



Central Rappahannock Regional  
**Library**  
INSPIRING LIFELONG LEARNING

# **Kissing Books for Everyone: Helping Romance Readers Find Diverse Love in the Stacks**

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# Today, we'll discuss:



- Why readers love romance and what makes the genre tick
- Why minority representation matters in romance
- How libraries can build and promote a diverse romance collection, and why you should
- Popular and upcoming romance titles and authors to know



# What makes a romance novel?

Two things make any romance novel:

1. A happy ending, also known as a HEA (happily ever)
2. A central love story

**It must have both to be a romance novel!**

Sexual content is optional.



# Who is the romance reader?

Romance leads all other adult genres in sales.

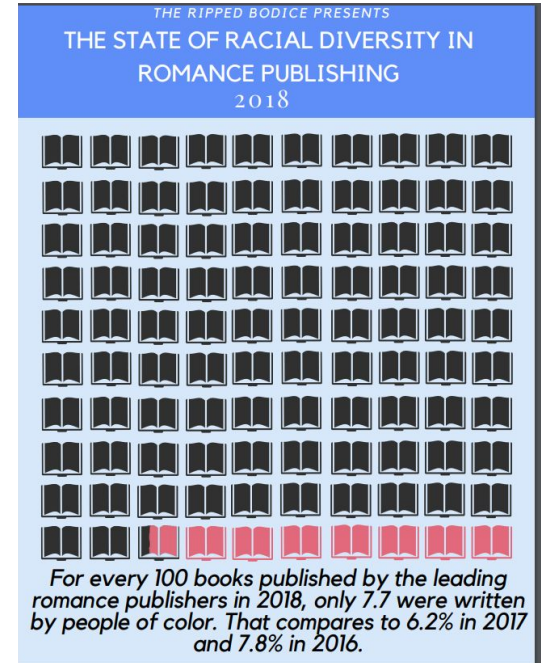
- Female: 82%
- Male: 18%
- Average age of the romance reader: 35–39 years old
- Ethnicity: 73% White/Caucasian, 12% Black/African American, 7% Latino/Hispanic, and 4% Asian/Asian American
- Sexual orientation: 86% heterosexual or straight; 9% bisexual, pansexual, or other bi+ identity; 2% gay or lesbian

*From "The Romance Book Buyer 2017: A Study by NPD Book for Romance Writers of America."*



# The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing Report

- The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing Report tracks the publication of books written by authors of color and indigenous peoples in the romance genre.
- Out of 20 publishers surveyed, **only one** improved from both 2016 to 2017 and from 2017 to 2018
- 18 out of 20 publishers chose to have 90% or more of their books written by White authors
- Does not address LGBTQ or disability representation



# The State of Racial Diversity in Romance Publishing Report

## ♥ Ripped Bodice Bestsellers 2018 ♥

A Princess in Theory by Alyssa Cole  
The Kiss Quotient by Helen Hoang  
The Wedding Date by Jasmine Guillory  
A Study in Scarlet Women by Sherry Thomas  
An Extraordinary Union by Alyssa Cole  
The Hating Game by Sally Thorne  
Heroine's Journey by Sarah Kuhn  
Heroine Complex by Sarah Kuhn  
The Duchess Deal by Tessa Dare  
Next Year in Havana by Chanel Cleeton

**80% OF THESE BOOKS ARE WRITTEN BY AUTHORS OF COLOR**

**The most common refrain from publishers remains:  
These books don't sell.  
Yet they seem to fly off our shelves...**



# About the RITA awards...

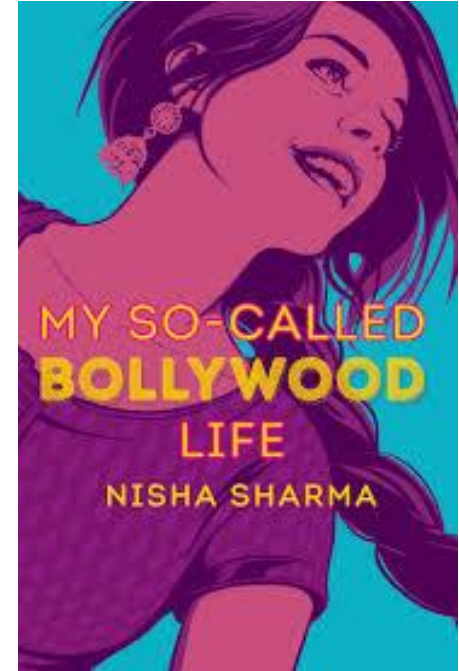
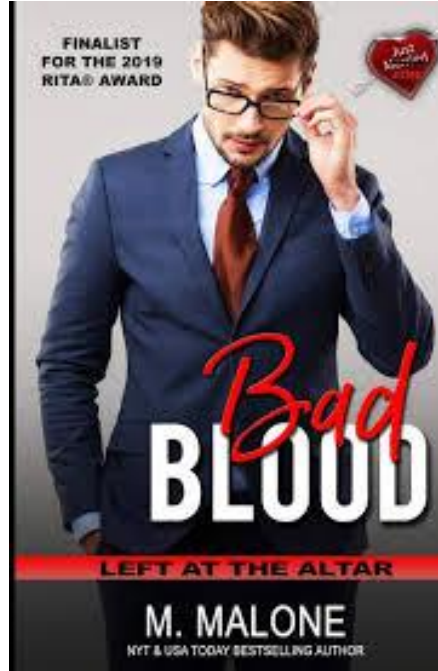
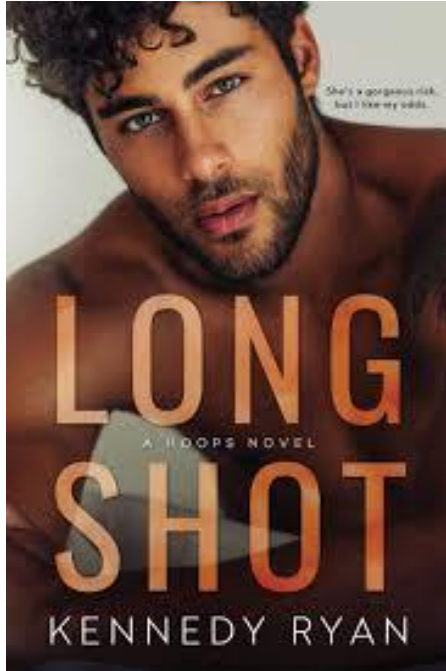
The RITA awards are the most prominent awards in romance. They are presented by Romance Writers of America and awards books in 13 categories.

