



BOOK
CLUB
KIT

ONE TO WATCH

A NOVEL

Kate
Stayman-
London

“Relatable,
incredibly smart . . .
an extraordinary debut.”
—New York Times bestselling
author **JASMINE GUILLORY**

A LETTER FROM KATE STAYMAN-LONDON

Dear Reader,

In March of 2017, when I was still reeling from the results of the 2016 election, I turned to one of my very favorite coping strategies: reality TV. More specifically, *The Bachelor*. I've been a fan of the franchise for almost 20 years now; I started watching during the very first season back in 2002. And no matter what troubles are going on around me, I can always find some joy in watching a crazy bunch of singles laugh, cry, fight, kiss, and maybe even fall in love.

But one thing has always gotten under my skin: According to *The Bachelor* and its many banner shows, love only looks one way. It's supposed to be a fairy tale that represents "reality," but most of the people on the show are white, straight, and almost every last one is thin. That doesn't represent love in my life—and I bet that's true of a lot of your lives, too.

As I was watching that night in March, I thought about the best writing advice I've ever heard, which comes from Jordan Peele. He says that you should write your favorite movie you've never seen. So I set out to write my favorite book I'd never read. I was looking for the escapist thrill and romantic adrenaline that I get from *The Bachelor*, but I wanted to imagine a more inclusive version of the show—and of our society, frankly.

A little more than three years later, as we live through the most profound chaos and uncertainty of our lives, I think we all need those comforting books, TV shows, and movies more than ever, the ones that make us laugh and clap and feel unabashed joy. But I hope *One to Watch* does a little bit more than that—I hope it makes you feel *seen*, too. Because whoever you are, however you identify, and whatever you look like, you absolutely deserve an overnight fantasy date in a castle in France. Oh, and true love. You deserve that, too.

Thank you so much for reading, and I hope you love spending time in this world and with these characters as much as I loved creating them.

Sending all the love and sequins in the universe,

Kate

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

If you love *The Bachelor* (or *One to Watch!*), you might also enjoy . . .

- ***Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche**

If you love that Bea is a blogger with a strong voice trying to figure out who she is and where she belongs (and having some romances along the way), you absolutely must meet Ifemelu. Ifemelu's searingly insightful blog posts are woven into the narrative, and the novel is a rich series of interlocking stories that range from Lagos to Princeton and back. This book is completely unmissable—if you haven't read it already, now's the time.

- ***The Royal We* by Heather Cocks and Jessica Morgan**

British royal fanfic really IS my Bryptonite! This book is such a funny, dishy, fully imagined rendering of what William and Kate's love story might have looked like behind the scenes (with different characters, of course!). Cocks and Morgan (who you may know as the Fug Girls) have a brilliant and engaging way of handling gossip, celebrity culture, and royal intrigue—not to mention swoon-worthy romance.

- ***Attachments* and *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell**

A twofer! I absolutely love both of these books, and I think they scratch different itches when it comes to romance and fandom. *Attachments* is a lovely romance told largely through emails between best friends at work, so if you liked the epistolary style of *One to Watch*, I think you'll really enjoy this one! *Fangirl* is one of my favorite books ever: it tells the story of a college first-year named Cather who's painfully shy in real life, but secretly internet-famous for her Simon Snow fanfic (Simon Snow serves as a stand-in for Harry Potter). I identified so much with Cather's desire to escape into a fantasy world and her struggle to cope with her familial problems (and shyness around guys) in the real world. *Fangirl* is an absolutely gorgeous story about the ways we escape our lives, the strength of finding our own voices, and the rewards we reap when we open our eyes to the love of the people all around us.

WINE TO WATCH

A wine-pairing guide for *One to Watch*

By Tia Subramanian (www.tias-wine.com) and Kate Stayman-London

The characters in this book love to drink wine—as does the author. She and her sommelier pal Tia have taken many wine trips that inspired several sequences in this book (fun fact: they got into a dramatic fight with their Airbnb host in Amboise, but fortunately no one stormed out of a courtyard). They put together this wine guide for you to enjoy as you read *One to Watch* (mind the spoilers!). They picked wines that are delicious, good value, and perfect pairings for each character.

