

# **A Potpourri of Happy Endings: An Analysis of Subgenres of Romance Novels**

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A potpourri is a mixture of flowers, herbs, or spices kept in a jar for scent. This chapter analyzes 32 different romances from eight very different subgenres offering the reader enticing choices. Romance writers take you to new places where you learn from the challenges faced by their characters. There are pleasant surprises and disappointments. Occasionally, challenging philosophical, moral, and ethical questions arise. Romances offer a chance to learn and grow, as well as, escape.

The analysts used the following taxonomy to categorize romance novels. The term ‘genre’ means an entire category of literature like romance novels. Within each subgenre there are further divisions called subcategories. For example, romance novels are a genre. A subgenre is fantasy and the subcategory is vampires. The subgenres analyzed in this chapter have varying degrees of specificity. With Gothic, Medical, and Fantasy subgenres the reader gets what they expect: unusual houses or castles, doctors and nurses, or wolves and vampires. Subgenres like Adult, Black, Sports, and LGBTQ+ need more key words because they are so broad. For instance, a contemporary adult Black romance leads the reader to a fairly defined class of novels. At times, the researchers will refer readers to other subgenres. However, they utilize the same methodology for analysis throughout this paper.

## **Medical Romances**

Medical Romances focus on the lives of medical professionals and the romantic associations and dalliances that develop between them. These books feature physicians, nurses, and other healthcare workers. They explore the challenges they face in their personal and professional lives. On the surface, it is difficult to understand why anyone would want to read about romance in a hospital setting. For the average person, novels filled with medical technical jargon are off-putting. In their imagination, hospitals are often a place of pain, disease, and death. This misses the point. If you have experience working in a hospital you know there is drama and emotion beyond the “scrubs” among healthcare workers.

Health care workers feel the pain of their patients. They rejoice when they heal, and grieve when they die. It is not so much the institution, but the people who work in them. They literally work in a life and death situation and are always striving to bring hope and healing to their patients. There is a wide-range of medical romance novels from Christian to those that feature more intimate romantic interactions. What determines their excellence is their ability to portray the emotional challenges inherent in the medical profession.

Registered nurse Laura Scott, a Christian Romance writer, displays extensive knowledge of the inner workings of hospitals. Such personal experience helps her describe testing and treatment for debilitating autoimmune diseases like muscular dystrophy with authority. In *Broken Dreams* (2023), she reveals the challenges of a rehabilitation ward in a Veterans Administration hospital and in *Crushed Promises* (2024); she portrays the high intensity nature of an ER in a general hospital.

Both novels employ the same trope. A physician, confronted with a debilitating medical condition, is forced to alter the trajectory of his medical career. The love interest must overcome problems

related to family. Characters in both novels refer to God's plan for them. Sexual relationships are limited to hugs. Kisses range from warm to edgy as relationships move toward love and marriage. Strong males solve problems and protect their love interest. Both novels employ mid-plot twists that heighten the tension, physical abuse by a staff member in *Promises* and the shooting of a policeman in *Dreams*. The physician in *Dreams* is a male and a female in *Promises*. In addition, *Promises* features a real world mystery centered on the theft of narcotics from the hospital. Scott uses clear, straightforward, often-humorous style, to give real insight into the lives of healthcare providers.

Hopefully, the social movement and awareness campaign against sexual abuse and harassment has changed attitudes since Grace Devon wrote *Medical Romance: Her Trauma Doctor* (2016) and *Medical Romance: Her Hot Doctor* (2016). The problem with both novels, and with all doctor-nurse relationships, is the unequal power and status between the two parties. Even so, such novels enjoy tremendous popularity. A large number of erotic and pornographic sources adhere to this trope. *Goodreads* lists 505 similar works.

In *Trauma Doctor* (2016), the main character, registered nurse Lucy Lavigne, verbally challenges Doctor Knox Paten for his brusque uncaring attitude toward patients. In real life, this act would guarantee a note in her personnel file or dismissal. Interaction between the two improves when they both work on a project for healing the lives of veterans suffering from PTSD. She learns Dr. Palen's troubling disposition is a result of his experiences as an Army Doctor in combat. Her support and his action in averting the suicide of a veteran in their program, lead to wellness and romance.

Devon's *Medical Romance: Her Hot Doctor* (2016) is the most troubling of the medical romances read by the researchers. Zeb Morgan, a neurosurgeon falls in love with patient Cassidy Novotny. His prescription for brain surgery, at which he assists, is an erotic dance for the patient in her hospital room followed by sexual intercourse when she returns home. Such action breaks the sacred trust between physician and patient. It violates the AMA code of ethics forbidding physicians from putting their interests ahead of patients. Such behavior is a good way for a physician to lose his livelihood and medical license. In addition, both of Devon's novels contained so many typos and miss-spellings that it constituted a distraction for the reader.