- Judging is a peer-review system notorious for unconscious (and conscious) bias
- Many authors of color have stopped participating because they felt it was a waste of their money (pay to play)
- As of 2018, less than one percent of RITA winners have been authors of color and zero Black authors had ever won a category RITA





# 2019 RITA winners



“Every story I’m writing is in a way something that I wish I had had when I was younger, or even right now. You know, maybe some 15-year-old or 16-year-old will pick this up and read this and hopefully maybe feel the same way that I felt the first time I picked up a romance novel with a black heroine.”

*Alyssa Cole, Romance Author*



“[I seek out Afro-Latinx romance novels] because I’m tired of only seeing us in ‘issue’ books. [...] In romance, Afro-Latinx characters get their HEA (Happily Ever After), and I want more of that. With these stories, we also have the opportunity to do away with the harmful stereotypes of how we live.”

*Linda Camacho, Literary Agent*



**What can WE do?**



# Change your library's collection



## Does your library...

- Require a certain number of “professional” reviews before you buy a title?
- Weed books entirely based on number of circs?
- Do more than just display “diverse” books once a month for heritage months?
- Buy from small and independent presses?

As of 2006, 99.7% of public libraries had a romance collection. What percentage of yours is by marginalized authors?

Source: Angie Manfredi, [Fat Girl Reading](#)



# Collection Development Challenges

- Self-published vs. traditional publishing
  - Increasing numbers of original cataloging, shrinking cataloging staff
  - Fewer professional reviews
- E-book only formats and limited availability
- VOLUME



# Brace yourself for pushback

- We don't have \_\_\_\_\_ people here
- Romance / \_\_\_\_\_ romance doesn't circulate
- Diverse books are a trend
- We only care about QUALITY
- I don't like those kinds of books



# How do you promote romance novels at your library?

**Table 1.** Percent of Libraries Providing Romance Genre Promotion or Programming

Method Used	Percent (%)
Displays of romance novels	41
Reader advisory assistance with romance novels	56
General reader advisory tools	55
Romance-specific reader advisory tools	22
Provide romance-related magazines, e-zines, or journals	8
Other methods of romance promotion	7
Romance-oriented book discussion groups	6
Romance author visits or book signings	13
Other types of cultural programming	4

*n* = 396; total greater than 100 percent as respondents had the option to choose multiple answers

Source: *"Promoting Romance Novels in American Public Libraries," Public Libraries Magazine*





# Romance Reader's Advisory 101

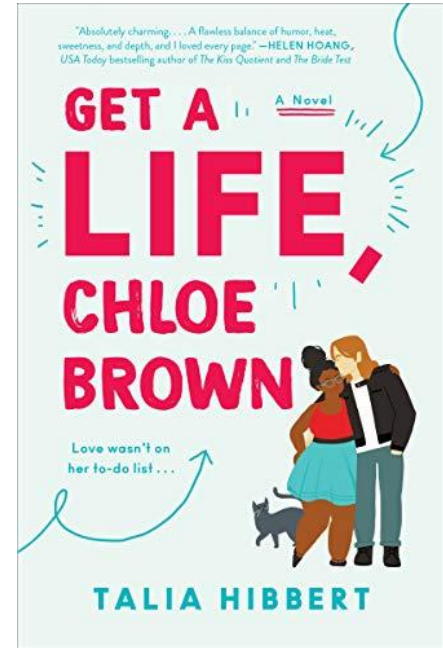
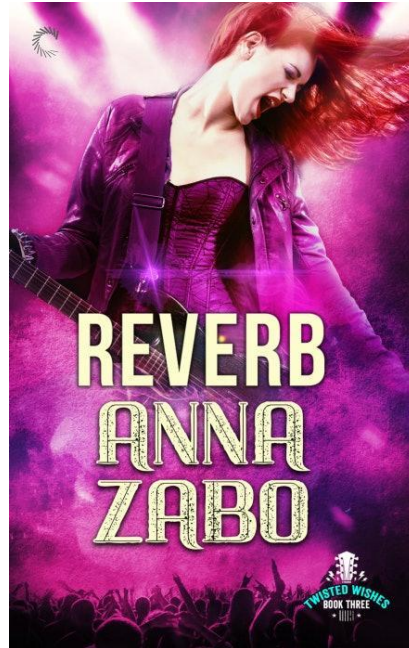
- Romance readers have very specific tastes. Listen and give them what they want!
  - Sub-genre is about book style: historical, contemporary, paranormal, romantic suspense
  - Tropes are plot characteristics: marriage of convenience, friends to lovers, secret romance, soulmate, second chance at love
- Is your library romance reader friendly? What if the romance reader is a person of color, or trans, or autistic?



