

NARRATOR INTRO

Welcome to the Talking Book Voices, the podcast where we explore the wonders of the Texas Talking Book Program. Join us in making literature accessible to all. This program, a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission provides a free library service to Texans of all ages with a qualifying visual, physical, or reading disability. Each episode will uncover its history, share stories, get updates and tips to maximize this invaluable program. So, whether you love reading, seeking accessible materials, or just curious about the program this podcast is for you. Visit www.texastalkingbooks.org for more info. So, let's begin the Talking Book Voices, a podcast, by the Texas State library and Archives Commission.

LAURA JEAN

Did you know the Talking Book Program offers both adult and youth book clubs? Well, we do you don't need any special technology all you need is a phone. For more information call us at 1-800-252-9605. Hi podcast listeners, my name is Laura Jean and I have been a Reader's Advisory Librarian here at the Talking Book Program for nine years now. Before that I have worked as a Library Assistant at various different academic and public libraries for 12 years.

STACEY

And my name is Stacey and I manage the Reader Services Department at the Talking Book Program. So, what is reader advisory? One of our major responsibilities as Reader's Advisory Librarians is to know about the different types of books that are available to our patrons. One way to categorize books is by genre. So, what exactly is genre fiction? For our purposes, a genre is a group of books that have a similar subject matter, like mysteries or romance. So, we all know what romance is: kissing books, right?

LAURA NORRIS

Oh no, no. In the past, many people have made the mistake of underestimating or oversimplifying the romance genre and all that ever did was make romance fans feel embarrassed to tell Librarians about the type of books they like.

STACEY

Oh gosh, I never realized we don't want anyone feeling that way. Every book has their fan base, and they are all valid.

LAURA JEAN

Exactly.

STACEY

So, tell me a little bit more about what defines a romance novel.

LAURA JEAN

Well, there are two main things that all romance novels must have and first, they must have a happy ending and then second, they must contain a love story that is central to the plot. So, if a book is missing either of these two components it's just not a romance novel. So, the happy ending or happily ever after, traditionally this is meant marriage between the two main characters and a baby on the way, but more recently it just means that no matter what goes on, in the end everyone's happy and all is well with the world. The central love story is pretty much what it sounds like. The plot is driven by the love story between the two protagonists, they may run into obstacles, the course of true love never did run smooth as Shakespeare wrote, but by the end of the book, they've sorted it all out and they are together and happy about it.

STACEY

In the past, I found the women in many romances to just be so, deferential.

LAURA JEAN

You know it's kind of funny you say that because traditionally women were the main characters in romance novels. Usually, it's the man who surrenders to the woman by finally becoming vulnerable. And generally, romances are written by female authors for women readers. So, women's pleasure and agency are of main importance. More recently gender equality, personal fulfillment within a healthy

relationship, social justice, and consent have become important in readers of romance and thus are more present in romance fiction.

STACEY

These are all good changes, but in general, romances are just not my type of book.

LAURA JEAN

It's funny, you know I would have agreed with you before the pandemic, then all of a sudden, we were all in lockdown at home and the world just seemed so out of control. And all I wanted from a book was escapism and the knowledge that at the end of the book everything was going to be okay.

STACEY

Oh, I get that.

LAURA JEAN

People are attracted to romances because they are character-driven books or because they belong to the emotional type of genres like horror and suspense. They like that emotional response that the book evokes from them and sometimes they prefer them because they focus on the relationship and not just the sex. Others do like the spicy or steamy scenes.

STACEY

Of course, I just find them to be a bit too predictable.

LAURA JEAN

I can understand that you know for some people that's one of the main appeals. Think of it as a reassuring maybe instead of predictable. Romances can be comforting because you have a pretty good idea of what's going to happen next. And of course, that's not just romances. Mysteries and Fantasies, also, rely on tropes and form formulas. And for Librarians and readers, tropes can help readers explain their type of book.

STACEY

Laura Jean, what do you mean by their type of book?

LAURA JEAN

Okay, okay. So, like my friend, Molly, she loves those stories where the guy and the girl hate each other at the beginning of the book, but by the end they're absolutely bananas for each other. Well, that's a trope that's called enemies to lovers. And if you ask a reader about their favorite book and they describe that type of situation, you're already in a great place to recommend books with that same trope.

STACEY

Okay, well, what are some other popular tropes in Romance?

