



# **SAMPLE DEVELOPMENTAL EDIT LETTER**

*Shared with permission from author. Character  
and setting names have been changed. Completed  
as part of a "Deep Developmental" edit.*



## EDITING & PUBLISHING SERVICES

*from Victoria Griffin*

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# DEVELOPMENTAL EDIT LETTER

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**Project Title:** [REDACTED]

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**Key strengths:**

- Unique setting with well-integrated cultural elements
- Strong driving motivations and conflicts with high stakes
- Unique blend of genres

**Main weaknesses:**

- Lack of development regarding major motivations
- Confusion about antagonists' plans
- Ineffective secondary POVs

**Low-level issues:**

- There are a few instances of misuse of quotation marks and italics.
- Some of the prose is choppy, with overly complex sentence structures that distract from the story.
- The stammering throughout the dialogue is ineffective and distracting.
- There is a decent amount of redundancy in the prose, largely instances in which things are both “told” and “shown.”
- Nontraditional sentence structures create ambiguity within the prose.

## CHARACTERS

**Nina:**

- Nina's breakdown is mentioned early, but it's not shown in a way that the reader can connect with. Her experience with what occurs after she loses her memory—with her family and with Boy—are crucial to her current motivations and challenges. The fact that the reader does not receive and experience specific details regarding the aftermath of her breakdown undermines much of her character development.
- Her goal to find her soulmate is much clearer in this version. We see that she is searching for true love, an underlying desire the root of which becomes obvious when she learns she is half of an archsoul. But to Nina, before she learns this fact, what is driving her desire to find her soulmate? She is very clear about it, and she seems to be the only person in her sphere who is this interested in the concept. Where does her interest in soulmates stem from? Understanding this is important to the reader's acceptance of her goal of finding her soulmate as significant for Nina's character.
- Nina's relationship with her serra is confusing. She seems to want strong magic, but she is also afraid of it and attempts to avoid it. This needs to be clarified, especially in relation to her desire to learn her grandfather's secret. If using serra poses a risk to her, the reader needs to know what that is, in order to create believable stakes. Flashbacks would be an excellent way to show the potential danger serra poses to her.
- Max is the only look we get into Nina's previous relationships. A few specifics here and there would help us understand why her relationships were so bad and why she has trust issues. That said, there is also some inconsistency with her trust issues. At some points, she seems to have a hard time trusting people. But then she very easily trusts Daris and Hugo, even amidst clear evidence that she shouldn't.
- We don't get too much information about Nina's relationship with her parents. Her mom wants her to get married, and her dad doesn't believe in magic. Her mom's perspective impacts the plot in that it's part of driving Nina and Hugo together. What about her dad's perspective? How has her dad's lack of belief in magic impacted Nina's relationship with her serra? Again, this could come up in flashbacks.

### **Elias:**

- Elias is a pretty consistent character. Because there are so many main conflicts that require Nina's POV, there is simply not time to delve into Elias's character. He has one main goal: escape Trapini. And later, to open up to Nina and win her back. Most of my notes regarding Elias have more to do with plot than characterization.
- With Nina having two main conflicts (finding her soulmate and discovering her power), there simply is not room to flesh out Elias the way that would be necessary to keep him as a POV character. You would be better off to focus on Nina's POV. See structure.

### **Daris and the Uncles:**

- Daris's motivation is much stronger in this version. He's still unhinged, but a relatable emotion (grief) is driving him. However, more specific information about Sara would make this motivation even stronger. You could easily incorporate key scenes or details about Sara from Nina's perspective (again recommending flashbacks).
- Consider hiding Daris's intentions in the first half of the story. Focus on developing his relationship with Nina so that when the truth does come to light, it has more of an impact. The conversations between Daris and Nina are so well done. You could really catch the reader off guard by showing that relationship first, casting him as an ally, and then drawing back the curtain and showing that he is really a villain of the story.
- Does Daris believe Nina actually had a breakdown? Or do he and the other uncles know that her amnesia was a result of a magical attack?
- What have the uncles done to elicit such fear among locals? And how is that fear not a huge red flag for Nina—and the rest of the family? How does Nina's dad feel about his brothers, and has that colored Nina's perception?
- An earlier demonstration of the uncles' power is crucial to their development and their believability as foes. This also relates to the previous bullet.

#### **Bell:**

- Bell is much stronger in this version. Clarifying her goals and personal challenges went a long way toward making her a more convincing support system for Nina.

#### **Hala:**

- Hala plays important roles in the plot, but she doesn't impact Nina on a personal level. See Virginia.

#### **Virginia:**

- You mention that Virginia is thinking of joining them, but then she never does. Virginia is a great character, but she doesn't play a role in the story. My suggestion would be to combine her with another character, using her personality to fill a crucial role in the plot. You could combine her with Hala or Jane.

#### **Hugo:**

- Nina needs a better reason for sticking it out with Hugo and giving him a chance. The only positive moments Hugo has in regard to Nina are simple acts of kindness, and that's not personal enough to create a believable bond with Nina.