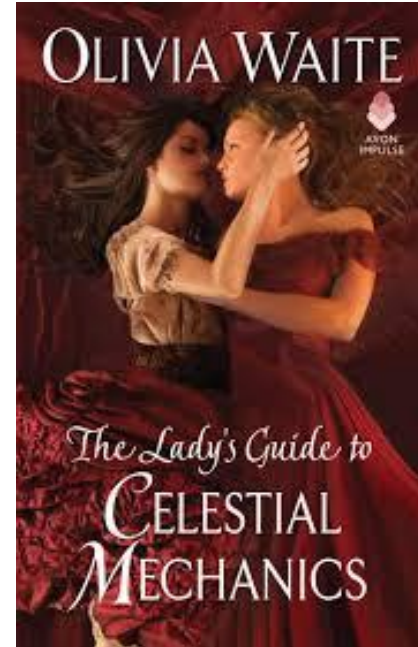
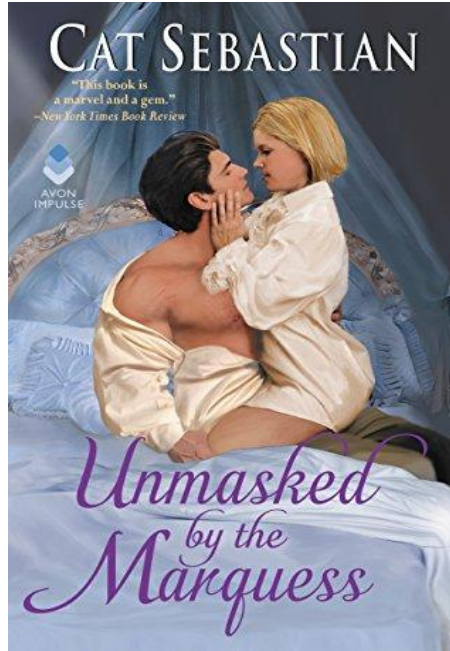
# Sub-Genres



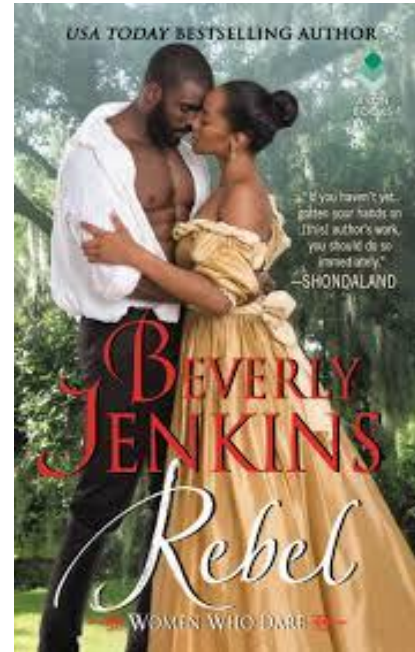
# Timeframe: Contemporary



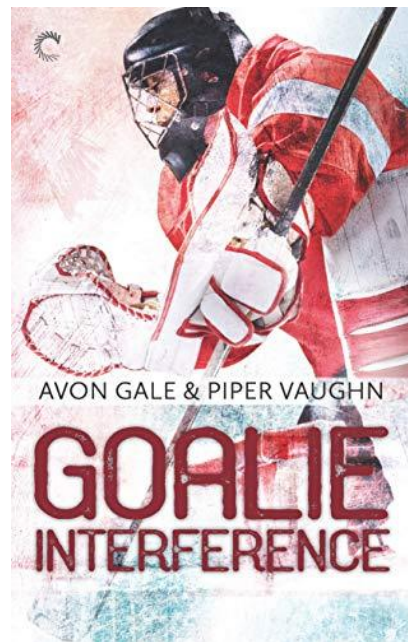
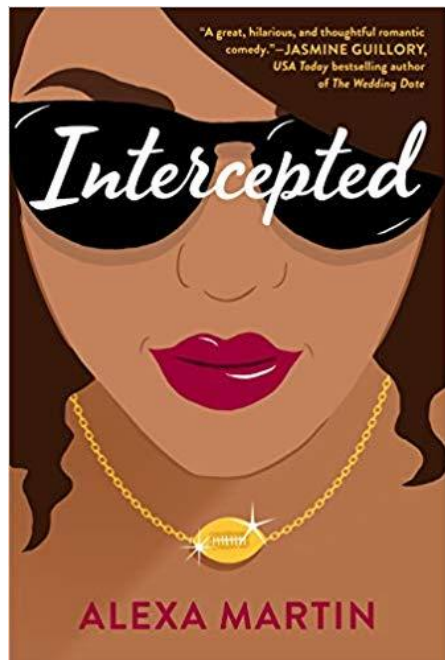
# Timeframe: Historical



