

**I'm Julie. I've worked at Orem Public Library for more than 25 years and I proudly bear the title of romance novel queen. I've always loved the fantasy that romance novels provide and my current assignment as the librarian who purchases genre romance allows me to indulge my interest in romantic tales of all kinds. While everyone reads for different reasons, I'm drawn to sympathetic characters and interesting stories. This very personal list highlights some of my most favorite romance novels. They run the gamut from sweet to steamy, from historical to Sci-Fi but there should be something for everyone.**

### ***Julie's Favorite Romance Novels Ever (in no particular order)***

***Jane Eyre*** Charlotte Bronte – classic—I hated it in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It was a revelation when I was 25. This remains my favorite romance. Poor orphan with a can-do attitude falls for the dark, brooding older man. Passionate, supernatural, and oh so satisfying.

***Persuasion*** Jane Austen—classic—I love every Jane Austen novel including her juvenilia and fragments but this story remains my favorite. Sweet Anne Elliot who is so loving and capable, lives a frustrated life full of disappointment until her past love reenters her sphere. Written when Jane Austen knew that no Mr. Darcy was coming for her, this realistic tale of older love is surprisingly passionate. Captain Wentworth's letter brings me to tears every time.

***Almost Heaven*** Judith McNaught—historical—A traditional romance with a sweet, generous heroine and a rather cranky hero. He is so cranky I am tempted knock him on the head in frustration but the ending is too tender for words. Although there are a few spicy scenes in this book, they are mild and the focus here is on the couple and the story rather than the bedroom antics.

***Katherine*** Anya Seaton—historical—The best historical romance revolves around the lives of actual people. Such is the case of Katherine Swynford who survived the plague and became the mistress and eventually the wife of John of Gaunt. Rich in historical details and characters, Seaton brings the medieval period to life.

***Thunder and Roses*** Mary Jo Putney—historical—The first book in one of Mary Jo Putney's most beloved series, The Fallen Angels. This one is hard to find in print. I finally bought a digital version so I could have it in my collection. Clare Morgan, daughter of a Welsh Methodist minister, makes a devil's bargain with the Earl of Aberdare, Nicholas Davies to save the impoverished citizens of her village. Along the way there is drama, mystery, gypsies, passion, and duels.

***Borrowed Light*** Carla Kelly—Western historical, LDS—I'm not a big reader of LDS fiction but this charming tale is my favorite LDS romance. Twenty-eight year old Julia Darling has just returned to Salt Lake City from Boston where she completed a course at the prestigious Fanny Farmer cooking school. In an effort to escape a bad engagement, she accepts a position as a cook on a cattle ranch in Wyoming. Fantastic period details, good dialogue and interesting personal development of the characters make this one a winner.

***An Arranged Marriage*** Jo Beverley—historical—My first Jo Beverley novel and it's still my favorite. Eleanor Chivenham has been placed in a dangerous situation by her feckless brother and marries the mysterious Nicholas Delaney in haste. The novel is full of danger and intrigue and Nicholas' mission on behalf of the government threatens to destroy any happiness the couple may have. This is the first title in Beverley's very popular Company of Rogues series. Digital or used paperback may be the only option for this book.

***Irresistible*** Mary Balogh—historical—Mary Balogh writes interesting, charismatic, and sympathetic characters. Sophie Armitage is plain and lives a humble existence. However, her hopes of a pleasant season chaperoning her niece in London evaporate when a threat from the past arises. When she meets her deceased husband's comrades and develops feelings for Nathaniel Gascoigne, she fears what will happen if her secret is discovered.

**Midnight Marriage** Lucinda Brandt—historical—This tale is based on an actual historical events. At age 12, Deborah Cavendish is married off in the middle of the night and has no clear recollection of the event. Years later she encounters dashing Julian Hesham, her noble husband, in the forest. He is determined to have her love him for himself, not his title or his reputation.