**Jane:**

- Jane really doesn't do anything. She "spies," but Daris already has all the information about Nina he could want. She serves a role in regard to Hugo, but with a few simple changes, Jane's character could easily be removed. Her only other potential role is as a misdirection in regard to Daris and the uncles. But with page space being a limiting factor in this story, my suggestion would be to simplify the plot and reduce the cast wherever possible. Jane is a prime candidate for removal.

**Sara:**

- How did she die? There's mention of the "organ" she and Daris shared, but that's all.
- Did Nina know her? That could make things more complicated when Nina learns what Daris is trying to do. Is there any part of Nina that wants to see her aunt alive?

**Leah:**

- She only makes one appearance in conversation. You could cut this character.

**PLOT**

- Nina's desire to understand the past and find answers about her grandfather and her breakdown needs to be introduced early and cast as a goal for her. This only becomes important at the time of her discovery, which removes a massive source of tension from the first part of the story. It also reduces her character's agency, since she seems to just stumble onto the truth.

Nina's journey to unlock her powers is a crucial part of the plot, but it seems to all happen by accident. If this is something she is searching for, we need to see her trying to figure out the mystery. What exactly does she know and remember? She has the pendant. What action does she take to find the secret? What does she speculate the secret is, and why does she believe she needs to uncover it?

- The encounter with Max is unnecessary. The plot would be better served by removing this scene and adding some details about Nina's previous relationships in dialogue with her sister or friends.
- The first scene in Ovideo, with Nina teaching, has no relevance to the plot. It's good, but it should be removed or made more relevant.
- Nina's exact emotions about the dream hands are unclear. What does she think they are? And how do their presence change her emotions or behavior? This is partially related to the lack of consistency about magic. This may also be rectified by showing more of her

encounters with Boy. We would be able to understand how Nina connects those previous instances to her encounters with the dream hands, and how she feels about those encounters' relation to reality.

- Nina's research and dissertation are extremely interesting components of the story and could be a boon for setting this manuscript apart. However, they are not integral to the plot. While you are brainstorming plot changes, I suggest considering her research as a tool. If you can alter the plot in a way that her research becomes a determining factor in the plot moving forward, you've both given Nina more agency and woven the research component decidedly into the plot.
- The line between what is and isn't possible is a consistent issue. Nina readily accepts some developments while viewing others as complete impossibilities. The reader needs to better understand the framework of their magic to see why she reacts as she does to certain elements. You may be able to do this during flashbacks focused on her breakdown.

This is also problematic because it removes the possibility of the reader being concerned, as Nina is, that she could be losing her mind. If we don't understand why something is impossible, we don't see it as a potential tipping point for Nina. Specific instances are in the comments.

- Much of the plot relies on Nina being clueless and obtuse. She clearly should not trust Daris, and yet she continues to without reason, even when her sister completely distrusts him. You could give her a better reason to trust him, but I believe the plot would be better served by giving Nina a healthy dose of mistrust. Instead of having her be played over and over, let her make some of the choices. Allow her to figure some things out and actually respond to Daris's ploy.
- When Nina decides to take a break from Hugo, the reader needs to understand exactly how big that is. She still believes Hugo is her soulmate. That means she is willing to sacrifice her soulmate, her life goal, for her personal integrity and agency. But the fact that she continues to give him chances undermines this show of resoluteness. Honestly, Hugo's purpose in the story ends after she tells him they're going on a break. He is out of her mind. She is focused elsewhere. And his role in regard to the uncles' plan soon changes.

What if, instead of it being a break, she ends things altogether. That would really solidify the fact that she is willing to place her values above all else. It would give her more agency. It would end Hugo's involvement at a better point. (You could even have Daris kill him immediately, rather than waiting until the end. That would open additional plot possibilities, even as far as Nina potentially learning how bad Daris is earlier.) It would also reduce the page space spent on Hugo after he is already irrelevant and allow you to focus on the immediate conflicts.

- Daris's "plans" seem convoluted. Even on a second close reading, I had a hard time keeping up... Daris has worked hard for years to keep Nina from finding her soulmate or love. He believes that love will allow her to unlock her powers. Daris's plan is to keep

her miserable until the uncles can work out a way to steal her power. (What are they doing to further this cause? Are they close? Have they tried anything that failed?) He is somehow keeping Elias trapped, though it is not clear how he even learned Elias was Nina's soulmate. After learning the power cannot be stolen, Daris kills Hugo. (Why? Hugo seems like a nonissue now.) He makes a deal with Druid Karthik—an amiable druid on the council in exchange for a method of stealing Nina's power. I do think that allowing the reader to discover Daris's plans along with Nina, rather than revealing information to the reader before Nina, will make the information easier to process.

