



Book Club Set #104

Accidentally Engaged

By Farah Heron

About the Author

Farah Heron is a critically acclaimed author of romantic comedies for adults and young adults filled with huge South Asian families, delectable food, and most importantly, brown people falling stupidly in love. She lives in Toronto with her husband, two children, and a rabbit named Strawberry. She recently adopted two cats, who are now in charge.

Farah's debut, *The Chai Factor* was named one of the summer's best books by *The Globe and Mail*, and was praised in *Book Riot*, *Smart Bitches Trashy Books*, *Bustle* and more. Her next release, *Accidentally Engaged*, was listed as a best book of 2021 in *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Today*, *NPR*, *CBC Books*, *Kobo*, and more. Her young adult debut, *Tahira in Bloom*, was recently released, and was praised as one of the best rom-coms of the year by *USA today*.

Retrieved from: <https://farahheron.com/bio/>

About the Book

When it comes to bread, Reena Manji knows exactly what she's doing. She treats her sourdough starters like (somewhat unruly) children. But when it comes to Reena's actual family-and their constant meddling in her life-well, that recipe always ends in disaster.

Now Reena's parents have found her yet another potential Good Muslim Husband. This one has the body of Captain America, a delicious British accent, and lives right across the hall. He's the perfect, mouthwatering temptation...and completely ruined by the unwelcome side dish of parental interference.

Reena refuses to marry anyone who works for her father. She won't be attracted to Nadim's sweet charm or gorgeous lopsided smile. That is, until the baking opportunity of a lifetime presents itself: a couples' cooking competition with the prize of her dreams. Reena will do anything to win-even asking Nadim to pretend they're engaged. But when it comes to love, baking your bread doesn't always mean you get to eat it too.

Retrieved from: <https://farahheron.com/accidentally-engaged/>

Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
 - Why do characters do what they do?
 - Are their actions justified?
 - Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
 - How has the past shaped their lives?
 - Do you admire or disapprove of them?
 - Do they remind you of people you know?
3. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?
4. Discuss the plot:
 - Is it engaging—do you find the story interesting?
 - Is this a plot-driven book—a fast-paced page-turner?
 - Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
 - Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
 - Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?
5. Talk about the book's structure.
 - Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
 - Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
 - Does time shift back & forth from past to present?
 - Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?
 - Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
 - What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?
6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
7. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?
10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

Retrieved from: <https://www.litlovers.com/run-a-book-club/questions-for-fiction>

Author Interview

Question: What does your writing process look like? How many hours a day do you write?

Answer: I don't have a set routine, but I tend to do more actual writing at night. During the day I get all my promo and business stuff taken care of. Right now, with everyone at home, it can be hard for me to turn off my brain enough to focus until everyone else has gone to bed.

Q: Is there a particular author/work that inspired you to become a romance writer? Who are some other authors that are especially good with writing relationships and/or friendships?

A: I was inspired to write by several writers. Back in the 90s (I know, I'm dating myself here) I loved rom-coms in the chick-lit craze. One of my favourites was Marian Keyes for her ability to blend very serious topics with romance and humour. Then a little later in life I discovered historical and contemporary romance. As I read more of them, I had trouble turning off my own stories in my head, so I started writing. Around then I discovered the work of Sonali Dev. Before her, I didn't know that there was a market for romances with Indian characters and Indian culture with specificity. Since then, I have written stories set in my own culture.

Q: If you could tell your younger self something about writing and becoming an author, what would it be?

A: I would have told myself to start writing instead of just telling myself that I should try writing one day. I didn't start writing fiction until 2016, when I was nearly forty. Things moved quickly for me in my writing career, but I wish I had taken the plunge before then. But at the same time, publishing in the past wasn't what it is now, and I'm not sure I would have been able to get published with my Indian-Canadian rom-coms before now.

Q: How did you come up with the concept of Kamila Knows Best? Is a modern retelling something that you have always endeavoured to write?

A: I have been a Jane Austen super-fan for years, and I've loved retellings, so I always knew I wanted to try my own one day. I picked Emma, not because it was my favourite Austen (that would be Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion) but because I thought Emma would be such a great challenge to try to adapt. Emma is a very hard character for many to love, and it's such a balance to make readers root for a character who is at the same time very image conscious and meddling, but also generous and playful. And yes, I did find it incredibly hard—mostly because modern stories need to have goals and motivations that were often absent in older books. But I loved the way it turned out, and I hope readers fall in love with Kamila as much as I did.

