she* would notice about him would tell us more about their relationship than anything else in the scene.

The chapter ends without landing anywhere

It just stops. Claire makes a face and walks away. Compare this to Chapter 5 ending with June watching Phil disappear into the distance, or even Chapter 4 ending with Liz's screen fading to black. Those endings had emotional weight. This one drifts off. Find the moment in this scene that means something and end *there*.

Character Notes

Liz: This is genuinely her best chapter. The film ambition, the financial struggle, the easy intimacy with Glenn and Claire. She feels real here. Hold onto this version of her.

Claire:interesting addition to the cast. The WNBA dream paralleling Liz's film dream is a nice structural echo. But she needs a moment that's specifically hers, not just a reaction machine for Liz's jokes.

Glenn:do just enough. For now that's fine, but if he's going to matter to the story he'll need more eventually.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Overall Impression

This is your shortest chapter yet and it's doing several things at once , some of them very well. There's a confidence to this scene that's been building across the last few chapters. But the chapter is so brief it raises a question worth addressing directly: is this a full chapter or a scene that belongs attached to something larger?

What's Working

Professor Cunningham's backstory is your best character introduction so far. And crucially , you don't stop the scene to deliver it as a separate paragraph. It flows naturally from the context of watching auditions. The details about waiting tables in Manhattan for a decade, the three roommates in Harlem, coming back to Longview and watching thirty years disappear along with most of his hair , that's economical, melancholy, and human all at once. His one remaining dream being a full night's sleep on a Saturday and one student making it where he couldn't , that's genuinely moving. This is the character introduction technique you should be using for everyone.

Jess strutting to center stage and nailing it in one line is a great character moment. It shows rather than tells her talent and her confidence. The "spun silk" voice description is evocative without being overwrought. And her exit , curtsy, strut, done , is charming.

The observation about more girls than boys at auditions is a small, real detail that grounds the scene in truth without making a big deal of itself.

What Needs Work

Professor Cunningham's leer is a serious moment being treated casually

"Professor Cunningham liked what he saw while he leered at the pretty freshman." This is actually the most alarming line in the novel so far. A professor in a position of power leering at a student during an audition , and then cutting her off quickly with "very nice" , is loaded with implication. But the narrative just moves past it without registering its weight. Is this intentional? Is Cunningham going to be a threat in this story? If so, this moment needs more texture , maybe Jess notices the look and feels something she can't quite name. If it's not intentional and you just meant he found the student attractive, the word "leered" is doing more than you want it to. Leering implies something predatory. Choose the word carefully because right now it's pointing toward a storyline the rest of the chapter doesn't acknowledge.

The fumbling classmate and the monologue detail

"The Death of a Salesman" doesn't have any famous female monologues , it's almost entirely male roles. A drama student fumbling a monologue from that play in an audition is an odd choice and might raise eyebrows with readers who know the play. Consider swapping it for something more obviously associated with female audition pieces.

The chapter needs a landing

Jess curtsies and walks off stage , and then what? What does she feel? Does she look back at Cunningham? Does she catch anyone's eye in the crowd? Right now the chapter ends the moment the scene ends, which isn't the same thing. Give Jess one beat after her exit that tells us something about what this moment means to her before the chapter closes.

Crawled across her ruby lips

You've used variations of this image , red lips, ruby lips, the smile arriving on her lips , several times across the novel for Jess. It's becoming a verbal tic. Find a fresh way to show Jess' confidence in this moment.

The Cunningham Backstory , A Wider Note

This is worth pausing on because it's genuinely your best writing in the novel so far. The reason it works where other backstories haven't is because it's *thematically connected* to Jess in real time. Cunningham is watching students audition for dreams he once had himself. That parallel gives his history meaning in the present moment of the scene. When you gave us June's Brooklyn backstory or Claire's athletic scholarship paragraph, they were disconnected from what was happening in the scene. Cunningham's past is inseparable from what he's doing right now. That's the difference. Apply this principle everywhere.