



A Bookish Affair Booklist for *The Bride Test* by Helen Hoang

In our April book pick, *The Bride Test* by Helen Hoang, Khai is forced to share his life and space with Esme. As we stay at home to stay healthy, let's explore some smart takes on common romance tropes: forced proximity, enemies to lovers, second chances, fake relationships, and of course, soul mates. Compiled by Shannon (ssedell@lakeoswego.city)

Dating is never easy, not when physically distancing and certainly not in the 21st century. When challenged to find a date before landing a big assignment, Hannah sets her sights on Jack. But he has chosen her for an article he's writing about all the ways to lose a date. An updated version of the movie *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, *Not the Girl You Marry* by Andie J. Christopher tackles deeper subjects, such as interracial relationships and family dynamics after divorce, in this delightful fake relationship rom-com.

Forced proximity meets fake relationship in *The Wedding Date* by Jasmine Guillory. When Drew and Alexa get stranded together in an elevator, they decide to pose as a couple at Drew's ex-girlfriend's wedding. What could go wrong? Oh yeah, this scheme might lead to some real feelings and possibly even love. Swoon!

One of my favorites from the past year, *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* by Talia Hibbert, is a delightful and thoughtful enemies-to-lovers romance. Struggling with chronic illness, a fiercely meticulous but unfulfilled web designer, Chloe Brown, recruits Red, an artist and the superintendent of her apartment building, to help her cross items off a list meant to reestablish adventure, fun, and meaning in her life -- while he heals from his own trauma and heartbreak. Hibbert writes compassionately about chronic illness and domestic abuse in this heartwarming and romantic novel.

The modern Muslim rom-com *Ayesha at Last* by Uzma Jalaluddin finds a reluctant teacher, Ayesha, trying to balance duty to her family and personal dreams. Ayesha would rather avoid an arranged marriage and pursue her literary ambitions, but she finds herself falling in love with her cousin's infuriatingly conservative fiance, Khalid -- under false pretenses. Jalaluddin gives us a beautifully

written enemies-to-lovers and mixed identity romance that allows readers insight into a rich and complex community.

In *If I Never Met You* by Mhairi McFarlane, British attorney Laurie, is unceremoniously dumped by her longtime boyfriend, only to learn that he has a new girlfriend -- and she's pregnant. Feeling humiliated, she agrees to a fauxmance with her colleague Jamie, the office playboy, who's looking to clean up his reputation to advance his career. The tried and true fake relationship trope takes a charming and delightful turn as both Laurie and Jamie grow and learn about themselves and, of course, about each other.

The second book in her Modern Love series, *Girl Gone Viral* by Alisha Rai, successfully takes on the forced proximity trope. When an innocent conversation with some guy at a coffee shop is live-tweeted and goes viral, fiercely private Katrina King is mortified. Struggling with PTSD, a result of a traumatic past event, she flees to a cabin with Jasvinder, her longtime bodyguard and friend. Meanwhile Jas is looking to hide from his own traumatic past. They leave LA and head to a cabin in Northern California. As they run from the current and past situations, they run right into each other's arms and into true love. This book is so satisfying and heartwarming!

A wedding planner left at the altar? The irony isn't lost on Carolina Santos, either. *The Worst Best Man* by Mia Sosa opens with Lina being offered a dream opportunity that could change her life. There's just one hitch: she has to collaborate with Max Hartley, former best man and the one responsible for her own failed nuptials. This is a well-written story about love, family, and friendship as well as some scrumptious Brazilian cuisine. Can I just say that this book is delicious?

The steamiest pick on this list, *Rafe: A Buff Male Nanny* by Rebekah Weatherspoon delivers the goods on forced proximity and soul mates. Dr. Sloan Copeland is left in the lurch when her nanny quits without notice. She really needs someone to watch her twins. Enter Rafe, a highly regarded nanny and a very attractive one at that! Deeper themes such as divorce and emotional abuse are expertly discussed. Working through mutual attraction has never been more fun -- or sexier.

A Bookish Affair, LOPL's romance book club, meets monthly to discuss the diverse, inclusive world of romance novels! Email Shannon at ssedell@lakeoswego.city or Shandy at sdickinson@lakeoswego.city for more information.