**Cry No More** Linda Howard—contemporary romantic suspense—Milla Edge excels at finding lost children, but on a trip to Mexico, she discovers links that may uncover answers to tragic events in her past. She joins forces with James Diaz, known as the tracker, to solve the mystery. One of the first romantic suspense novels I ever read and one of my favorites. Drama, passion, heartache, and a bittersweet ending.

**Trouble in a Pinstripe Suit** Kelly Hunter—contemporary—Hunter is an Australian author who writes category romance for Harlequin. Often maligned, some of these short, formulaic romances are smart and fun and oh so enjoyable to read. Smart, successful Mia Fletcher has just inherited a hotel in Malaysia from the mother she thought had died when she was an infant. Her plan is to sell it but she falls in love with the historic building and with Ethan Hamilton. Exotic locale, great story. Digital or used paperback will be the best way to read this title.

**Bride of the Lion** Elizabeth Stewart—medieval historical—The secret to a great medieval romance is to use just enough language and period details to give the story an authentic feel. Elizabeth Stewart does a fabulous job with this story placed at the end of the struggles between King Stephen and Empress Maud. Jocelyn Montagne and valiant knight Robert de Langley come from families on opposite sides of the conflict, but to forge alliances, they may have to unite their houses. My most favorite medieval romance. Out of print. Only available as a used paperback.

**Just this Once** Rosalind James—contemporary—Hannah Montgomery, marketing exec extraordinaire, does everything for everyone else. She finally plans the vacation of a lifetime in New Zealand and a dangerous trip through a rip tide crosses her path with a handsome rugby player. A vacation fling with Drew Callahan turns into much, much more. I found this for free on Amazon and just really had fun reading this title and the rest of the series. You can get a paperback but digital is the best way to read it. This book is one of the reasons I planned my 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary trip to NZ!

**The Ugly Duckling** Iris Johansen—contemporary romantic suspense—Nell Calder is sweet woman who survives a horrific trauma and is reborn from a plain to a beautiful woman. While she rebuilds her life, she is determined to find revenge. But while she prepares, her attacker is determined to finish what he started. Full of suspense and a twists, this was a very satisfying read.

**Mrs. Drew Plays Hand** Carla Kelly—historical—This is one of Kelly's earliest historical novels. After her husband's death, Roxanna Drew is left with more beauty than fortune. Now, desperate to escape the perils of her past life, she must learn to trust the dashing Lord Winn—a broken man with a past of his own. Carla Kelly writes very realistic, sympathetic, and interesting characters.

**The Admiral's Penniless Daughter** Carla Kelly—historical—Life has been hard to Sally Paul. She is down to her last penny and doesn't know where to turn. Admiral Charles Bright is retired from the Navy and in need of a wife. A marriage of convenience might save both of them. I obviously like Carla Kelly. This novel was written for Harlequin Historical which means it's a little spicier than her traditional regencies or western historicals.

**Angel's Blood** Nalini Singh—paranormal—Never judge a book by its cover, right? Not true! I admit the reason I picked up this book was because of the cover. (This is also true of Patricia Briggs' *Moon Called* but that is an Urban Fantasy and not on my romance list so I digress) Sometimes a fabulous cover is advertising a fabulous read. This is the first in Singh's Guild Hunter series where Archangels rule the world with the help of their vampire servants. Hunters are those, trained and born, who can track rogue vampires. Hunter Elena meets Archangel Raphael and sparks fly. Things are a little gritty and violent but surprisingly fun in a comic book sort of way.

**The Deception** Joan Wolf—historical—I'm a sucker for a damsel in distress. Kate's father is a talented Irish horse breeder and she has spent her life on the road schooling her father's stock. When tragedy strikes, she is sent to live with her

mother's brother. For revenge, he arranges to have her compromised by war hero, the Earl of Greystone. A marriage of convenience turns into much more. I enjoyed the mystery, and I loved the horsey bits in this novel.

