

A SHORT LIST OF RELATIONSHIP FICTION

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Some people call them Chick Lit, but they're not exactly that. Some call them Romance Cozies. I call them Relationship Fiction, because it's the relationships in the books that are the significant carrier of the stories. Whatever you call them, during the pandemic there is a big demand for these "soft reads" or "gentle reads," or "happy" stories. Not everyone wants the romance, some just want the upbeat ending. Many of these will be successful with your patrons looking for something to lighten their mood.

***The High Season*, by Judy Blundell**

Lovingly renovated, located by the sea in a quiet village two ferry rides away from the glitzier Hamptons, the house is Ruthie Beamish's nest egg—the retirement account shared with her ex-husband, Mike, and the college fund for their teenage daughter, Jem. The catch? To afford the house, Ruthie must rent it out during the best part of the year, from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Resigned to this deprivation, Ruthie moves herself and her daughter into her friend's guest house. But as she loses her grasp on her job, her home, and her family, Ruthie decides to take a page out of the book of the rich and entitled and push back. *It's about snobbery and superficiality, but also about sincerity and persistence and fortitude. It's about family values, sacrifice, and feelings.*

***The Overdue Life of Amy Byler*, by Kelly Harms**

Amy is soldiering on as a single mother after being completely abandoned by her husband, John. When the children were 12 and 9, John went to Hong Kong on a business trip, and never came back. Amy had to go back to work full-time as a school librarian and scrape absolute bottom to keep her kids in their school and put food on the table. John didn't pay child support or communicate with any of them for three years. Small wonder that Amy harbors major resentment. Then John comes back—because he misses his kids and wants to make things up to them. Amy agrees (with some counseling by her friend, Lena) to give John a week with the kids, and she takes off for New York City on a part-professional, part-personal trip. The week stretches into a summer, and Amy finds herself at loose ends (and somewhat uncomfortable with it) as all her responsibilities are picked up by someone else. *Light and fun, while dealing with some serious issues.*

The novels of Jenny Colgan

I'm not singling one out, because this writer's catalogue of books from 2012 onward (the ones before that are uneven and in some cases mean and snarky) are uniformly fun, sweet, and entertaining, with great characters, luminous settings, and not-too-cloying love story elements. Many of them come in pairs, with an initial book and a sequel. Favorites include *The Bookshop on the Corner*, *The Café by the Sea*, *Little Beach Street Bakery*, *Meet Me at the Cupcake Café*, and *The Loveliest Chocolate Shop in Paris*. They are written to a formula,

but each has its unique qualities. The formula is a miserable protagonist who finds the courage to exchange a dull or stressful lifestyle for a long-held dream job. Both job satisfaction and romantic happiness usually ensue, but the happily-ever-after is more about finding a life than a mate. As a bonus, some of them feature great recipes.

The Library at the Edge of the World, by Felicity Hayes-McCoy

Hanna Casey works as the librarian in Lissbeg, a small town along the Finfarran peninsula of Ireland. Until a few years ago, Hanna had embraced life in London with her lawyer husband, Malcolm, and her daughter, Jasmine. Then she was devastated to discover that her husband had been having a long-term relationship with her good friend, and she decamped with Jazz back to Ireland. A few years later she is beginning to regret that hasty decision, as living with her mother in a small cottage is definitely beginning to pall. She has recently rediscovered a legacy left to her by her aunt that might be an “out,” and she thinks if she is careful with her money, she can renovate Maggie’s old cottage and live in splendid isolation on the bluffs above the sea. But plans by the bureaucrats of Finfarran to centralize services in a grand new center located in the most populous town would cut off all the small businesses and tourist attractions everywhere else, and also close Hanna’s library. Hanna wakes up from her dazed existence and suddenly discovers within herself the will to fight to preserve a lifestyle she didn’t realize she had come to love. *Quirky characters with an upbeat message about inclusiveness and community. There are two sequels.*

The Language of Sisters, by Cathy Lamb

Antonia, Elvira, and Valeria—Russian sisters who escaped Communist Russia with their parents when they were young children—now live as adults in Oregon with the rest of the noisy, loving, extended family of Kozlovskys. This book has a touch of magical realism: The sisters are able to hear one another in their heads at times of danger, sadness, or trial, and can call out to one another for help. The book is narrated by Toni (Antonia), and is essentially her story, although it encompasses her sisters, her extended family, and the “extra” family she has created on the dock of the tugboat (floating in the Willamette river) that she calls home. *Secrets from past and present, some activism, a little romance.*

A Risk Worth Taking, by Robin Pilcher

Dan Porter had it all: a lucrative London job, a big house, a beautiful wife, three children in private school. In what seems like a moment, it all went away. Then, Dan hears about a company for sale in northern Scotland and, with his son Josh and two dogs in tow, he lands in a primitive cottage above a frigid loch, considering taking on a daunting challenge. It’s both a big risk and a big chance, with a slim prospect for success. . . . But the reward is a community saved and a new outlook on love. *A characteristic story by the son of Cornish novelist Rosamunde Pilcher.*

The Rosie Project, The Rosie Effect, The Rosie Result, by Graeme Simsion

Three books written about Don Tillman—precise, literal, frustrating, yet engaging in his innocence and bewilderment about the social norms that escape him. He is a man who has never been on a second date, who can count all his friends on the fingers of one hand, and yet he decides, based on a casual comment by an acquaintance, that it's time for him to find a wife. Rosie Jarman—barmaid, smoker, painfully blunt—possesses none of the attributes for which Don seeks. And yet.... *A charming trilogy: You can see where it's going from the beginning, but the telling of it is so enjoyable.*

The Garden of Small Beginnings, by Abbi Waxman

Lili was widowed in her 30s and left with two young daughters—Annabel, who is now seven, and Claire, now five. It's been four years since her husband was killed in a car crash, and although she has recovered her equilibrium after a few months of total breakdown and has made a good life for herself and her daughters, she is determined not to yield to her family's and friends' pleas that she “get back out there.” Then, the publishing company for which she is an illustrator decides that Lili will be the artist who takes on a new book on vegetable gardening, and her boss asks that she attend a six-week gardening class to familiarize herself with the subject. Lili is happy to comply, and takes along her sister, Rachel, and her two girls to the class. She is surprised to discover a hint of chemistry with the solemn but charismatic Danish instructor, as well as some unexpected but welcome camaraderie with the other students.... *Humor, gardening tips, and the busting of stereotypes.*

The Bookish Life of Nina Hill, by Abbi Waxman

Nina has it all: A job in a cool bookstore, a lovely guest house lined with bookshelves filled with books, a companionable cat named Phil, and a busy schedule taken up mostly with book clubs and trivia contests. Then, Nina discovers that the father she never knew has called her out in his will to receive some sort of legacy, thereby putting her in touch with a raft of unknown and unsuspected brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, aunts and cousins...which is in one way a dream come true for a wistful only child who has previously been an observer but not a participant...and in another way kind of a nightmare for a self-sufficient, slightly anxious introvert. Also, the leader of one of the competing trivia teams in her league is showing definite interest in Nina...but it will never work out, because he's not a reader. Oh well... *The ultimate wish fulfillment for the bookish and the romantic.*