Most writers learn that each profession has a fairly standard rubric of the necessary preparation regarding educational background, hands-on experience, and previous recommendations. Indeed, it is refreshing to the reader to note specific activities that indicate a thorough knowledge of a character's profession. Medicine is a complex milieu with many levels of employment and a plethora of professional requirements. Writers of romance novels featuring the medical profession vary in their knowledge. Those, who have a rich background and personal experience in this field, are well worth reading. Some, unfortunately, misrepresent activities and relationships.

### **Fantasy Romances**

Magic and love collide in this captivating category. Seven per cent of romance novels are in the fantasy subgenre. The novels in this imaginative and challenging subgenre feature storylines that include vampires, werewolves, wolves, and other assorted magical creatures. These settings are far removed from the easily identifiable masculine characters in English and Cowboy Romances. Nevertheless they are true romances using all the conventions of the genre, an emphasis on relationships, and a love story with a happy ending. The effect of magic on the main characters is often portrayed as both good and evil. The principle fantasy romance characters often bond in a struggle or ongoing battle against dark magic or evil creatures. These imaginative romances tend to emphasize either the romance or the fantasy. Excellent authors blend the two elements in a seamless whole.

Publishers distinguish between "romantic fantasy" where the romance is most important and "fantasy romance" where the fantasy elements are most important. It all depends on the author. The following two novels illustrate the point. Rose Wulf's *To Love a Sentry* (2023) is a fantasy romance that reads like a graphic novel. Rochelle uses her magic to defend her kingdom as a sentry. But an explosion destroys the wall that separates the two kingdoms and she finds herself the captive of a soldier, sentry, and teacher from another kingdom. They are soon involved in a sexual relationship. He helps her strengthen

her magic. Working together they better both their worlds. In this case, the fantasy served as a backdrop for an erotic relationship.

L.B. Anne's. *The Girl Who Looked Beyond the Star*, a young adult Christian fantasy, lies at the other extreme. The fantasy elements predominate to such an extent that it is a romance only in a limited sense. Sheena Meyers is a middle-school student growing up in a Black family in a small town in Michigan. Her special gift lies in seeing and conversing with Angels. The key to unraveling that gift lies with an elderly White man she meets in a hospital. He tells the nurses that she is his granddaughter. When they question his assertion, he refers to the brown bag test, a discriminatory practice within the African American community in the 20th century, in which an individual is denied privileges based on their skin tone as compared to the color of a brown paper bag. The old man dies, but not until after he teaches her how she can use her gifts to make the world a better place.

**Wolves** - Writers through history have used the terms “wolf” and “werewolf” to mean whatever their story demands. Romance writers use them in two different ways. First, think of primitive humans who don the skin of a wolf to give them power during a hunt or in battle. Shape-shifters have control over their transformation into real wolves. They remember what happens to them as wolves and humans. They enjoy the freedom and closeness to nature brought by this experience. Their human self and wolf self co-exist in the same body and can communicate with each other. In a shape shifter wolf, the metal silver slows down their healing process drastically.

Fantasy romance writers love to write stories about wolves because they are social animals, hunt in packs, and mate for life. In addition, they have a keen sense of smell, communicate subconsciously with the pack, have decreased healing time, and heightened attraction to their destined mate. Shape shifting runs in families. If a shape-shifter has a child with a human, the offspring is always a shape shifter. However, some stories say that it depends on recessive genes. In these cases, the children can be either human or wolf. A person cannot shift into a wolf until a certain age, usually 16, so the parents do not know until then whether or not their children are shifters.

The second way writers use werewolves, or loup-garou in French speaking areas, is as mythical beasts, often in opposition to vampires. Werewolves do not have agency over their transformation. Remember the agony J. K. Rowling's character Remus John Lupin in her *Harry Potter* series. He loathes and fears his involuntary transformation into a werewolf when the moon is full. Humans are not born werewolves; rather, circumstances beyond their control, like sorcerers using magic curses, turn them into werewolves. Sometimes the bite or scratch of an existing werewolf transmits this condition. Werewolves are immortal. They are known for their aggressiveness, speed, strength, and the ability to land on their feet from high falls. Silver, especially in the form of a bullet, can kill a werewolf.

The first novel analyzed, Patricia Briggs' *Hunting Ground* (2009), was a messy jumble of an urban fantasy romance set in the rain-soaked night streets of Seattle. A werewolf pack mates Anna, a victim of abuse, to Charles, a dominant wolf and enforcer for a pack of North American wolves. His mission is to rehabilitate her, ease his penchant for killing, and find love. A summit meeting of wolves involves them in a battle for supremacy in the wolf world between the good American wolves that see recognition and acceptance for what they are and the bad European wolves that wish to keep their identities secret. Fairies, vampires, wolves, witches, and pack magic attack them on their quest to keep the peace between warring factions by solving the mystery of who killed the leader of the European wolves. There are few scenes of intimacy between the main characters and lots of information on pack structure.