***Burn for Me*** Ilona Andrews—paranormal—Ilona Andrews are a husband and wife writing team who write dark, edgy urban fantasy and paranormal romance novels full of great mythology and world building. *Burn for Me* takes place in a world that is ruled by powerful families with magical talent. When Nevada Baylor teams with powerful Connor Rogan to bring a mad man to justice, a dangerous plot as well as dangerous feelings, is uncovered. This romance is a slow burn, heavy on the paranormal activity and magical hijinks.

***Silver Shark*** (novella) Ilona Andrews—sci fi—Claire Shannon is a powerful psycher with the ability to attack human minds and do battle in biological computer networks. And she has been used as a tool by the government for her entire life. When war ends abruptly, she must hide the power of her mind in order to avoid execution. Deported to a vivid new world, she gains employment with Venturo Escana, also a powerful psycher, who threatens to overwhelm her mind and body. This short novel is fun, smart, and entertaining.

***Radiance*** Grace Draven—fantasy—Brishen Khaskem, prince of the Kai, has lived content as the nonessential spare heir to a throne. When a trade and political alliance between the human kingdom of Gaur and the Kai kingdom of Bast-Haradis requires that he marry a Gauri woman to seal the treaty, he agrees to the marriage. His bride is as ugly as he expected and more beautiful than he could have imagined. Ildiko, niece of the Gauri king, has always known her only worth to the royal family lay in a strategic marriage. She is horrified to learn that her intended groom isn't just a foreign aristocrat but the younger prince of a people neither familiar nor human. Bound to her new husband, Ildiko will leave behind all she's known to embrace a man shrouded in darkness but with a soul forged by light. Two people brought together by the trappings of duty and politics discover they are destined for each other.

I stumbled across this novel through a recommendation and was surprised how much I enjoyed the characters, world building and the story. A great rainy day read. You can buy a paperback but the digital copy is the easiest way to enjoy this one.

***Outlander*** Diana Gabaldon—historical time travel—Smart, clever, WWII army nurse Claire Randall accidentally takes a trip to 1740s Scotland. There she meets brave highlander Jamie Fraser and gets embroiled in dangerous mysteries, political uprisings and bittersweet romance. This novel is as compelling and gripping a read as it was when I first read it 20 years ago.

***A Court of Thorns and Roses*** trilogy Sarah J Maas—fantasy—When Feyre kills a wolf in the woods, she finds herself confronted by a fierce creature who drags her across the wall to a magical kingdom she knows and fears from legends. Her captor is the once powerful Tamlin of faery and soon Feyre is emotionally involved in helping to right an ancient wrong. Full of strong characters, magical elements and a twisty plot, this is an engaging and edgy novel. A strong fantasy and first in a series that is much more adult than Maas' earlier works.

***And Only to Deceive*** Tasha Alexander—historical mystery—This is truly a mystery with just a whisper of romance. Lady Emily marries quickly to remove herself from her overbearing mother's household and just as quickly finds herself a wealthy widow. When she discovers foul play may have been involved in her husband's demise, she is determined to find the truth. Intelligent and well written, this novel is a delight.

***Silent as the Grave*** Deanna Rayborn—mystery—Another Victorian mystery with a thread of romance. This time Lady Julia must solve the mystery of her husband's death with the help of a dark and dangerous halfblooded gypsy who has a touch of the sight. A very engaging story and the beginning of a wonderful series.

***Naked in Death*** J. D. Robb—futuristic mystery—Eve Dallas is a homicide cop. She is dedicated, driven and has a dark past. In the futuristic New York City of 2058 she catches a violent crime that pits her against ultra-wealthy, super sexy Roarke. They must work together to solve the case before time runs out. This is a dark and gritty mystery that is the first in a long and successful series. The first 10 or so are my favorites but I keep reading because I have such a soft spot for Eve and Roarke.

