

## **Diverse Reading: Romance**

**By Nanci Milone Hill**

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Romance readers want to see people like themselves in the stories they read, but until recently there has been little diversity. Characters of color, characters with disabilities, or LGBTQIA characters rarely appear as the protagonists. The Ripped Bodice, a romance-only bookstore, has conducted racial diversity surveys since 2016; 2018's survey indicated that of every 100 books produced by leading romance publishers, less than 8% were written by people of color. The Romance Writers of America (RWA) has investigated its membership's diversity, with the conclusion that it is predominantly white. Publishers' responses to the needs of diverse readers has been slow, but trends are changing. The titles presented here attempt to be as inclusive as possible.

### **Stand-Alone Novels**

*White Houses* by Amy Bloom

This fictionalized account highlights the romance between journalist Lorena Hickok and First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, who met when F.D.R. was still governor of New York. The character-driven narrative, told from Lorena's point of view, moves back and forth in time. Elegant prose and engrossing characters make this much more than mere biographical fiction.

*Strawberry Summer* by Melissa Brayden

Margaret Beringer was the different kid growing up. When Courtney Carrington moved to town, Margaret finally felt that she belonged. As first loves often do, the two grew apart. Now Courtney, who Margaret hasn't seen for years, is back in town following her father's death, and she's even more beautiful than ever. This banter-filled, angsty tale about lost first loves will make you both cry and rejoice.

*Lunch with the Do-Nothings at the Tammy Dinette* by Killian B. Brewer

Marcus Sumter had a rough upbringing. His mother, an itinerant waitress, left him at the side of the road and he hasn't seen her since. He worked as a short-order cook until his sugar daddy Robert took him in. After a fight, Marcus winds up in Marathon, Georgia, where he not only meets a group of older women set on seeing him succeed and stay, but also a handsome mechanic who he falls for. This amusing story sports a strong sense of place, a gossipy tone, and banter-filled dialogue.

*Far From Home* by Lorelie Brown

A straight woman with an eating disorder offers to marry an Indian woman in need of a green card in this heartwarming tale of unexpected attraction. Rachel is buried under a mountain of student loan debt while Pari wants to make a major career move that threatens her work visa. Rachel offers to marry Pari in exchange for being able to live, rent-free, in Pari's elegant condo. As their wedding plans proceed, this friendship of convenience slowly blossoms into passionate love.

*The Kiss Quotient* by Helen Hoang

This erotic romance features Stella; an autistic woman who is having trouble navigating the world of relationships. She hires a male escort to teach her how to enjoy sex. Deciding that she needs to learn more, Michael agrees to be her fake boyfriend. Before long, they begin realizing that their professional arrangement has turned a great deal more personal.

*Indigo* by Beverly Jenkins

Escaping slavery as a child, Hester Wyatt helps others escape to freedom as an Underground Railroad conductor. When Galen Vachon, aka, Black Daniel is brought to her, wounded, she nurses him back to health. Though she originally finds him arrogant their affection grows. Jenkins' heartwarming own voices novel is full of accurate details, providing readers with a better understanding of slavery in America.

*Until I saw Your Smile* by J. J. Murray

Lawyer Matthew McConnell offers to help Angela Smith with the rent of her coffee shop in exchange for using the space to meet with his clients. He's also interested in winning Angela heart, but she's struggled with mental illness in the past and is leery of getting involved with anyone. Soon though, the sexual tension flies and the two are engaging in more than just coffee talk. This steamy romance features an interracial couple.

*The Lawrence Browne Affair* by Cat Sebastian

Lawrence Brown, the Earl of Randor, is a scientist and a recluse. Afraid that he will suffer the madness that consumed both his father and his brother, he has shut himself up in his family's estate. Con man Georgie Turner hasn't had a conscience in a long time. When it resurfaces and he is unable to swindle an old woman, he earns the wrath of a master criminal. Pretending to be the new secretary to the Earl of Randor seems like the perfect way to hide out, until he begins to fall for his new boss. This leisurely-paced Regency story is full of snarky dialogue and engaging writing.

*Idlewild* by Jude Sierra

Asher is still grieving the loss of his husband, John, when he decides to revitalize the restaurant that they opened together in Chicago. He fires everyone and hires a whole new staff, including Tyler, who is in an on-again, off-again relationship with his college sweetheart. There's a connection between Asher and Tyler, but Asher isn't sure he can let go of his past and Tyler needs to be his own man before he can become someone else's. Not just a multicultural LGBTQIA romance, this novel also explores class differences.

*Something True* by Karelia Stetz-Waters

Something True finds barista Tate Grafton shares an unforgettable night with Laura Enfield (a woman whose name she doesn't even know). Laura is in town to close the coffee shop where Tate works before joining her father on his conservative political campaign. Lies are told and secrets are exposed before the two women can make a relationship work.

## Series

### **The Loyal League** by Alyssa Cole

Freed black men and women work as spies for the Union army during the American Civil War. Each main character has suffered abuse yet is willing to risk their lives for the greater good. These steamy romances feature inter-racial relationships during a time when those relationships were forbidden. The last book in the series, *An Unconditional Freedom*, also features a Cuban American heroine.

### **Five Boroughs Stories** by Santino Hassell

Set in the five boroughs of New York, each of these stories feature flawed characters trying to overcome their pasts. Friendships turn to sex and then to more in each of these interconnected stories. A strong sense of place is evident, with each of the boroughs becoming a character unto themselves. Highly erotic stories; not for those looking for clean romances.

### **Matched to Perfection** by Priscilla Oliveras

Three Latina sisters follow their own paths to love in these contemporary, multicultural romances. Their close-knit family is as important to the stories as the romance. The Chicago-based Latina and Latino cast features characters that are both realistic and multifaceted.

### **Suits Undone** by Mia Sosa

Each title in this multicultural contemporary series features a wealthy CEO who is unexpectedly thrown together with the woman he ends up falling for, whether because he is sentenced to community service for driving recklessly, being courted by a new publicist, or is forced to be best man to her maid of honor. Each relationship starts out as a fling and progresses to love.

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