- We need more information about the dream hands—her relationship with them, her speculations about who they belong to, how they impact her emotions and decisions. Plus, we need to understand how her understanding of magic and dreams, including her history with “Boy”—impacts her perception of the dream hands.
- The scene in which Nina almost gets hit by a car (chapter 16) is unnecessary and seems only meant to reinforce Hugo's role as a knight in shining armor.
- Nina's pain at being an archsoul separated from her other half needs to be consistent. She feels it intensely after the fountain scene, but she doesn't feel it after leaving Elias's mansion. Also, what it feels like to be an archsoul needs to be consistent between Nina and Elias. Elias does not seem to feel the pain or experience the lack of control that Nina does.
- Nina's behavior when it comes to Elias is erratic. The only internal logic for this is that Elias is her other half, but Elias is able to act logically around her. So that reasoning doesn't stand. It's understandable that she's willing to take risks to get to him, but doing things like putting her sister at risk and completely ignoring the readily apparent dangers make Nina seem thoughtless.
- One of the least utilized set of stakes is the possibility of Nina losing her mind. To make this an urgent possibility, you would need to remove the scenes from the uncles' POV and add flashbacks to clarify the severity of the aftermath of her breakdown. That danger of losing her mind would define her relationship with the dream hands and her senna, and it would create a viable reason for her to be so cautious.
- The scenes when Nina is at Elias's mansion feel like she is on vacation. There is very little urgency, and the whole situation feels like a rom-com-esque ploy to put the love interests in the same place. Elias is stalling, but Nina doesn't know that. It needs to seem to Nina (and the reader) like they're working toward something. As is, her time at the mansion feels like a break from the story. The tension needs to be maintained during those scenes. That shouldn't be a problem, considering everything that is happening, but the characters can't just ignore the fact that Elias, and Nina by extension, are basically under attack.

If Nina had already been working toward rediscovering her memories and unlocking her grandfather's secret, that would be a source of tension and urgency, especially if she believes that secret could help her release Elias. The earlier you let Nina learn about Daris, the sooner that becomes a problem for her—a source of conflict and tension. She

will suddenly have an enemy, someone she has to outsmart. If she were to learn about Daris's malice toward her before she contacts her grandfather, that would significantly up the urgency. She would *need* to discover the secret in order to figure out why Daris has been sabotaging her.

The uncles are responsible for trapping Elias in Marseille. What if, instead of him magically being freed when Nina arrives, Nina learns about Daris and "turns" Ismet while she is at Elias's mansion. She then uses the information to release Elias. You could even use this to create a more solid foundation for their fight. Maybe Elias believes Nina was in league with her uncles.

- If you were to remove the uncles' scenes and allow Nina to discover Daris's plans sooner, she could persuade one of her other uncles (such as Ismet, who isn't fully sold on Daris's excessive behavior) to give her information. That would allow the reader to understand the stakes, especially as they increase to death for Nina, while giving Nina a useful tool for combatting Daris's plan. She would still need to get the book, so she could still wind up in his clutches. But the reader would be on edge, knowing that she will die if she's caught.
- Why doesn't Nina share with Elias their childhood relationship? I know she mentions that she didn't tell him because she didn't know how he would react, but that doesn't seem like a good enough reason—especially when that information is a great tool in your belt as far as plot development.
- The nature of the "sacrifice" to bring Sara back to life is not clear. They need to kill Nina because they need her power to raise Sara. But Daris says that Nina's death will balance the scales. It seems like there should be *another* death. Killing Nina gets them the power. Then sacrificing another soul as they actually raise Sara balances the scales.
- The resolution falls flat. Elias saves Nina far too easily. And the rescue doesn't rely on anything Nina has been working toward. Then the uncles don't come after them, even though the internal logic of the story says that they would be able to trace Nina's power.

## STRUCTURE

- There are several scene breaks with a change in setting or POV. They would read much better as chapter breaks.
- The chapter lengths are a bit inconsistent. Work on tidying those up.
- Watch out for moments in which Nina is lost in her thoughts. That feels like an easy way to include exposition, and it breaks the momentum of the scene.
- The chapters with two POVs are not effective, and the extra POVs are simply cluttering the story. This is clearly Nina's story. For example, there aren't enough scenes from Elias's POV to provide any significant characterization. The other perspectives are

thrown in to provide additional plot details, and those scenes wind up breaking the momentum and feeling like plot devices, rather than organic parts of the story.

I suggest merging parts two and three. The largest change comes between parts one and two, and making this a two-part story would flow better while also balancing the word count. My recommendation is to entirely remove all POVs except Nina's. In the first part, use flashbacks to illustrate her childhood with her grandfather and her response to her breakdown—setting up her desire to learn about the secret her grandfather wanted her to know—along with her interactions with Elias as a child. Depending on how much information you decide to give, the first part may even be in an alternating chapter structure. (I believe this structure would be ideal.) The second part focuses on Nina's present and Elias.

## **SETTING**

- Well done!

## **VOICE**

- Each individual character has a strong, unique voice. The only character whose voice lacks consistency is Hugo.

## **SUGGESTED ACTION PLAN**

1. Merge Virginia and Hala.
2. Remove all POVs except Nina's.
3. Restructure part one with chapters alternating between the present and the past, showing the aftermath of Nina's "breakdown."
4. Address major plot recommendations:
  - a. Nina is seeking answers regarding her grandfather's secret and/or her breakdown.
  - b. Nina's research is key to her discovering answers.
  - c. Nina ends her relationship with Hugo before visiting Marseille. Hugo is out of the equation.
  - d. Nina learns about Daris's malice before leaving Marseille.
  - e. Nina and Elias use her knowledge to free him from his imprisonment.