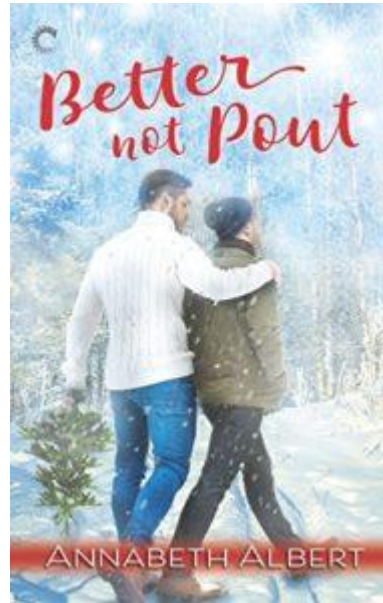
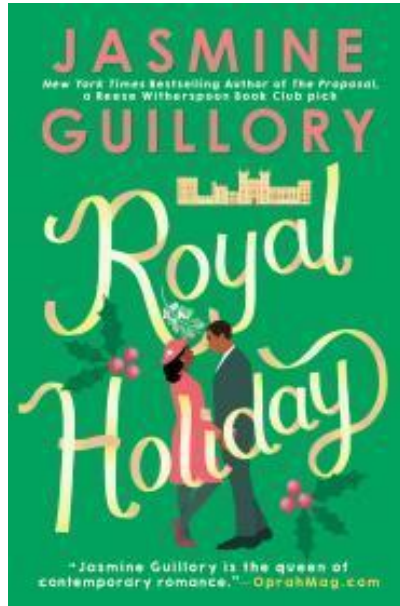
# Timeframe: Historical



# Sports

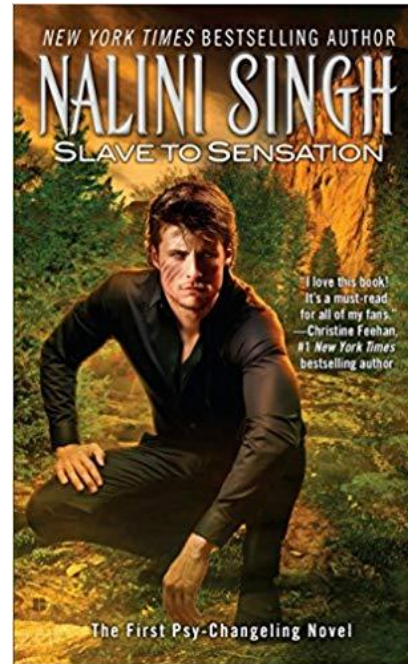
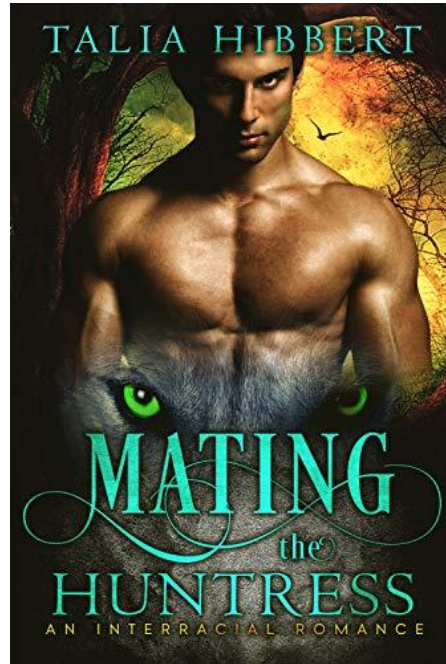