***The Blue Sword*** Robin McKinley—YA fantasy—The death of her beloved father makes it necessary for Hari Crewe to relocate to the desert regions of Daria where her brother is stationed in the service. Tall, horse mad Hari doesn't fit in any better here than she did at home. But the wild Darian magic calls, adventure sweeps her away and she has the opportunity to save the day and the country from an evil force. Strong female hero, swords, and horses, what's not to like? I've been reading and rereading this book since I was a teenager.

***The Blue Castle*** L. M. Montgomery—YA historical—Everyone knows Anne of Green Gables but very few have ever heard of Valancy Sterling, the main character of *The Blue Castle*. Valancy is 29, an old maid and horribly picked on by her mother and aunt. When Valancy gets some shocking news about her health, she decides she might as well really live and enjoy her life. Sweet, light, and charming this novel is a delightful romantic romp in north eastern Canada in the early 1900s. A perpetual favorite. A digital version is finally available.

***Child of the Northern Spring*** Persia Wooley—historical, Arthurian—My big complaint about most Arthurian legends is that they portray Guinevere as a frivolous tart. Hello, how about a little judgement for the murderous, unfaithful knights? In any case this novel tells the tale of the meeting and marriage of Christian Arthur and pagan Guinevere. And it does it in a way that is rich and interesting and doesn't make anyone look like a tart.

***A Rose in Winter*** Kathleen Woodiwiss—historical—Kathleen Woodiwiss is an old standby and the author credited with spawning the modern romance genre. Of her 12 novels, *A Rose in Winter* is my favorite. It's a colonial retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* and while at times the plot stretches credulity, I have a soft spot for the heroine.

***Marianna*** Susanna Kearsley—historical, supernatural—Julia Beckett, freelance artist, stumbles upon an old farm house that she feels belongs to her. Before she knows it, she has purchased the farm, moved in, and embraced a rural lifestyle. However, strange events begin happening and she seems to be reliving another life in the past. As Mariana's life becomes more and more overwhelming, Julia will have to learn to put the past to rest to move forward with love in her future. Wonderfully written and very atmospheric.

***A Ladies Code of Misconduct*** Meredith Duran—historical—This was my favorite find of 2017—a historical romance that I really enjoyed. When Jane Mason is manipulated by family into an unwanted engagement, she desperately reaches out to one of the most dangerous men she knows—an unlikeable political genius. But when Crispin Burke is assaulted and left with a debilitating memory loss, Jane may hold the key to his survival and salvation. The characters here were a bit prickly but warmed up nicely and the story was interesting without being histrionic.

***P. S. I Love You*** Cecelia Ahearn—contemporary—The ultimate tear jerker novel. I love it so much. It's the sweet story of a husband who leaves a series of letters with assignments for his wife to help her recover from his death. I cried quarts while reading it. Seriously. Don't bother with the US made movie of the same name, the story is changed to be almost unrecognizable. Stick with the novel. And keep a hankie handy.

***My Ladies Choosing: An Interactive Romance Novel*** Kitty Curran and Larissa Zageris—historical, humorous—A choose your own adventure novel. For adults. This is seriously the funniest, most tongue in cheek book I have come across in a while. You (the reader) play the heroine who is forced to support yourself as a companion to a vile older lady. While attending a ball in a foul frock, you meet some eligibles and have the opportunity to choose your destiny. Your choices, as a reader, determine the course of the story and reading out all the possible outcomes provides hours of entertainment.

***The Lost Letter*** Mimi Matthews—historical—Mimi Matthews is another recent and wonderful discovery. She writes fantastically entertaining Victorian romances. Lovely period details and great dialogue make for an enjoyable experience. Her tales are sweet not steamy, yet the characters have very believable chemistry and aren't insipid. A fabulous find. In *The Lost Letter*, beautiful but destitute Sylvia Stafford is asked to come to the aid of her former beau, who abandoned her. Colonel Sebastian Conrad has been scared and wants nothing more than to molder alone in the country. He certainly doesn't want to entertain the frivolous beauty who rejected him. Can these two lost souls reunite and save each other? This short and sweet novel was a delight.