Bea: Dry sparkling rosé

Don't be fooled: this pretty beverage is no pushover. Great sparkling rosés can be tart and complex, with bold fruit flavors and thrillingly sharp acidity. Look for Cremant from the Loire Valley in France, Cava from Spain, or real Champagne if you're feeling splurge-y. Like Bea, these wines blend effervescence with lively character that draws you in again and again.

Pairings: This is one of the most versatile food wines out there. Try it with buffalo chicken, mac and cheese, or a giant bowl of popcorn while settling in to watch or read your favorite romantic comedy.

Asher: Nebbiolo from Piedmont, Italy

Red wines made from the Nebbiolo grape grown in Piedmont, a region in the north of Italy, embody a set of contradictions. They're soft and fruity but serious, light in color but full of depth and character, deliciously drinkable but also ageworthy, able to go the distance. Like Asher and Bea, when Nebbiolo is made right, it's a perfect balance. The most serious (and expensive!) wines made from Nebbiolo are called Barolo and Barbaresco, but for something more affordable, grab a bottle called Langhe Nebbiolo.

Pairings: Charcuterie platters, mushroom dishes, lingering conversations about the nature of the universe.

Sam: Muscadet Sèvre et Maine from Loire Valley, France

Like Sam, wines from Muscadet are pure and joyful. Crisp, zingy, lightly fruity, and best enjoyed young, Muscadet is the summer white you'll keep coming back to. It gets a bad rap because people think it's sweet (it's not—wines from the Muscadet region have nothing to do with the Muscat grape that's often used in sweet wines), but that just means it's exceptionally well-priced for its quality. Look for bottles marked "Sur Lie" for more complex examples.

Pairings: Oysters, mussels, vinaigrette-dressed salads, romantic first dates in the warm summer sun.

Luc: Red blend from Languedoc, France

Languedoc is the former wild west of French wine, but over the last 30+ years, producers have started making higher-quality bottles and now gems abound from the region. Still, many of the top bottles retain a rakish, headstrong quality. They're ripe, a little dirty, and generally over-the-top. If that doesn't describe Luc, we don't know what does.

Pairs with: Roasts, meat stews, hot make-outs with someone who's absolutely not marriage material.

Lauren: Skin-contact white (aka orange wine)

It's only fitting that our most controversial character should be paired with the wine world's controversy *du jour*. Orange wines are simply white wines fermented with their skins, which gives them their deeper color and a whole host of added flavors. As with Lauren, you never know quite what you're going to get. Orange wines can be floral, gentle, and comforting—or harsh and unpleasant. Like Bea agreeing to star in *Main Squeeze*, you'll have to decide for yourself whether these trendy (and sometimes delicious!) wines are worth the risk.

Pairs with: Bold cheeses, richly spiced Indian and Moroccan curries, impressing your hipster friends.

Marin: Pinot Grigio from Friuli or Alto Adige, Italy

It's not reality TV without someone slinging Pinot Grigio. But like Marin (and the Real Housewives), the best examples of Pinot Grigio are anything but bland—they're zippy, fruity, and full of depth, the most dependable bottle

in your stash. Pinot Grigio's home is northern Italy, but avoid bottles from the sub-region Veneto; that's the bulk stuff you choke down at the latest baby shower you felt too guilty to ditch. Instead, look for bottles from Friuli (especially Collio) and Alto Adige.

Pairs with: Chicken, seafood, light pasta dishes, and watching reality TV with your best friend. No judgment if you feel inspired to add seltzer and ice cubes.

Wyatt: Grüner Veltliner from Austria

There is no situation that Wyatt doesn't lift with his pure heart and joyful goodness. So we had to pair him with the ultimate all-occasion wine, Grüner Veltliner. This native Austrian grape makes fresh yet intense, fruity yet lightly spicy wines that pair with almost anything— including notoriously wine-allergic foods like artichokes and eggs. As they get older, these wines can develop a deep gold color, just like the wheat fields of Wyatt's family farm.

Pairs with: Almost anything. From salads and veggies to spicy Asian dishes, you can feel great about bringing this bottle to any dinner.

Ray: Under-\$8 grocery-store red

Don't give Ray your time and don't give this wine your money. This is the inexpensive bottle you drop into your cart when some jerk has been terrible and you need to get tipsy and sob about it. Enjoy, but don't blame us if you feel awful the next day. Blame Ray.