# Christmas



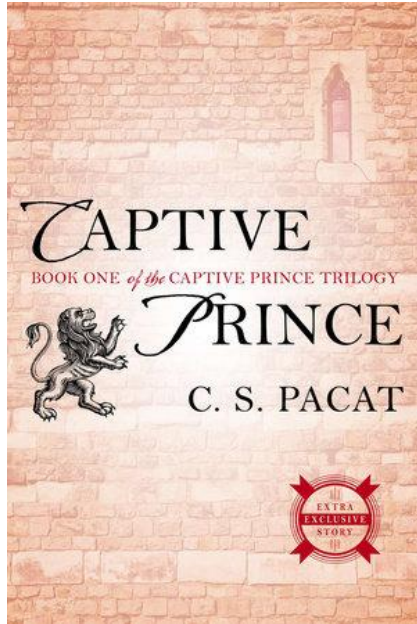


# Paranormal Romance

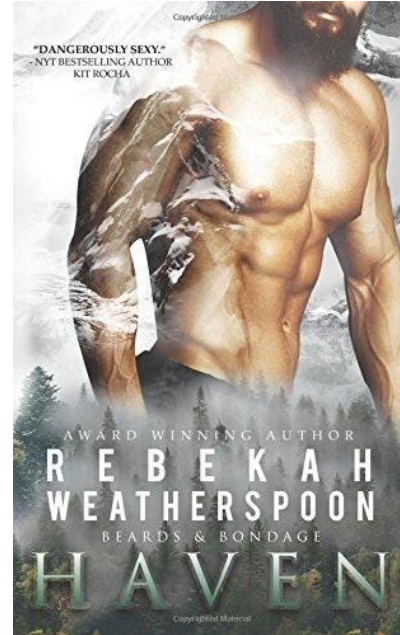




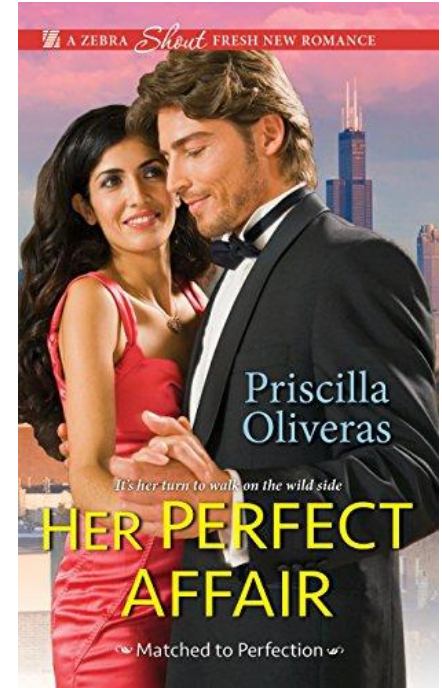
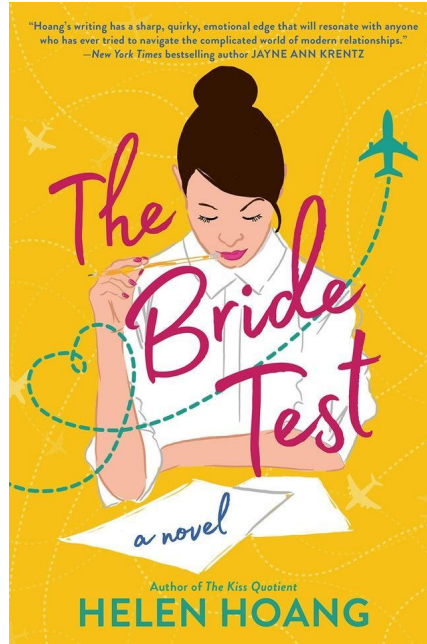
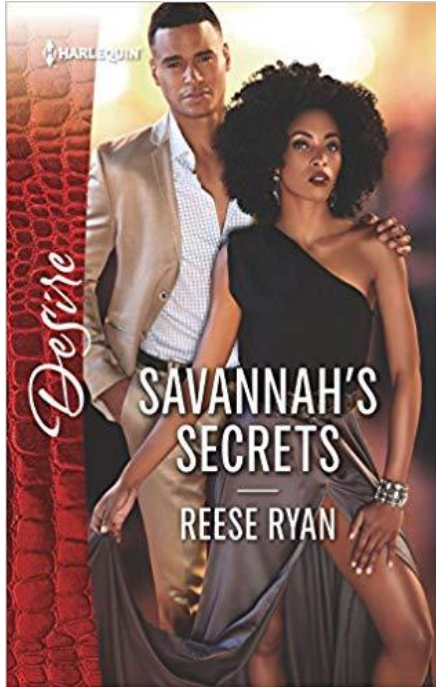
# Genreblend: Fantasy & Sci-Fi



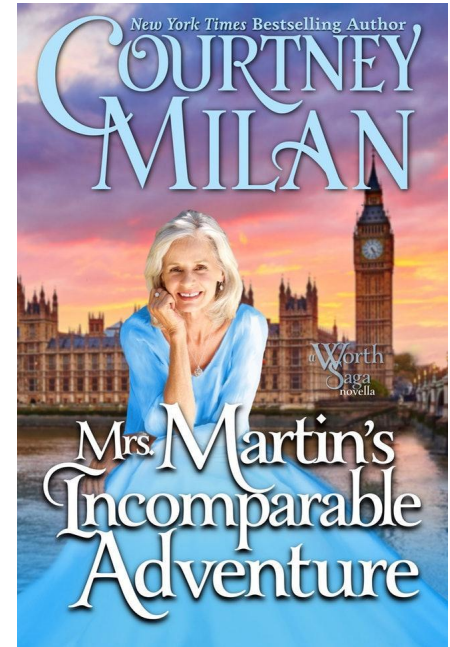
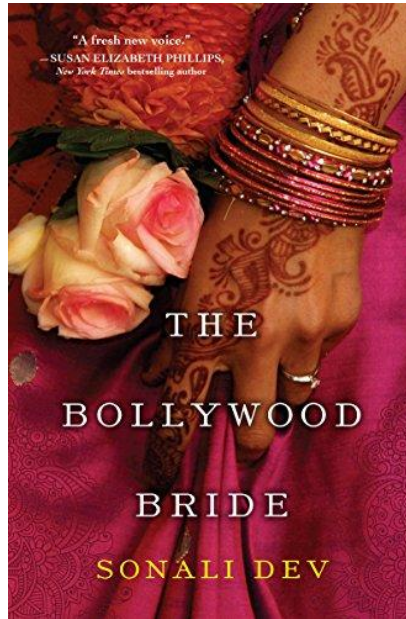
# “How spicy do you prefer your romance?”