LAURA JEAN

Oh, that's an excellent question. Okay, so, first there are three major themes. You've got character, setting, and plot themes. And then there are tropes that fall into each of these three themes. So, for like character themes, you know obviously those are themes that involve the characters. So, you've got enemies to lovers. Or the best friend's sibling, childhood sweethearts. Second chance at romance, in this case they were lovers once, but something got in the way of their love and there were hard feelings. But now they get the opportunity to make things right. And my favorite book with this trope is probably, *RECIPE FOR PERSUASION* which is the second book in the Rajes Series by Sonali Dev. And this one is an example also of famous flings, which is another character trope because the main male protagonist is now a famous athlete. Actually, this is a great segue into the next theme. Plot related tropes. So, it's not as obvious with this title, but *RECIPE FOR PERSUASION* is a reimagining of the Jane Austin novel, *PERSUASION*. Other plot tropes are things like once upon a time like fairy tales. Fake relationships, uh love in disguise or a secret identity, marriage of convenience. Previous trauma to be overcome and a good example of that is *GET A LIFE KHLOE BROWN* by Talia Hibbert. One of the main characters had been in a previous relationship that was abusive and so he struggles to do things differently with Khloe. That book's actually a good example of a disabled character since Khloe has fibromyalgia. And another good segue into setting themes because it falls into forced proximity because they live in the same

building, and they can't help but run into each other. And so, some other setting themes besides force proximity are workplace romance, um, home again, where you come back home to your hometown after being away for a while. Love abroad or on vacation, where you fall in love overseas or on vacation. Love in the small town, which I think, is every Hallmark Christmas movie ever made.

STACEY

But readers don't always use these terms.

LAURA JEAN

Oh no, of course. Not it's often a case of you can't remember what it's called, but you'll know it once it's described kind of thing. As long as you can get a patron to describe a bit of the plot of the last best romance they read. You'll get the idea.

STACEY

Okay, so a lady has to go back home to Spain for a wedding, but she told her entire family that she has a boyfriend. A guy she works with that she doesn't really like offers to go and stand in as her boyfriend and, of course, they fall in love.

LAURA JEAN

Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh! Spanish love deception, but yes, um like um uh setting themes. Home again and love abroad character themes. Um enemies to friends and uh plot themes, fake relationship with a side of workplace romance.

STACEY

So, you can mix several tropes together?

LAURA JEAN

Oh, absolutely. And we haven't even talked about sub-genres yet. Sub-genres are things like, you know, you've got a time frame based sub-genres. So, anything that's said in a Victorian era or the Medieval Era. Or in the future, um, which is slightly different than historical romance. Those are generally set prior to World

War II, and they are often paired with another sub-genre. So, you get things like historical LGBTQ, as a sub-genre. You also can have character or events. So, like a multicultural or holiday or sports. And they are also usually combined with a time frame. So, they are contemporary Christian romance, for example, like Hallmark Christmas movies. Oh, and genre blends, so they are really not a sub-genre, per se, they're more of a hybrid of two broad genres. So, like paranormal romance or time travel romance, romantic suspense. Oh, and this is an emerging genre blend, horror romance, like the VAMPIRES OF EL NORTE by Isabel Cañas.

STACEY

This is really complex.

LAURA JEAN

It can feel that way. You can look at tropes, sub-genres, and sexual explicitness as tools with which to figure out which romances you like and which aspects really draw you in and which ones are totally not your thing. So, for example, I absolutely love a good retelling, but not that once upon a time fairy tale trope and I prefer contemporary romance and I like love in a small town, but not during the holidays. They are picky little differences, right, but understanding these nuances help me tell a Librarian, what kind of romance I prefer and then that helps them suggest books that might suit my preferences.

STACEY

Okay, let's talk about sex. Aren't they all really sexually explicit, I mean, I'm not sure I want to read about all that.

LAURA JEAN

Oh, that is absolutely fair. No, no not all romances are graphically sexual, and romance is different from erotic fiction. Erotic fiction has a lot of sex, but it isn't concerned with a happy ending or a love story which are indispensable characteristics of romance. For romance books, you can use terms like chased, mildly sensuous, steamy spicy, and explicit and we'll often refer to a book as spicy or steamy if there are sexually explicit scenes in the book. And if that is not your

thing, just tell us. There are so many gentle romances you can try; you'll just be more interested in authors like Debbie Macomber and Sherryl Woods.

STACEY

Okay, well, I might want to try romance maybe one that's less spicy.

LAURA JEAN

The best way to determine if you like a romance is to pick something short, like a collection of short stories. That way, the time invested is low. So, if you don't like it you haven't wasted as much time as you would on an entire book. So, for example, you might try *FOOLS IN LOVE: FRESH TWISTS ON ROMANTIC TALES*, which is a young adult anthology featuring fifteen short stories that reimagine or subvert popular romance and romcom tropes. Or *SERENDIPITY: TEN ROMANTIC TROPES TRANSFORMED*, which is another collection of short stories that celebrate love at its most humorous, inclusive, heart expanding, and serendipitous moments. Or *SUMMER DAYS AND SUMMER NIGHTS: TWELVE LOVE STORIES*, which is a collection of twelve short summer romance stories. In fact, we have a couple of romance genre and genre blend bibliographies, full of recommendations for anyone who's interested.

STACEY

Well Laura Jean's given us some things to think about. About the romance genre or maybe you're already a fan So here's a question for you, what is it about romances that you like? Do you have favorite tropes or sub-genres when you read romances? Thinking about what specifically you and enjoy about a book or genre helps us make the best recommendations. And it helps us think outside the box to help you find books in similar genres or from similar authors you might enjoy. Well, that's just about all the time we have. I hope you take the opportunity to ask us for tips on what to read next. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next time, on TBP Voices.