The researchers found more to like in successive wolf novels. The call of the wild for a destined or fated mate resulted in hot crisp love stories. The joy found in the running and play of the wolf pack appealed to the researchers. The protectiveness of the Alpha wolf, pack, and mate provided a reassuring theme. Terry Spear's *You Had Me a Wolf* (2020) provided ample evidence of these three tropes. Private investigator Nicole meets Blake at a ski lodge he owns with his brother. She is on the track of a trio of insurance frauds. They are both wolves and the romance quickly heats up as Blake pursues his quarry. Nicole, a brilliant and focused she-wolf initiates intimacy. His family and the wolf pack support their mating and provide interesting subplots and opportunities for more novels in the series.

Perhaps, because they make good stocking stuffers, publishers make a practice of debuting Wolf romances at Christmas time. Julie Trettel's, *Christmas at Kaitilyn's Place* (2022), revisits all the treasured wolf tropes. Brock, a single parent wolf, shows up in the territory of Cadence's wolfpack during the holiday season. He yells at her and tells her to go away at their first meeting. However, Cadence, a wolf, a witch, and a healer immediately bonds with Hazel, Brock's 12-year-old daughter. She includes her and her grumpy father in the social events held by members of the local pack, like finding the tree, decorating it, a tea, and a Christmas ball. Most significantly, she realizes she and Brock are true mates and nothing can or should get in the way of their mating. Like many wolf romance novels, the other members of the pack provide characters for more novels in a series. Trettel's book has hallmarks of good writing, clean layout and easy to read font. It touched on universal themes like love, family, and, support.

**Vampire** novels are a popular subgenre in fantasy romance literature. Readers thrill to the intensity and complexity of the relationship between vampires and humans. These novels employ three main tropes. The first concerns love between species. The second is a love triangle involving rivalry between two love interests for the affections of a vampire. This often involves a human woman torn between her love for a vampire and a human. Charlene Hartnady's *Chosen By the Vampire Kings* (2015) flips this trope. Two handsome vampire kings vie for the hand of Tanya, a curvy human bookstore owner. This book employs a third trope where a world of vampires and other beings exists along side humans, except every 100 years when the vampires appear in search of a queen. This creates a dark enchanted world for the characters to navigate, and adds layer upon layer of danger and sexuality to the story.

Critics look to Anne Rice's, *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) as the starting point for this subgenre, noted for its darkness and eroticism. Lestat, the hero of her ground breaking novel, wakes up in a coffin in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans where evil is omnipresent and a necessity. He joined a rock band called Satan's Night Out. Rice uses florid prose in her back-story to establish a history of vampires starting with Lestat's experiences as a hunter and wolf killer, who ponders the meaninglessness of the universe with his soulmate. Popular actors Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise starred in a film based on Rice's work *Interview with the Vampire* (1991).

The most popular current vampire romance is Stephanie Meyer's Young Adult Twilight series available to the public in novels, films, and television. The first novel, *Twilight* (2005) details the relationship of Bella, a human teenager, and Edward, a vampire that drinks animal blood rather than human. Meyer's prose tends toward the florid. Bella's infatuation with Edward seems most superficial. Her description of Edward's appearance is unlike any other fictional vampire.

The first 100 pages of the book describe high school life in the small town of Forks, Washington. Edward's, vampire pale pallor, inhuman good looks, muscular body, and golden eyes that become black when he is thirsty attract Bella. She describes him as "dazzling" (*Twilight*, p. 177, 224). In the sunlight his skin "sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds on the surface" (*Twilight*. 280). By the third 100 pages Bella discovers he is a vampire and falls in love with him. The first real action occurs in the last 400 pages of the book. James, a member of a vampire coven that does drink human blood, attacks Bella, and tracks her when she flees to Phoenix, Arizona to escape him. James almost kills her, but Edward and his siblings intervene, kill James, and get Bella to the safety of a hospital.

For those who want even more vampires, there are the spinoffs from the 1992 film, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; including a seven season TV series, novelization of those shows, and originals from a multitude of writers. The theme is the same for all these shows. Buffy is one in a long line of young women chosen specifically to seek out and destroy vampires, demons, and other forces of darkness. Buffy establishes a support group of friends who aid her in this mission. Their battles are frequent since the high school they attend sits on the gate to hell.

Vampire romance novels enjoy an enduring and popular niche in American popular culture. They captivate readers with their unique blend of darkness and desire. . Vampire characters represent a true escape from reality, allowing readers to indulge in the fantasy of eternal love and passion. The inherent tension between the mortal protagonist and immortal vampire creates a dynamic that keeps readers engaged until the final page. The themes of desire, power, and redemption explored in vampire romance novels resonate with readers on a deep emotional level, offering a cathartic experience that allows them to

explore their own desires and fears in a safe environment. For these reasons, Vampire romance novels have effortlessly made the transition to highly profitable films and TV series.