# “What are your favorite tropes?”

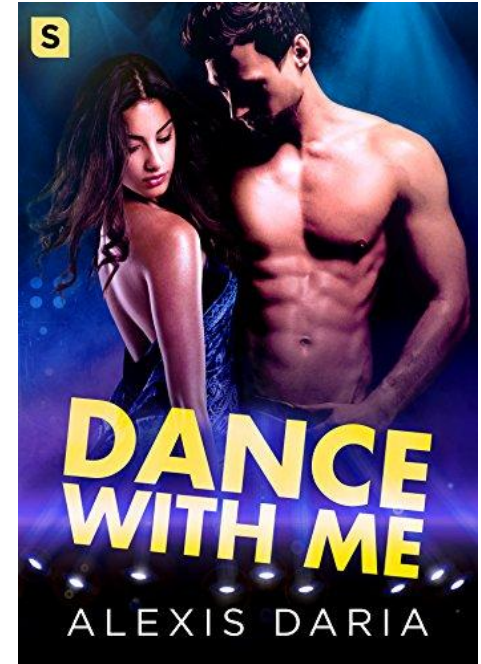
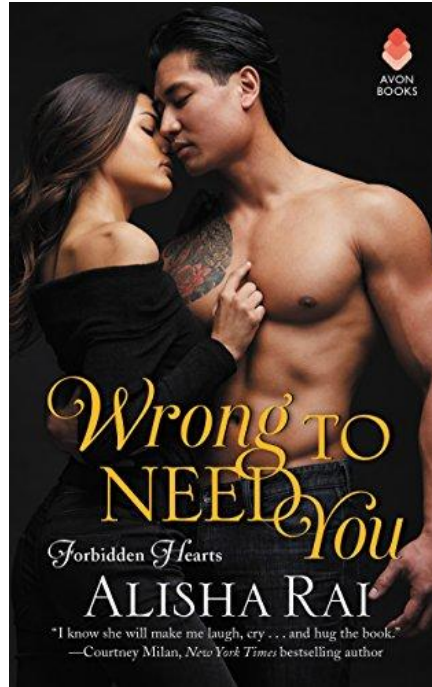
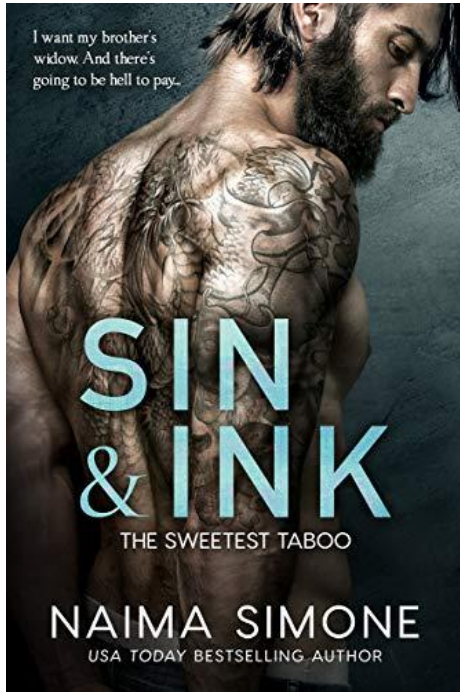


# Friends/Enemies to Lovers





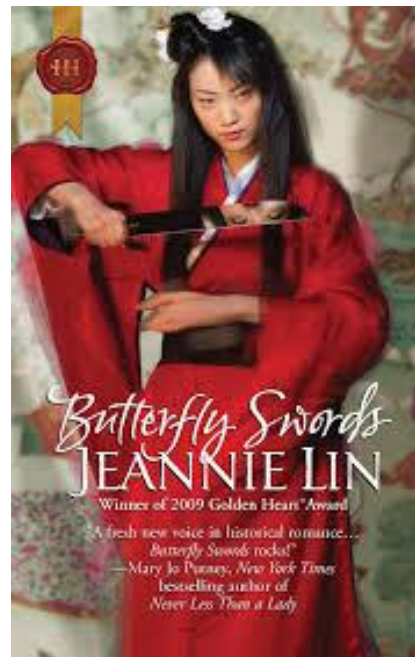
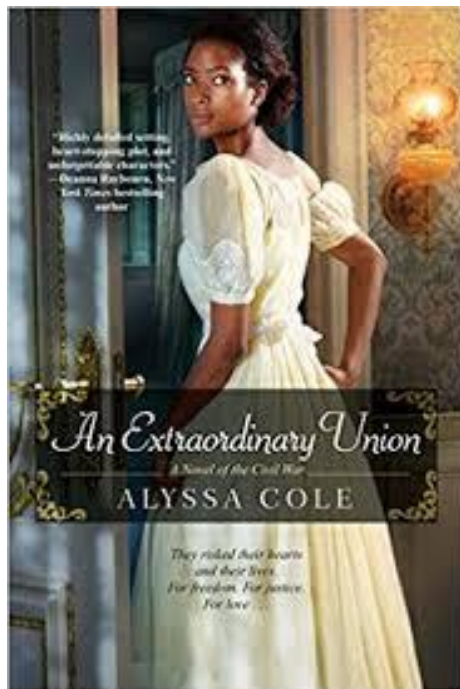
# Forbidden Romance