Q: Your novels are both enhanced and complicated by cultural and familial expectations—for example, in Kamila's case, she is conflicted with her desire to both fulfill and defy her father's wishes and in Accidentally Engaged, Reena is trying to balance personal fulfillment against the pressure of her culture as well as family duty—why is it important for you to include these topics in a romantic comedy?

A: I think whether I want to or not, I will always write about families and family expectations in my stories. Family is such a big part of the lives of immigrant communities, and it's almost impossible to write a south Asian story without family being a part of it. I personally find the push and pull between our culture's collectivist thinking, and North America's individualist way of life, brings so many story possibilities.

Q: Tahira in Bloom is your first foray into YA. Did you approach it the same way as your other works?

A: Not at all! My adult rom-coms are about millennials for the most part. And even though I am a bit older than that (aging myself again!), I am pretty much writing my adult characters from my own worldview. But my teen characters are gen Z. They are basically my own teenage kid's worldview. I used to be a youth counsellor, so I also drew on my experiences there to get the "teen brain" right. Another difference is my

adult books are about the children of immigrants (for the most part). The characters have that culture clash between their immigrant parents, and their North American upbringing. But my YA books are about the grandchildren of immigrants, again, like my own kids. They don't have cultural confusion or cultural struggles. They have Canadian-born liberal parents. But that doesn't make them less Indian. This was something that was hard for me to find in YA—most books I came across with South Asian teenagers were about immigrant families, and they were about cultural struggles. I wanted to write a story with kids more like my own.

Q: What was the inspiration behind Tahira in Bloom?

A: My inspiration was the teen romances I used to read and re-read as a child. These were primarily low-angst, coming of age stories about first love, and they often had small town settings. I set out to write something like that, but with more diversity. I was also inspired by Schitt's Creek for the fish out of water setting.

Q: I love that the attraction between Tahira and Rowan is based on mutual respect in that they both admire each other's talents. Did you set out to have your leads on equal footing or was this something that evolved as you were writing?

A: I did set out for them to each have their own passion that they would admire the other for. I settled on flowers for Rowan early, as I had just binged Netflix's Big Flower Fight, and I was entranced with the elaborate floral sculptures. My son suggested fashion for Tahira, and I thought it would work well because I wanted to make her a city girl through and through. It also was easy for me to write about fashion and fashion design, because I not only used to work in the industry, but I also was once a hobby sewist, and used to design and sew dresses for fun.

Q: Can we just take a moment to appreciate the food in your books? You seem to know your way around a kitchen—are you a cook/baker? What are some of your favourite things to make or favourite pairings?

A: I love to cook! I call myself the queen of hobbies because I pick up a new one and become completely obsessed with it every few years. A while back I was obsessed with bread and sourdough. I grew out of that hobby right before I started writing *Accidentally Engaged*, so all the bread baking there was based on my own experiences. I still bake, but not as much as I used to. I also really love making the Indian food I grew up with, and thankfully my family loves it too. It's a great way to connect to my culture, and the food is so comforting! But I am also a huge fan of Chinese and Thai food, and it's probably the most common food we eat at home.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: I have a few projects on the go right now! I will start edits on my next YA soon. It will be released in the fall. It's set in the same family as Tahira in *Bloom* and is about Tahira's sister Samaya. Samaya is nothing like Tahira, though. She's a math genius, and a bit of a video game nerd. I've paired her with Daniel, a hockey player who wants to study pastry arts after high school. They make pies and play video games together. But it's really a story about class differences, moving on after heartbreak, and learning to tune out high school gossip to focus on what's important. And I recently announced my next adult book, *Jana Goes Wild*, which is a second chance romance set on a Tanzanian safari. I think we're all looking to armchair travel right now so writing something set on a dream vacation has been super fun.

Retrieved from: <https://style.ca/boreal-book-club-romance-author-farah-heron/>

Other Links and Resources:

Recipes from the book: <https://farahheron.com/recipes/>

Passion Project Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQx4MaIXf2c>

What to Read Next Interview: <https://music.amazon.com/podcasts/03359071-194f-4bd7-a37d-d6e8686a0d95/episodes/d4eb0495-2190-4b7e-9913-881ce8b88306/what-to-read-next-podcast-l-book-recommendation-show-310-author-interview-accidentally-engaged-by-farah-heron>

Share your thoughts with other readers!

DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: