Beta Reading Feedback
Beta Read by Maya Linda

Feedback on Monique

Overall impression

I like the premise, and Monique immediately feels like someone I want to know more about. She is visually memorable, and the contrast between her tragic, almost horror-like life and her excitement over chicken nuggets is funny in a way that makes her feel more human. The whole scene feels gothic, sad, strange, and a little absurd, which gives it a distinct personality.

What I feel as a reader

At first, I feel curious but also a little confused. I can tell Monique is dangerous, lonely, homeless, and hiding from someone, but I am not yet sure what kind of story I am reading or which details I should focus on. There are a lot of mysteries introduced at once in the lab, “he,” the missing-person poster, the bells, the screams, the gold leaf, and her victims so I sometimes feel like I am being given pieces of her backstory before I have had time to settle into the present scene.

I feel the most connected to her when she is doing ordinary things. Her counting her money, worrying about whether she can afford nuggets, carrying a dog plush and a book, and practicing her order all make me feel sorry for her without the narration having to explain that she is lonely. The nugget scene makes me laugh, but it also makes me sad because she clearly wants one small normal experience and cannot even manage that without something going wrong.

When she sees the missing-person poster, I feel curious and uneasy. That moment makes me want to know who she used to be and what happened to her, but I also wanted her reaction to last longer. I wanted to feel the shock or fear of seeing her childhood face instead of having her look at it and move on so quickly.

By the end, I feel sympathy for Monique and I would keep reading, mostly because I want answers about her past. I also want to see whether anyone helps her, whether the employee treats her badly, and whether the person she is hiding from finds her. The ending gives me curiosity, but it could create more urgency if it ended on a stronger immediate consequence or threat.

Pacing

The pacing is not too slow, but it feels scattered because so many important details appear close together. The strongest immediate storyline is Monique trying to get food and then realizing she has lost her money. I would bring that goal in earlier and let the other information appear naturally while she tries to accomplish it.
The money loss also feels slightly convenient at the moment. I would show why she becomes careless. Maybe she is distracted by the smell of food, overwhelmed by the crowd, hears one of the bells, or is so focused on finally eating that she forgets to hide the cash. That would make the problem feel connected to her character instead of something that happens only because the plot needs a complication.

Character

Monique is strongest when her personality comes through in small actions. Her rehearsing the order makes me feel her social anxiety. Her concern about the gold reverting shows that she is practical and used to surviving. Her belongings make me wonder what she lost and what she is still holding onto. Those details make her more sympathetic than simply describing her as a monster or saying that the world rejects her.
I would use more of that behavior and fewer broad statements about her emotions. Let the reader see her loneliness through how she watches couples, avoids people, or reacts when someone speaks to her. The

contrast between her frightening past and her very normal wants is the most interesting thing about her.

Emotional impact

The emotional core is there, but some of the dramatic language is so intense that it starts to blur together. Words like monster, atrocities, victims, souls, rejection, and grave misfortune all appear early, before I have a specific event to attach them to. Because of that, I understand that Monique has suffered, but I do not always feel the suffering as strongly as I think I am supposed to.
The scene would hit me harder if some of the emotion were quieter and more physical. For example, when she cannot pay, show her checking the same pocket repeatedly, struggling to speak, going numb, or becoming convinced everyone is watching her. That would make her panic feel immediate and personal.

Plot and questions

The magical leaf turning into gold is one of my favorite details, but it raises questions I want the story to answer. Does the gold always revert? How long does it last? Has Monique done this before? What happens to the jewelry shop when it changes back? Those rules could create a lot of tension, especially if this is how she survives.

I am also curious about the forty nuggets. It is funny as it is, but it could become emotionally meaningful if it connects to a comfort ritual, a childhood memory, or the fact that she has not eaten properly in a long time.

The bells and screams are intriguing, but I am unsure whether they are memories, hallucinations, or part of the supernatural side of the story. I do not need an explanation immediately, but a small clue would help me understand how to interpret them.

Errors and corrections

There are a few noticeable errors and awkward phrases that should be cleaned up in the next draft. These are the main ones I caught:

Here are the main errors and awkward phrases I noticed:

“Dreary winds washed over her” could be changed to “cold winds swept over her.” “Dreary” describes the mood more than the wind itself.

“The fallen, disrupted, souls she laid to waste” could be changed to “the souls she had laid to waste.” “Disrupted” seems misplaced, and the commas interrupt the phrase.
“Stories of a life she lived vibrantly told just by a glance at her stature” could become “Her stature told the story of a once-vibrant life.” The original sentence is difficult to follow.

“Within grave misfortunes” sounds unnatural. You could use “unfortunately” or “because of this misfortune” instead.
“Has anyone left for warmer lands?” may need to be “Has everyone left for warmer lands?” if Monique is wondering whether the whole area has emptied out.

“Conversations she always designated for white noise” could become “conversations she had trained herself to treat as white noise.” This makes the habit clearer and sounds more natural.

There is a spacing error in “o f a”; it should be “of a.” There are also missing spaces in “IfI take that down” and “he’llfind me.” These should be “If I take that down” and “he’ll find me.”

“They were akin to those scratchy bells” needs clarification because it is not immediately clear what “they” refers to.

“Proceeding to rifle through her pockets…” would read more smoothly as “She rifled through her pockets…” The original is a sentence fragment.
“Two…three..four…” should be formatted as “Two… three… four…” so the ellipses are consistent.

“A once bright, cheery child” would be better as “A once-bright, cheery child.”

“He had to have used the one right before I left” is vague. “He must have used the photo from right before I left” makes the meaning clearer.

“A building made of black material called ‘The Ruby’” could become “the black building called The Ruby.” “Material” makes the description confusing.

“A wad of cash she held no care to count” should be “a wad of cash she did not bother to count.”
“The order she required” sounds unnatural when referring to food. “The order she desperately wanted” fits the moment better.
“40 pieces of chicken nuggets” could be “40 chicken nuggets” or “a forty-piece order of chicken nuggets.”

Finally, “W-wait, I do have… give me a moment” could be punctuated as “W-wait. I do have it… Give me a moment.” That better shows her panic and the breaks in her speech.

There are also some tense shifts, such as moving between “she always has” and “she always had,” so I would do one full pass for tense consistency. The tone shifts between lyrical gothic narration and casual phrases like “What a steal!!” That contrast can work, but it should feel intentional and consistent throughout the story.

Areas for improvement

The biggest improvement would be giving the scene a clearer focus. Right now, the opening introduces a lot of mysteries and emotional information very quickly, so I sometimes feel curious but also unsure what I am supposed to care about first. Let Monique’s immediate goal getting food and finding somewhere safe lead the scene, and bring in the backstory through what interrupts or complicates that goal.

The second area is emotional clarity. The narration tells me that Monique is a monster, traumatized, and rejected, but the moments that affect me most are the smaller ones: rehearsing her order, counting her money, and carrying her old belongings. I would rely more on those actions and use fewer broad statements about her pain.

The third area is making the plot problems feel connected to Monique. Her losing the money should happen because she is distracted, overwhelmed, hungry, or triggered not just because the story needs her to struggle. That would make the conflict feel more natural and make me feel more invested in what happens next.

The magical gold, bells, screams, lab, and missing-person poster are all interesting, but they need slightly clearer rules or hints. I do not need every answer immediately, but I need enough information to know what is mysterious on purpose and what I may have missed.

Finally, the ending could use a sharper hook. I want the restaurant scene to end with a stronger emotional or plot consequence: Monique accidentally using magic, someone recognizing her, the employee calling for help, or someone unexpectedly offering kindness. That would leave me feeling more desperate to continue.

Final thoughts

I would keep reading because Monique is memorable and I want to understand what happened to her. I like the weird combination of gothic trauma, magical gold leaves, raccoon shelter, a missing-child poster, and an extremely serious nugget mission. The story has a strong identity.

The main thing I would work on is focus. Give Monique one main goal in the scene, let the backstory come through her reactions, and make the loss of the money feel like a natural result of her emotional state. Do not make it less weird; just make the weirdness easier to follow.

The scene currently makes me feel curious, sympathetic, amused, and slightly confused. With a clearer progression, I think those feelings could become much stronger and the ending could leave me feeling more desperate to read the next part.