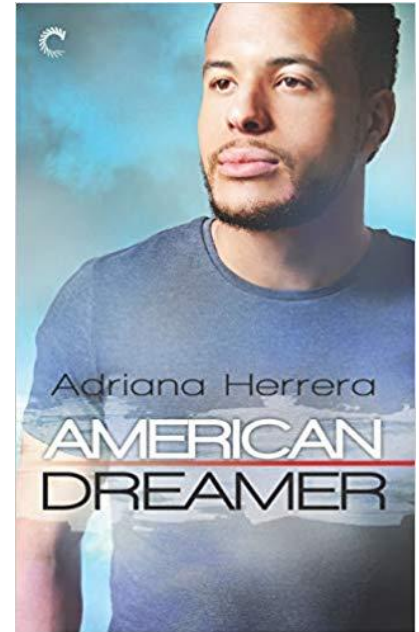
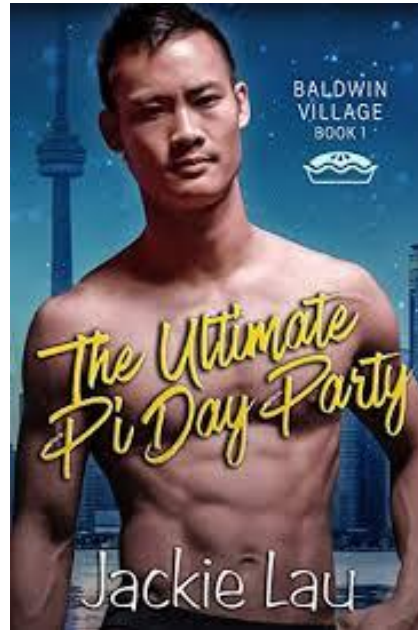
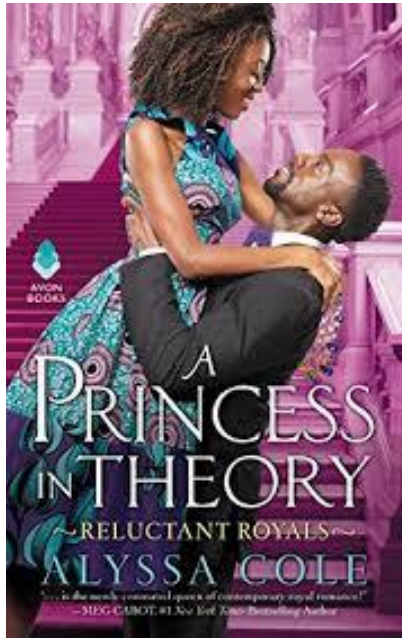
# Popular Series



# Historical Romance Series

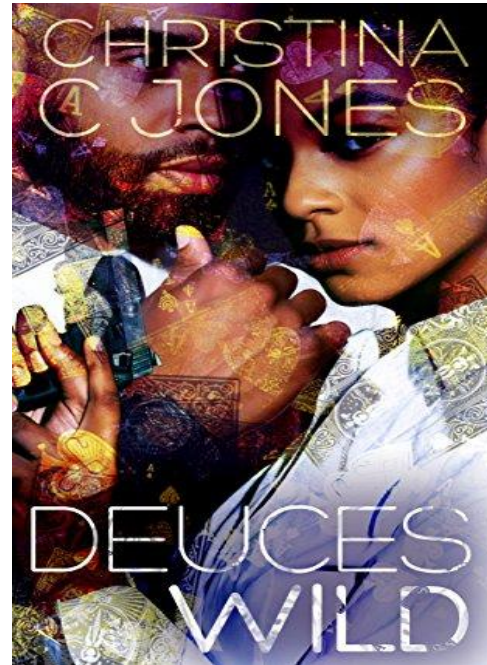
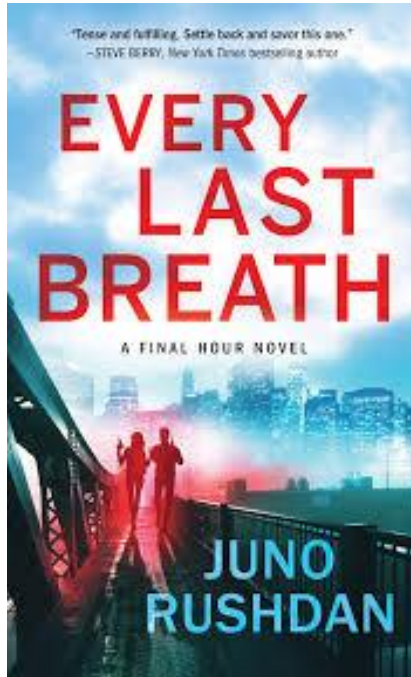


# Contemporary Romance Series



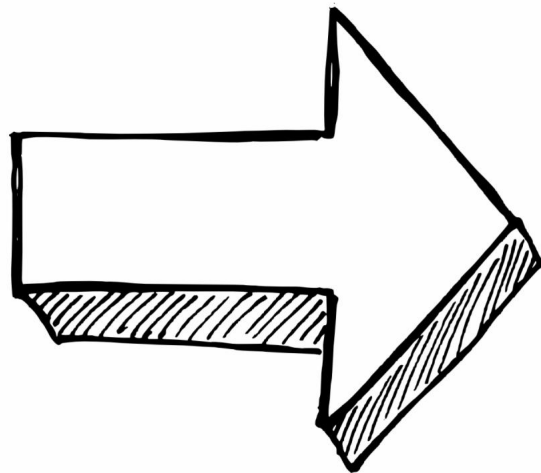


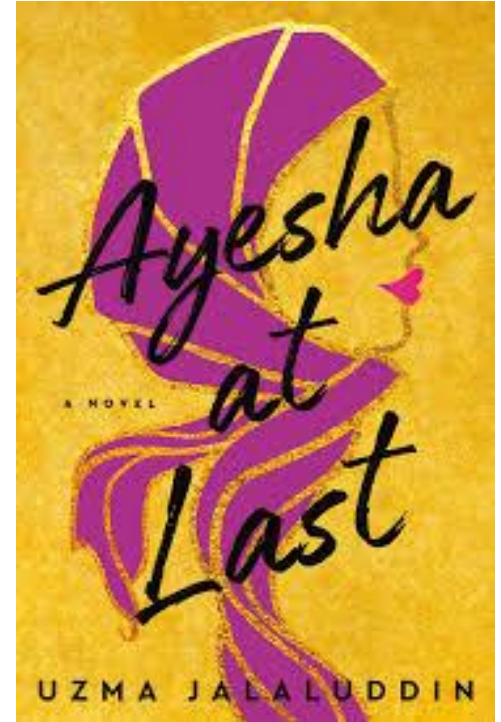
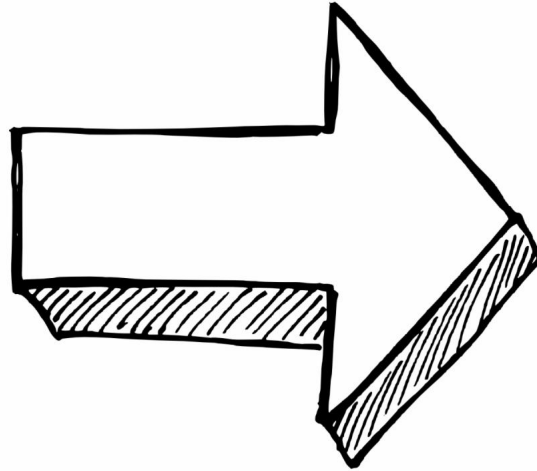
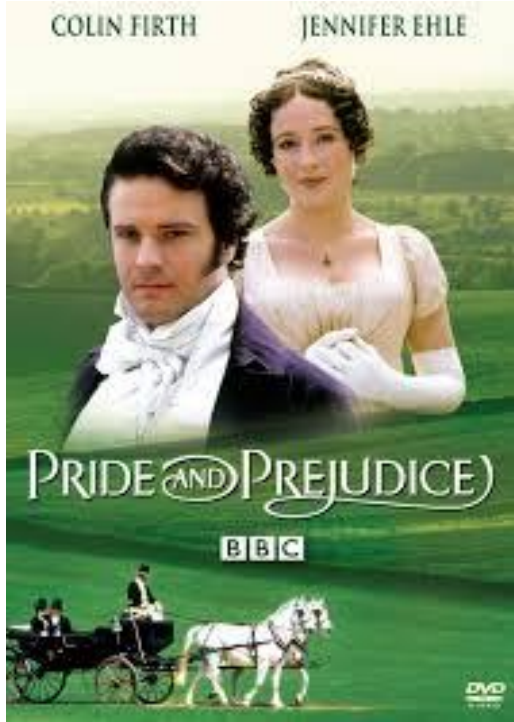
# Romantic Suspense Series



**If You Liked, Then Try...**











# Keep Learning

- Blogs
  - Girl, Have You Read? <http://girlhaveyouread.com/> - Reviews, podcast, new release index & author directory centering Black romance
  - Love In Panels <http://www.loveinpanels.com/> - Inclusive romance (& comics) reviews and book index with heat index
  - Romance Sparks Joy <http://www.romancesparksjoy.com> - Blog and book club promoting authors of color & other marginalized groups
  - Smart Bitches, Trashy Books <https://smartbitchestrashybooks.com> - Reviews, industry insight, podcast, book finder
- Podcasts
  - RomBkPod - Weekly podcast on diverse romance, one trope per month
  - When In Romance - Bookriot. Biweekly, reader-focused
- Social Media
  - @WOCInRomance - Weekly roundups and new releases



# Questions? Thanks!

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