Fantasy romance novels and science fiction romance novels, feature completely different settings, but have much in common. Both take readers out of the mundane world of everyday life by evoking imaginative worlds, extraordinary relationships, and exploration of complex human emotions. In fantasy romance, magic and mythical creatures play a significant role in creating a sense of escapism. In science fiction romances advanced technology, space exploration, and futuristic societies provide a backdrop that transcend time and space. Both subgenres use unique settings to enhance the emotional depth of the relationships portrayed and ensure the required resolution of the story.

### **Science Fiction Romances**

Science fiction and romance constitute two distant galaxies, which rarely intersect. Balancing deep philosophical questions with authentic, heartfelt relationships can be arduous. The focus on technology and fantastical elements can overshadow the delicate nuances of love and intimacy. This invites exploration into why crafting romance within a science fiction setting poses a challenge to the writer. The futuristic and often dystopian backdrops of science fiction can overshadow the emotional depth required to develop a compelling romantic narrative. The portrayal of love in a science fiction context demands a departure from conventional norms and societal structures. Creating believable relationships amidst alien civilizations, time travel, or dystopian worlds necessitates a thoughtful analysis of human emotions.

The striking blue cyborg on the cover of Melisse Aires' adult science fiction novel, *Her Cyborg Awakes*, alerts readers that this story is hot. Sabralla is a consort to a warlord who has little time for her. She has a handsome cyborg servant, Qy. A computer program addled his brain and rendered him asexual. He attends to Sabralla's every need. When her warlord orders her to "entertain" his top officers, she and Qy escape in a luxury space ship. She pilots the ship, docks it, and performs an operation on Qy that saves his life. In the process, he remembers he is a fierce warrior, and recovers his sexuality. The sex signal occurs when he asks her what she wants. She responds with her body. The last half of the novel elaborates on that fact in detail.

Lois Bujold has a reputation as a writer with many well-turned phrases. Her sci-fi romance novel, *A Civil Campaign* (1999) details the attempt of Lord Miles Vorkosigan to woo and wed a beautiful widow, Ekaterin Vorsoisson. His plan is to be kind, nice to her nine year-old son, and let things develop slowly. Eventually, she responds. The other volumes in this series may have more excitement and adventure, but this novel moves at the unhurried pace of its plot. It features numerous characters with strange names and complex relationships that serve the purpose of furthering the plot.

Michelle Diener's *Dark Horse* (2015) has everything science fiction aficionados want: space ships, aliens, and wars between galaxies. Aliens from another world capture Rose McKenzie. They look on her as a subject for study. She falls in love with the captain of the alien ship, Dav Jallan, and discovers that the two species are sexually compatible. Perhaps, there was a common ancestor eons ago or parallel evolution. She proves her mettle defending the spaceship against its enemies and earns the trust of her captors. This involves building a caring relationship with an artificial intelligence hidden on the space ship and helping it escape to another compatible ship. Rose finds happiness with Dav, but her true romantic relationship is with the AI she freed.

Alechia Dow's *The Sound of Stars* (2020) fits into a number of different categories: young adult, romance, science fiction, Black, or LGBTQ+. The story involves a Black girl who loves books. She is imprisoned in an apartment building in New York by aliens. She believes gender makes no difference when it comes to love and has a relationship with another girl. Soon, however, she falls in love with a male alien who loves pop music. She provides music recordings and teaches him about emotions. With his help, she escapes from confinement. They go on a wild road trip to save humanity, but are recaptured. They escape a second time, blast off in a space ship, journey to his home planet, and confer with his mother on how to save Earth. This novel sounds like a confusing jumble, and it is. As far as science fiction and romance, it is a difficult mix. However, if the main characters wear skintight space gear and are in space long enough, anything can happen.

## Gothic Romances

Gothic romances have captivated readers for centuries due to their unique blend of mystery and passion. Often the settings, ancient castles, haunted mansions, or isolated landscapes, create a sense of impending disaster and lurking danger that draws readers in. The element of the supernatural, with ghosts, vampires, and otherworldly beings, adds an exciting dimension. Gothic romances revolve around forbidden love, strong emotions, and complex characters dealing with secrets and hidden pasts. The tension between the light and especially dark aspect of human nature portrayed in these novels fascinates readers. These deep emotional themes resonate with audiences on a deep emotional level making them both captivating and relatable.

The publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 established Gothic as a type of romance novel. A dark foreboding atmosphere characterized this work. Walpole described the subterranean regions of the castle, "Now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness" (p. 14). Gothic romances feature outlandish, even grotesque, characters and events. For example, a huge helmet crashes down and kills the son of the king. Walpole introduced the definitive tropes of the genre such as foreboding castles, cursed families, and a gloomy atmosphere.

Amanda Pagan, a Children's Librarian for the New York Public Library, noted female leads dominated gothic romance, especially after the publication of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in 1847. A young woman struggling to maintain her independence as she falls for a dark, brooding, handsome man became a genre-defining plot for Gothic romances. A renewed public interest in these stories came with the publication of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) upon its publication.

