



****This sample is from a 95k new adult romance. Length of memo will vary.****

Thanks so much for giving me the chance to work on this novel! First and foremost, remember that my feedback is only an opinion—and every editor will have a different one. It's up to you to decide which of my suggestions fits your vision for the manuscript. You can incorporate all my ideas, some of them, or none of them. As this is genre fiction, there are certain norms that influenced my feedback. By no means do you have to adhere to these norms—I just feel it's important to understand the norms and when you are veering from them, so you can make a conscious choice to do so. As the author, you have the ultimate decision. You know your story and characters best.

That said, I hope you find my notes helpful!

Overall:

Overall, there are a lot of things working for this book. Some of the characters' choices were surprising (in a good way), and your voice is very memorable. However, I think there are some pacing issues and I don't think you are using all your elements to their full potential.

Marketing:

You're right, this isn't YA (not enough teen angst), and it's not contemporary romance (the couple is not together at the end, which is pretty much the only hard and fast rule for romance). I think this fits neatly into New Adult. As a category, it typically has characters 18-23, and the main concerns revolve around college life, job life, and establishing your identity after high school.

A very similar title to check out would be *Trade Me* by Courtney Milan. Her whole Cyclone series is New Adult and a good read.

Pacing:

You're right, the story feels a little long. But that's because you don't really have enough plot and tension to justify this word count. You've got a great sense of plot beats, but you repeat the beat you are using, so it feels slower than it should. Specifically, we see them sparring several times, and we see them interrupted by a phone multiple times.

For the sparring, I think you can get away with this twice before it starts slowing the pace. After she turns the tables on him, the audience loses interest because we've already seen both outcomes. I would cut other sparring sessions.

As for the interruptions, this is a problem in two ways. First, it's repetitive. Second, the reader knows he is holding back important information and is only going to give him so many opportunities to come clean before getting frustrated and just putting the book down. At most, you have two chances here. The first time, the reader will forgive him for not pushing the issue. The second, the reader starts feeling a bit agitated but is probably willing to go along with it. Then he has to tell her—no more interruptions. I would cut the interruptions down to two.

I also think you could cut a sex scene or two without losing much. It's a matter of choosing your favorite few and deleting the rest.

As I mentioned, part of the issue is that there isn't quite enough tension to hold up this word count. So you are repeating beats with the tension you DO have, but it doesn't quite work. I think you actually have so much potential for tension baked into this story, you just aren't utilizing it. So I want to get to a place where this is at its full potential and you are using all the tools at your disposal, not just the same ones over and over again. (See my suggestions in Character.)

The other choice is to take out the repetitive elements and reduce the word count. I would say with this plot and tension, a natural word count would be more like 65-70k. More the level of a Harlequin series title rather than a single title.

Writing Style:

What I love about this is your voice is so strong. It's impressive in any manuscript, and doubly so because English isn't your first language. My line edit cleaned up all the little inconsistencies so now your voice shines through.

There were a few phrases you used in heavy repetition that I think you should be aware of for future books:

1. Smiling widely/wide smiles/grinning widely/wide grins—this is fine in moderation, but on some pages you used this 3 or 4 times, which is too much. I changed some to “big” and took others out entirely.

2. Actually/slightly—a filler word you don't usually need
3. I felt/I thought—this phrase can create unnecessary distance, and it's not usually needed, as we are in her POV and know these are her thoughts and feelings.
4. Descriptions of blushing—this is tricky because Scarlet is a known blusher. But leaving fewer descriptions of these means they have a real impact when we do see it.
5. Eye color—You noted Christian's eye color very often, and that just doesn't ring true. Most people note eye color infrequently.

Setting:

What you've done in terms of setting the scenes is fine. It's always clear where something is happening. If you wanted to up your game a bit, I would delve further into the descriptions. For example, when we are in Scarlet's room, what color is the bedspread? Does she have a small twin bed or a king size? Does she have one small armoire or a giant walk-in closet? Carpet or hardwood? Etc.

Plot:

The overall plot is solid. Not too many places where I felt things didn't make sense.

In the beginning, the chapters feel a bit choppy. We need better transitions so we understand the passage of time. Make sure the reader can follow when she visited her father's building, and how many days have passed before we see the school scene, etc. (You do a much better job of this later on, it's just the beginning that is a bit rough.)

Throughout the manuscript, be careful of scene breaks. This may be a formatting issue, but there were a lot of places without scene breaks, so it was a bit confusing. Just make sure we have an extra line of space or asterisks to indicate when a scene is changing.

A big hole for me was when Scarlet spends the night at Christian's after the party. One, why does he bring her there, so far away, when it doesn't give us any more information? He doesn't tell her who his father is, and we understand he is rich from the car. I think here is when he needs to confess about his father. It's not really believable that she didn't Google him, so let's give this scene a purpose and let him confess it here. The secret of moving to London is big enough to leave til the end.

Also, does Scarlet have a curfew? Her parents are worried about her staying out in a later scene, but in this scene, we don't see her texting them to tell them where she is, or thinking they'll be worried, etc. At minimum she needs to shoot them a text telling them she is sleeping over at a friend's.

The shower scene after the party felt inorganic to me. It's 2am and she's already told us she's exhausted. Why get in the shower? It makes more sense that she would leave it until morning. Plus the broken shower, inexplicably going in his room when he doesn't answer the knock...it's all very contrived. There are less obvious ways of getting to see him naked. I would cut this bit.

I also wanted more detail about the Growth Association program. I think it has to be something like: she will get the opportunity to meet other business owners and learn about their companies and how they started. This is enough detail so we understand how it will help her without being super specific.

Elaborate dreams are very tricky in books. Done right, they let us know something we couldn't have possibly known otherwise, and add to the story. But done poorly, they feel like a cheap tactic meant to trick the reader. They artificially set the scene and then shock the reader when we find out it's just a dream. In this case, I think we are at the latter, unfortunately. The dream isn't adding anything but artificial tension. I would cut this out. She can definitely reference that she had a sexy dream, but we don't need to see on "on screen," as it were.

As for the sex scenes, I always tell authors it's about what makes YOU comfortable. There are all heat levels in New Adult. But if you are trying to write an explicit scene and you aren't comfortable, it will just feel awkward for the characters and the reader. What you have here fits in the market perfectly well, so I see no reason to change it.

If you wanted to have the characters go further, but not have to write it, there is always the option of a "closed door" scene. It usually goes something like this: kissing/fondling ensues, then someone invites the other to the bedroom with that look in their eyes, and the door is close. End scene. The next scene is seeing them wake up in the morning in bed.

I'm not quite sure if the scene with Samantha is having the right impact, because we don't know Samantha that well and don't care if Scarlet "wins." But it would be good to have outside tension here that has nothing to do with their relationship. So I'm going to suggest that instead of introducing a new character, you make this Angela. We already know and dislike Angela, and we know she uses men. So seeing her get her comeuppance here would be very satisfying for the reader—more so than with a character we just met.

Characters:

Heroine: Scarlet has so much potential to be a truly memorable heroine. I love how strong and unapologetic she is. And she's surprisingly self-aware. It's so refreshing! Plus, it's easy to see why a 21-year-old would be interested in her.

However, a lot of the time she is simply reacting to the plot as it happens, when her decisions should be driving the plot. Simon manipulates her into coming over for the movie, and Christian manipulates her into going to the party and playing pool. Then he keeps a big secret from her, and she doesn't push the issue, instead only reacting when she found out by accident. She is a girl who is strong enough to drive the plot, and I'd like to see the action be driven by her goals and aspirations, instead of feeling like she is a passenger in her own story.

My suggestion is going to be fleshing out her drive to create her own business. I want specific details. What type of business? What are her specific goals? What is her major in college going to be? What steps is she taking in high school to help achieve this goal? Etc. I want all of her decisions to be made with this in mind. For instance, the reason she hasn't really dated should be that she feels boys get in the way of her goals. And then her attraction to Christian makes her realize she just wasn't into other guys enough before this.

And I want to see what she is doing right now to achieve this. Let's say her business idea is to help bring green energy to existing buildings in San Francisco. Does she read a lot of books on the topic? Follow particular people on Instagram because they help her with her cause? Nag her parents to install solar panels? Etc.

By putting more emphasis on this, you will give her agency, and you'll also add another layer of tension, which will help keep the pacing up. We will see her acting of her own accord, which will balance out the times she isn't in control (when Christian tricks her into going to the party, etc).

Hero: Christian is a solid hero. But I don't think we understand him as well as we should. I wasn't clear on how long he had lived in England, and what sort of research the company was doing that brought him to San Francisco particularly. (Why couldn't he do research in a British school?)

You are TELLING us he's British, but you aren't SHOWING it—he has no accent, no British slang, no British habits. So I think he should just be American. If he was American and had gone to private school (or gone to one of the few elite boarding schools), then Scarlet still wouldn't know him and it would solve a lot of the unanswered questions. He could still be heading to London to work with the company branch there.

And how did he make his own money? This is a big point, and yet it's never explained. We need to see exactly how he is responsible for his billions, or it needs to be that this is his father's money and he works very hard so people don't think he's just a spoiled rich kid. Perhaps it's even a chip on his shoulder—he wants so badly to prove to the world that he deserves the money.

Secondary: The secondary characters are very well fleshed out. I was especially excited with how well rounded Simon and Keith were. It's tricky to do with secondary characters who aren't getting as much "screen time," but you've managed it beautifully.

Conclusion:

There is a lot of good in this manuscript. But I think you have to choose whether you want this to be a less complicated, shorter book, or a more complicated longer title. If you just want to take out the repetitive elements and not add much, I'd say you should be aiming for 65-70k. If you are willing to take out the repetition and flesh out some of the tension that you aren't currently exploring, then 90k is fine.

That said, the manuscript felt fresh, and the characters make unexpected choices that I feel really make this story stand out from the pack. In genre fiction, this is a major accomplishment.

I hope my feedback helps you achieve your publishing goals!