

Novel Excerpt C Proofread

“Why the *hell* is it red?” I snarled, staring at my monitor in shock as my face heated so fast it felt like dried-out sunburn.

“Clearly to piss you off,” my editor, Ben, snickered through the speaker on my phone.

“No, seriously, why is it *always* fucking *red*? It’s like she does it on purpose!”

“You’re being paranoid. Maybe she likes red.”

“Just because I sound paranoid doesn’t make me wrong,” I drawled, rolling my eyes.

“Every time, Ben. We go through this *every time*. How can you not think she doesn’t do this intentionally to annoy me? There’s no red on the background. The guy’s not wearing red. Why on god’s green earth would she pick red—which matches nothing—as the title color style? It’s not even a pretty red!”

“Eric, would it really be okay with you if she made it a gorgeous metallic red or a shiny, sparkly, burgundy with stars? You’re saying I wouldn’t have gotten this ranting call then?”

“No, but if there was some type of pattern with red that correlated with the title or something with the motif I can’t think of as an example at the moment, then I wouldn’t be this upset. It’s not only that I hate red, it’s simply that a graphic designer, a *professional* with *so much experience* according to her that I’m paying way more than she’s worth *and* picking up the tab for the photos really should have an eye for what works without me having to hold her fucking hand each step of the way like she’s a newb.”

“Tell her no more red, then.”

I rolled my eyes again. “No shit. I have. At least twenty times I’ve yelled about the red.”

“Right, but you do after while yelling about the list of what she screws up. Tell her beforehand.”

Again, another eye roll. Sometimes people really just assumed I was such a flighty author or seriously that I was just slow. I made a few clicks with my mouse and chuckled. “Check your email.”

“Got it,” he muttered. “Okay, title... Series... Tag’s here.” Then he burst out laughing. “Are you kidding me? You *include* this in your cover requests?”

“Yes, now you get the ranting phone call.”

“Yeah, I really do. I mean, it’s right here, *no red for the title. No red for any of the font colors. Seriously, there is no need for red if it’s not a vampire book, which this is not. Match to eyes, shirt, something pretty and subtle, but make the title pop. My name should be of a blander, but elegant font styling. No more grungy looking crap. I write paranormal gay erotic romance, not smut, not porn, not zombies, not shoot them up grit... No grunge!*”

“I figured there was no way she could keep bitching, *well you never told me that specifically* if I put it in the cover requests.”

“Okay, so how long have you been doing it this way?” Ben hedged and I adjusted my neck.

“The past five covers.”

“Eric, you’ve gotten red the past five covers, and that last one had that tire treads thing on your name.”

“Yup!”

There was a slight pause where I hoped he came around to understanding my mood and why I needed to vent. I internalized a *lot*, most of the crap I dealt with so if I called to bitch, I really did need it. “Okay, she might really be doing it on purpose.”

“*Thank you!*”

“But why? She’s just going to get snapped at by you and have to change it.”

“I think she does it not only to get my blood pressure up but to show how many alterations she does. Like oh, see how much work I put in, we had twenty-four versions. As if that’s proof I’m so difficult.”

“That’s just ridiculous though,” he bitched, his voice getting growly. “Over half of those are her fuckups alone! *Oops, I forgot the logo. Oh, right, we need the tagline visible. Yeah, series number is bigger than the series title on this one.* How is it another version to lay at your feet if she should have done it that way from the beginning?”

“I don’t know, but she’s always saying that it takes so long because of all the versions or that I waste time by not getting back to her right away.”

“She does them at like two in the morning. You’re a morning person, not a night owl. Plus, it takes us awhile to find every mistake. If she’d stop taking four-day weekends and coming up with lame excuses neither of us believes all the time as to why we couldn’t get in touch with her, none of this would happen. I swear, you need a new graphic designer.”

“Yes, because they’re *sooooo* easy to find,” I hissed, hating when people acted like the simple solution was right there and I was silly for not having figured it out.

“I know, I know, but I’m sure they’re not all crazy or you’ve used them.”

“I’m not difficult. Don’t make me sound difficult. People need to do what they say they’re going to, not *forget* projects, have some artistic pride in their work, not charge out the ass for crap like the Adobe files, and not simply churn out what fits the bare minimum. If I did that as an author, I’d get my ass reamed in a heartbeat. I mean, why do this if you don’t love it? *You* do what you say or you have a good reason for the delay and it doesn’t happen every time. Hell, I’m supposed to be the flaky author and I’m barely late.”