Dean Koontz, a popular and prolific modern writer, in *Writing for Popular Fiction* (1974), recalled that, when he could not convince a publisher to accept the science fiction he wrote, he turned to Gothic novels. He wrote one in two weeks, attached a female by-line, and upon submission to a publisher, received a healthy advance. He observed more than half the writers in this subgenre were men. He warned prospective writers that they must observe strict rules if they wished to publish in this genre. First, writers must start with a gloomy old house or castle. Second, the heroine must mature during the course of the story. Third, Gothic novels, like Christian romances, do not contain explicit or implied sexual scenes. Fourth, writers should maintain a leisurely pace letting the suspense build on its own. Last, and most important, the story must have a happy ending.

Jennifer Wilde is a pseudonym for Tom E. Huff (1938–1990), a native of Texas who gave up teaching High School English to become a full time novelist. Huff wrote several Gothic novels. The cover of *The Master of Phoenix Hall* (1968) depicts a couple about to embrace. This is about as steamy as this Victorian mystery and Gothic romance gets. The plot involves Angela, a London seamstress, who inherits a house in Cornwall. A robber holds up her coach on her way to her beautiful new house. She and her maid soon have it sparkling clean. The problem is the dank, dark, smelly cellar that contains jars of homemade poisons. Yet, she thinks, there is nothing to worry about. She settles down to peaceful country life and the attentions of the handsome local schoolteacher, Greg Ingram. The only negative is the arrogant master of the estate on which her house stands, Roderick Mellroy, wants to buy her house. Herein lies the mystery. Which of the two men, the gentle schoolteacher or the arrogant Lord is a cruel thief and which is her future love? The answer lies in something hidden in the creepy cellar. Angela grows from a timid seamstress to a member of gentility, with the courage to face down the villain when he tries to kill her.

Modern additions to the genre reflect both terror and romance, while also delivering updated or reimagined versions of familiar tropes. The cover of Violet Hawthorne's *Diary of Evil* (1972) depicts a forlorn looking woman in a blue dress. An ancient house shrouded by dark clouds appears in the background. The story involves the adventures of Pauline Shepherd, a New York secretary, who takes a job on an isolated mist-shrouded island in Long Island Sound. Mr. Buchanan, the owner of the island, hired her to transcribe and edit documents relating to his family history.

Several unusual individuals: a handy man, a nephew of Mr. Buchanan, a private detective, and a business partner populate the island. The detective and the nephew are interested in Pauline as a woman,

but there are no sexual encounters. As she delves into her work, she discovers there is a mystery concerning the deaths of Mr. Buchanan's wife and daughter. The secret lies in the wife's diary that Pauline discovers in an old trunk in the mansion's attic. Pauline demonstrates newfound strength in several dangerous situations, including confronting the killer. With the mystery solved and the villain disposed of in an explosion, Pauline emerges as a wiser and stronger woman for the experience.

In 1983, Gaywyck by Vincent Virga, reinvented the genre with a gay hero and a mysterious ancestral mansion on Long Island. Virga created a story about a mysterious and brooding master of the manor, and replaced the traditional damsel in distress with a handsome young man, Robert Whyte. In summary, Gothic romances fall in and out of favor, but when they do appear they follow the strict rules laid out originally by Walpole as later embellished by Koontz. If you pick a Gothic romance novel you will know two things for sure. First, there is a decrepit castle, mansion, or house. Second, like Christian romances, there are no explicit sex scenes.

### **Adult romance Novels**

Adult or erotic romance novels entwine elements of love, passion, and sensuality. These romances include vivid and descriptive language that explores intimate relationships and sexual encounters between characters. They evoke emotional and physical responses from the reader, drawing them into a world of heightened sensuality and desire. Adult romance novels include approximately nine percent of all romances sold. They feature more sex scenes than other types of romance novels. E. L. James best-selling novel, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), pushed the boundaries, or perhaps, overstepped them, for the types of sex portrayed in these romances.

Sally Thorne's *The Hating Game* (2016) is an adult contemporary romance novel. The trope of this book features enemies becoming lovers, or as the first page in the novel puts it, hate becoming love. Joshua Templeton and Lucy Hutton, the main characters, have adjacent desks in a publishing company. They both compete for a supervisory position. She hates him with a passion, but finds herself strongly attracted to him physically. She has sexual dreams about him and recounts them in an effort to titillate him. They share a passionate kiss in the elevator. The boss tasks them with developing a team building exercise so they are forced to work together and lower some of the barriers between them. They attend a wedding together at a distant city. When they arrive, the couple finds the hotel is overbooked, and they must share a room. Upon entering the room, Lucy declares that sex between the two of them was inevitable and announces, "Let's do this" (p. 256). They continue their relationship even after Joshua takes a job with another firm.