Pairs with: Heartbreak, regret, drunk pizza, and several glasses of water before bed. Seriously, drink the water.

Bob & Sue: Old Vine Zinfandel from California

As grape vines get older, their roots go deeper and deeper into the earth, finding new sources of nutrients and soaking up ever more complex flavors. Bob and Sue are the family whose love runs just as deep. Being with them is like being wrapped in an embrace, just like drinking in the rich, round, exuberantly fruity flavors of California Zinfandel.

Pairs with: Grilled steaks, barbecue, Sunday football, and unconditional love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *One to Watch* examines what it's like to have every move you make documented by cameras and consumed by an audience of millions. Lots of us choose to live some version of this reality by documenting our lives on social media—with both positive and negative impacts. Did you identify with any of Bea's experiences of being on-camera in your own life? How do you think the advent of platforms like Instagram has affected your life, if at all?
2. Before Bea ever stars on *Main Squeeze*, she loves it as a viewer—even though she has some serious criticisms of the show. What shows (or movies, or books) do you love even though you have problems with them? How do those problems affect your experience as an audience member?
3. Would you ever go on a show like *Main Squeeze*? What would the pros and cons be for you? If you were chosen as the star, what types of suitors would you want to date? What would you list as options for your “dream date” locations, both at home and overseas?
4. Bea argues throughout the book that the notion of a plus-size woman starring in a reality dating show is not radical, despite the fact that we've never seen it. What do you think? Would it be radical if a show like *The Bachelorette* cast a plus-size star? How would Americans react? Would you watch?
 - a. Follow-up question: What if a plus-size man were cast to star in *The Bachelor* instead? How would that change the dynamic?
5. Bea dates a lot of different types of men in the book—the exuberant younger man, the analytical academic, the sexy European, the alluring ex-boyfriend—and learns something different from each. Which men did you like best—and least? What lessons did they offer you about what you're looking for in your own life?
6. Luc believes it's possible to love someone without being possessive of them. Do you agree, or is this just an excuse to be unfaithful?

7. By the end of the book, Bea realizes that Ray was never the right guy for her (though, of course, her best friend Marin knew that all along). Why do you think she fixated on him for so many years, to the extent that she couldn't give anyone else a real chance? Have you ever struggled to let go of someone in your life?
8. Bea's stepdad Bob plays an incredibly important role in her life, and she ultimately chooses to play the same role for Gwen and Linus. This is one way to "choose your family," but there are many others. How has the idea of choosing your family played out in your life?
9. Bea fights against stereotypes of plus-size people (i.e. that it means you're lazy and unhealthy), but it's often an uphill battle. Do you notice stereotypes of plus-size people in your everyday life? Where do you see these stereotypes? What can be done to fight them?
10. Bea argues for the importance of inclusive representation on *Main Squeeze*—not just body diversity, but racial and ethnic diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusion as well. What are other areas of society that could benefit from more inclusion? What are the barriers preventing increased diversity? What effects (if any) do you think increased representation would have?
11. In the beginning of the book, Bea experiences the positive and negative effects of her blog post "going viral": On one hand, she experiences serious harassment and even death threats. But on the other, all the attention boosts her career and ultimately leads to her being offered a starring role on *Main Squeeze*. Do you dream of winning 15 minutes of internet fame? Do you think it would be worth it? Why do you think women, in particular, experience so much harassment when they achieve this kind of fame?
12. Shows like *Main Squeeze* set the expectation that the only way to have a "happy ending" is to fall in love and get engaged, but Bea strives to prove that it's just as valid to live on your own terms as a happy and fulfilled single person. Have you ever experienced a version of this tension? What are some ways our society can be more supportive of single people, and reset the expectation that the only way to be happy is if you find a partner?

ONE TO WATCH PLAYLIST

1. Cruel Summer by Taylor Swift
2. Soulmate by Lizzo
3. Too Much by Carly Rae Jepsen
4. John Wayne by Lady Gaga
5. Learn To Let Go by Kesha
6. Fallingwater by Maggie Rogers
7. Prom by SZA
8. Your Love by HAERTS
9. The Louvre by Lorde
10. Wake Me by Bleachers
11. Say You Love Me by Jessie Ware

For more, visit the **One to Watch** playlist on **Spotify!**