“I don’t disagree,” he sighed, and I started to feel bad for stressing him out and pulling him into all of this. He wasn’t just my editor, but more my editor-in-chief since I self-published,

so he did get bonuses for the extra crap at least. “I’m just saying if you can’t handle the stress of this, then you gotta stick your hand back into the graphic artist pool and see if you can’t pick a better one out. You don’t have to sever this relationship, just try a new one too.”

“I swear it was funeral bread,” I grumbled, slumping back in my desk chair.

“Oh no, what have you been researching *now*?” he groaned. There was a thump through the phone and I swore it sounded like someone banging their head on a desk.

“Shut up, nothing.”

“You are *such* a hypochondriac, Eric!”

“For an editor you should know your words better,” I snapped, hating when people picked on me. “I take shit care of myself, hate doctors and hospitals too much to give myself fake diseases.”

“True. You ignore the shit that’s wrong with you for real and practically work yourself to death.” I flicked off the phone when he chuckled. “Fine, you’re a *paranormalchondriac*.”

“And you give me crap for making up words.”

“Yeah, that list of *Eric-isms* is getting pretty long. There isn’t any *Ben-isms* and that’s what you are. You’re a *paranormalchondriac* not whatever you’re currently researching.”

“You don’t know that. You don’t even know what I’m researching or me as well as you—”

“*Ha!* So you admit you’ve been researching something.”

“I’m *always* researching something, dummy. I’m hanging up the phone now. You have lots of work to do, books to edit, and blah, blah. Loves you lots, *hi* to your moms, big kisses.”

“Wait, don’t do something stupid or weird research projects to test if you’re really whatever you think you might be again!”

“Yeah, yeah, I swear, okay, bye,” I hurried and hit the red phone icon on the screen to

hang up. I stared at the phone a bit and shook my head. “*One time* of buying a silver bullet and sticking it into a cut to make sure I wasn’t really a dormant lycanthrope and no one ever lets you live it down. I swear.” I glanced back at the cover again. *Maybe I should stop telling people about the stuff I do and think. I mean, it had to be bread at a funeral to get this bad of karma, right?*

It was the only thing that made sense.

I didn’t believe in past lives really, though if that was true, I *had* to have been Hitler for me to be this big of a shit magnet. I didn’t do enough bad things to deserve all the crap. Fuck, I didn’t have enough *fun* to get the negative repercussions.

Sighing, I emailed my graphic designer, telling her to fix the red and giving specifics on what to adjust it to, knowing it wouldn’t be done that way...but *just* close enough to what I asked for that she could say it was and I wouldn’t be able to yell. It was also really sad that there were five things total that needed adjusting and I was only telling her about this one.

Because she couldn’t handle more than one thing at a time. Yeah, there was no world in which I was being difficult and she wasn’t simply the problem. But yet, every time she had some “valid” reason and a way to lay it all at my feet, a form of blame that made me feel culpable and could twist the whole thing around to the point I was so stressed out and distracted I couldn’t write.

It was how I ended up so far behind my team went from nine to ten weeks out from the submission of a new book to publish to *four* weeks. And that alone stressed me out to the point that things slid even further into chaos. Sure this wasn’t the only area of crap, there were other things going on. Always. Any sane person would have been institutionalized by now.

Which apparently meant I wasn’t sane to deal with it all? Not sure how that worked.

I curled back up with the book I’d been reading and flipped through page after page.

“See, I *had* to have eaten my first piece of bread at a funeral. This explains so much! I’m a sin eater. It explains the bad karma, the invisible target for shit on me—even my crappy carb metabolism. That would have been the catalyst.” I kept reading.

Okay, so the tradition was for bread to be with the dead and someone else to eat it to take on their sins. Gross, because who doesn’t want to eat bread touched by a dead person, but that was just the legend. It was kind of a superstitious legend. It didn’t explain the good luck of the living.

It made a lot more sense that it was more like auras or openness. Some people in their openness could attract spirits or see ghosts, right? Why couldn’t others draw in bad juju or sins of people because they had open spots in their aura like a magnet? It would make sense that the catalyst of that was having their first absorbent food, like bread—though I bet cake would have worked too—at a funeral where the sins being released of a departed person were just looking for a home.

It tracked. Maybe not completely but there was *some* logic to it. And that was better than a lot of things people believed in that had no logic to it at *all*.

“Huh, so I’m a sin eater. Wow. Explains why I avoid people like the plague and things go easier on me when I’m alone.” I glanced down at my blubbery, unworked-out body and winced. “That might be another reason too. Maybe coming to terms with who I am will be the kick I need to lay off the carbs and go all Paleo for reals.”

That still left me with one very important question...

Why was I so severely lactose intolerant then? Maybe I was part fish shifter and I simply hadn’t been in the right body of water yet to activate it? They didn’t drink milk either.

Right?