Christiana Lauren's *Josh and Hazel's Guide to Not Dating* (2018) is an adult contemporary novel set in Portland, OR. Hazel is outspoken and irrepressible. She meets Josh, a Korean-American, at a college party. She thinks he is so hot that she tells him she would be honored to have sex. Regardless, it does not work out until ten years later when they meet at another party. Josh is recovering from a difficult break-up. Hazel proposes they double blind date in an effort to find someone new for both of them. They run through several dates and sexual partners without success. Hazel proposes they become sexual partners with no serious commitment. He agrees and they begin a sexual relationship. However, she becomes pregnant. She tells Josh she is pregnant only after she has problems bleeding. At which point, they declare their love for each other. The epilogue portrays them several years later happily married with several children.

Talia Hibbert, a Black author, chronicles the relationship between two unusual characters in *Get a Life Chloe Brown* (2019). This novel is listed as an Adult romance, instead of a Black romance, because the graphic scenes are more typical of adult romances. Chloe, a Black woman, is a computer geek and suffers from a chronic illness. Red, a White man, is an artist and the superintendent of the apartment building in which Chloe lives. Chloe decides her life is going nowhere, so she makes up a to-do list. On the list, is having meaningless, but thoroughly enjoyable sex. At first, she and Red do not like each other, but the physical attraction they feel for each other means Chloe is able to check one thing off her list. Then they have an argument, and break up. In the last few pages of the novel, they reunite and state their love for each other.

All three novelists employ humor and earthy language in detailing sex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All followed the enemies-to-lovers trope. The primary characters initially did not like each other, or were separated by circumstance. After working together on a project or a problem, they developed a sexual relationship. Romance came only after the intimacy. Perhaps, the intimacy was the romance. In any event, the couple's physical intimacy drives the relationship, the result of which is a happy ending. The women are open and direct in asking for what they want with no strings attached. The men are supportive, but somewhat clueless, about the needs and wants of the exceptional women with which they are involved.

### **Black Romances**

Black writers have faced a long history of discrimination, prejudice, and segregation in their efforts to publish their creative works. Black slave narratives like Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861 shocked the sensibilities of Northerners and galvanized the abolitionist movement. It has as much impact today as when it was first written. Black writers continued to write stories of bondage, escape, and freedom after the Civil War. However, publishers often requested that they change the race of Black characters to White and some insisted Blacks could not write at all.

Elsie Washington (1942-2009) wrote the first Black romance novel, *Entwined Destinies* (1984). It featured two African-Americans living in London. Publishers specializing in works aimed at the Black community developed a market created when main-line publishers thought it not profitable. Arabesque Publishing sold to Black Entertainment Works which Harlequin purchased in 2005 under the brand name Kimani. They specialized in romances centered on Black sports heroes. Harlequin phased Kimani out in 2015 and now includes Black romances in its regular offerings. Black authors still find it difficult to find a publisher, and often use independent publishers and the internet to advertise their works.

Black authors have works of merit, but they are hard to categorize. The analysts believed Marcella Bell's *The Rodeo Queen* (2022) belonged in the Cowboy subgenre. This novel, about a Black cowboy and a Cuban Latina rodeo queen added much to cowboy history and belonged in the cowboy subgenre. Similarly, they thought three novels with Black characters belonged in different subgenres. They included L.B. Anne's, *The Girl Who Looked Beyond the Stars* (2019) in fantasy, Alechia Dow's *The Sound of Stars* (2020) in science fiction, and Joy Ohagwu's "Red" (2014) in contemporary Christian suspense.

The researchers created a subgenre for Black romance novels and in so doing gained new insights into how these novels challenge readers on issues of racism, identity, and body image. Black romance novels showcase diverse narratives, characters, and settings. They cater to a wide range of readers. Their primary target audience is Black college educated women. Jessica Pryde, author of *Black Love Matters* (2022), cited a study by the Pew Research Center that showed this group contains the people most likely to read a book. She also noted that it is probable readers will read about Black women with White love interests, despite the fact that the 2020 Census indicated that Black men (24%) are twice as likely to marry outside their race as Black women (12%).

The researchers included the following four novels in the Black Romances subgenre. Simone Wu's *The Laws of Love* (2016), is a contemporary black adult romance focusing on relationships, love, and the everyday struggle faced by Black individuals. The key to the story is the book's cover that depicts an attractive up-scale African-American couple. His hair is in dreadlocks and he is dressed in a suit and tie. She wears a conservative black pantsuit with a white blouse. The image of a gavel appears in the foreground. This novel is one of the many billionaire romance novels with the same plot as *Shades of Grey* (2011). Stephanie Allen, a para-legal and John Pike, head of a multi-million dollar law firm, work late at night on a high profile entertainment case. In the process, they enjoy a torrid romance. She re-locates to another law firm to avoid rumors and innuendoes that she used sex to get ahead, but the couple continues to explore their relationship.

Black historical adult romances are set against the backdrop of key moments in Black history. These novels highlight themes of resilience, strength, and overcoming adversity. *An Extraordinary Union* (2017) about spies during the Civil War by Alyssa Cole is an excellent example of this type of novel. It chronicles an enemies-to-lovers romance between a White man and a Black woman. It features an unflinching examination of the causes of the Civil War, slavery, and systematic racism. Young people

would benefit from reading this book, except that its explicit sex scenes earn it an over 18 rating. This novel received numerous national awards. The failure of the Romance Writers Association to include it in its nominating process for the 2017 Rita awards led to a bitter debate over racism in the romance novel industry.

Jasmine Guillory's adult contemporary Black romance, *The Wedding Date* (2018), features engaging characters, sizzling sex scenes, and complete honesty. Best of all, it surprises you with things you know happen, but, depending on your life experience, are unexpected. One of the main characters is Alexa Monroe, a Black woman who is a lawyer, and the chief of staff for the Mayor of San Francisco. The other is a White man named Drew Nichols, who is a pediatrician. Drew asks her to be his date at a wedding in a chance encounter in a stalled elevator in the posh Fairmont Hotel. On a whim, she accepts. She asked if she is going to be the only Black person at the reception. He replies that he never thought about that. She answers that is why I asked. "I just wanted to know what I was in for before I walked in" (p. 36). She handles her self well. After all, she is in politics. She has a good time and is attracted to Drew. Even so, the things she fears most happen. The group treats her as an exotic curio, a creepy usher uses racial slurs behind her back, and she feels ashamed of her body in a crowd of tall long-legged blond California girls. This book makes you cry, laugh, and think.

Author Sunny Hostin's contemporary romance, *Summer on the Bluffs* (2020), tells the story of three middle class women who grow up together, and enjoy a cottage in a Black community on the beaches of Martha's Vineyard. These three goddaughters of Anna, the owner of the cottage, have different backgrounds and sexual persuasions. Under her tutelage and financial support, they become successful professionals: a lawyer, a marine biologist, and a member of the New York stock exchange. Each woman wants the cottage desperately as a place to slow down from the hectic pace of their lives. However, each has secrets which may hurt their chances.

It became evident upon aggregating Black romance novels that most center on accomplished heroines and upward mobility, two subjects of interest for Black women readers. In this brief analysis, authors portrayed black women as lawyers, para-legals, marine biologists, stockbrokers, and Chief-of-staff for the Mayor of San Francisco. They conquered evil, won the Civil War, and saved the world from aliens. They were open to love in all its forms, gay and straight. Their love interests included alpha male Doctors, lawyers, Pinkerton detectives, billionaires, and an Alien. No wonder the target audience becomes engrossed with these books. They hold significant interest for Black writers historically excluded from the romance genre because they question the underlying social and economic structures that facilitated that rejection.

### **Sports Romances**

The following two sports romances represent the worst and the best of a subgenre not known for excellence in writing. The main characters in these novels are athletes, embodying determination, competitiveness, and physical ability. Their shared love for sports acts as a catalyst for their romance, creating a unique dynamic bond by mutual respect and admiration. The setting of sports romance novels is frequently centered on a professional sports league, or a college team. This serves as a backdrop for the plot, adds depth and authenticity to the characters, and attracts readers who love a particular sport.

These romances explore themes of overcoming obstacles and self-discovery. In Katy Archer's, adult sports romance, *The Game Changer* (2024), Casey is a star player on Nolan University's ice hockey team. After a one-night-stand with Carolyn, an avid hockey fan, he discovers that condoms are not 100% effective. He supports Carolyn in her pregnancy because the intercourse they enjoyed that night was the best he had ever had. He continues his support even when learning that there is someone else who could be the father. Then comes the gut-wrenching plot twist. Carolyn has a miscarriage. After her recovery, they declare their love for each other, move in together, and he presents her with a box tied with a bow. Wait a second romance fans, it is not a ring, it is a puppy.

This story is told in alternating chapters from both their viewpoints. It contains considerable graphic sex and very little hockey. She does mention college ice hockey does not tolerate fighting, as does professional hockey. In an author's note at the end of the text, she apologizes for the miscarriage plot twist and assures readers the main characters will have several healthy children in subsequent novels in the

series. This book barely meets the requirements for a romance novel, but has received good reviews and high ratings. So, it apparently meets the expectations of a segment of the romance reading public.

Nicole Falls' *Shots Not Taken* (2019) is an adult, sports, Black romance novel. It is self-published and promoted by a podcast because of the difficulty Black authors find publishing and advancing their works. Alternating chapters tell the story of Nikolas, an NBA basketball player, and Jayde, a country western singer. Nikolas is the solid point guard on a championship team. He has played in Europe and overcome numerous physical injuries. True to the title of the book, he lives with the knowledge that you miss 100% of the shots you don't take. Jayde has overcome barriers to her musical career. Producers buy the songs she writes, but give them to White artists. They do not think that a country music audience will accept a Black artist singing her own songs on stage.

At first, Nikolas and Jayde are wary of each other, despite an obvious physical attraction. However, common goals bring them together. A virtual reality TV show picks him as a contestant. Jayde signs on as vocal coach for the contestants that live and perform in a large mansion under the ever-present eye of a TV camera. After a number of trials and tribulations, they emerge as a couple and support each other in their aspirations.

The romantic ending of the novel is one of the all-time best in the romance genre. Nickolas signs a lucrative free agent contract and Jayde gets a recording contract that allows her to perform at Ryman Auditorium, formerly known as the Grand Ole Opry. He arrives late at the venue, just in time to reassure her and present her with a performance poster. She wows the audience with a knock-out performance, at the end of which, she calls Nicholas on stage. They sing a duet together. He continues a solo announcing his love for her. When finished, he drops to one knee, presents her with a rose gold diamond ring, and asks her to marry him. She nods yes and the crowd erupts in cheers and laughter. A similar contrast of worst and the best romances occurred in the next subgenre analyzed by the researchers.

#### **LGBTQIA+ Romances**

Attitudes are changing in society about LGBTQIA+. Once publishers see that the public accepts this type of romance and finds them profitable more will emerge. These novels delve into the intricacies of sexual orientation and gender identity. They highlight diverse experiences and perspectives within the LGBTQIA+ community. Authors often relate their own personal experiences and present these narratives with authenticity and emotional depth. LGBTQIA+ romance novels celebrate love in all its forms, emphasizing the universality of connection, intimacy, and the pursuit of happiness regardless of sexual orientation. These novels frequently challenge societal norms and conventions, but, in the case of the following two novels, achieved widespread acclaim and acceptance by the mainstream media.

Cara Malone's sapphic medical romance novel, *Love Trauma* (2018), contains explicit sex scenes. The most significant thing for this analysis is that this novel goes beyond a love between two people to probe the emotional impact on healthcare providers when their work exposes them to danger and the emotional impact when a patient dies. Krys Stevens is a ruthlessly efficient trauma doctor. She devotes every second of her life to her patients. Her lover is Darcy Cosgrove, a former Army medic recovering from wounds incurred in the line of duty.

The two women meet in ER after Darcy performs a creative intubation with a ballpoint pen on a choking patient. Krys offers Darcy a volunteer position at a free clinic as a way of getting back to work. They start dating and Darcy always brings flowers and, according to convention, on the third date initiates sex. Their friends and families support their romance. Several jolting incidents force them to bond in a more meaningful way. They both undergo treatment after a young boy with tuberculosis sprays blood over them. To make matters worse, Malik, an eight-year-old boy with an indomitable spirit despite an advanced case of cystic fibrosis, takes a sudden turn and dies. This novel offers insight into the real dangers and emotional challenges inherent in the healthcare profession, as well as, the social connections between friends of different gender persuasions.

Casey McQuiston's *Red, White, & Royal Blue* (2019) is a contemporary LGBTQ+ romance novel based on the familiar trope of enemies-to-friends. Alex, the son of the President of the United States, and Henry, the Prince of Wales, have hated each other since a supposed snub by the Prince. Their feud reaches a climax at the Royal wedding of the Prince's sister in Buckingham Palace. The two tussle and tip a huge

multi-tier wedding cake over onto themselves. It is a hilarious scene in the 2023 Prime Video made-for-TV version of the book.

Handlers from the both countries insist the two young men participate in a well-publicized reconciliation during the course of which, they fall in love. Henry kisses Alex at a White House New Year's Eve party and they begin a secret relationship. Someone leaks photos and emails of the two together. Henry comes out as gay and Alex admits he is bisexual. Unfavorable publicity about their affair threatens Alex's mother's campaign for re-election. Alex flies to London to support Henry when he comes out to his parents. Alex's mother wins the election. Henry joins Alex onstage as an official couple at her inauguration. The author reveals in the bonus chapter of the collector's edition that Alex and Henry are happily living together. Alex pursues a law degree. Henry continues his work as a philanthropist after abdicating his place in the British lines of succession.

Publishers of romance novels are noted for their responsiveness to the demands of their readers. They have noticed an increase in demand for LGBTQIA+ novels in recent years and responded with new offerings. The speed at which these novels have found acceptance in the lucrative television and film markets has further incentivized their interest. The demand for these romances is expected to grow as societal attitudes continue to embrace diversity. Publishers recognize the need for catering to a more diverse readership. Authors are exploring a wide range of experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community, crafting stories that resonate with readers of all walks of life. These novels hold the potential to spark conversations about diversity and inclusiveness. If they can do this, and make a profit at the same time, so much the better.

### Conclusion

Three years ago at the onset of the pandemic, the researchers noticed a news article stating the tremendous increase in the popularity of romance novels. It has taken them on an interesting journey...sometimes fun, sometimes frustrating, sometimes disappointing, but seldom dull. As the conclusion of their research, they discovered much about this venue. Why not simply select reading material much as members of the general public? They often select their choices by suggestion lists or perusing heaps of novels in a grocery store or pharmacy. The researchers chose a variety of subject matter within the romance genre. After many hours of determination and reading 164 romance novels, the authors of this paper submit this paper, the last installment of a book before publication.

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