

Imperfect Pairings

Jackie Townsend

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Townsend writes lovingly of the Italian world in a love story about questioning of values and ideals.

Love, thirty-something Jamie believes, does not give someone claim to her soul. And Jamie, the protagonist of Jackie Townsend's novel *Imperfect Pairings*, has other things to accomplish—like “partnership to achieve at the firm, money to accumulate, goals and milestones to reach.”

But she admits she's in love with Jack, the man she's been dating for two months. “The only hope,” as she sees it, “is to keep reminding herself that this is not the first time she's fallen in love.” It is the first time she's dated an Italian, a fact she'd hadn't even known until the evening they board a plane for a family wedding in Italy. Soon, Jamie is cocooned in a language she doesn't understand, eating food she doesn't normally eat within a family she never fathomed.

Townsend writes lovingly of the Italian world—subtly explaining dishes like agnolotti (it's not ravioli!) and tumin (marinated cow cheese)—so that the reader is indeed part of the “knocking of elbows and brushing of legs and everyone eating and talking all at once” at a crowded family meal.

But career-driven Jamie is another story. Her character lacks the same zest. Too often Jamie's feelings are summarized, “... for all Jamie knows her and Jack's relationship will be finished ... At least, this is what she must tell herself to counterbalance the effects of a love that seems only to want to deepen, driven by some force stronger than nature, stronger than her.”

Jamie's theories on love and marriage are familiar—an independent women struggling against her feelings. But we don't always get to see the raw emotional work of untangling them. Because of this, Jamie's character is often at arm's length.

After the Italian wedding, the couple returns to San Francisco where Jack has a new job assignment and Jamie will soon follow. “That is real,” she reminds herself, “whereas Italy is a dream, and since [her] return, in the back of her mind, she's been hoping it will go away, or at least keep itself contained on the other side of the Atlantic.”

But Jamie makes a decision that will change her forever, though she doesn't believe so at the time. This is a love story that unwinds across two contingents and between the vines of an old family vineyard. It's also a story of finding oneself—for Jamie and Jack, of questioning values, ideals and family stories.

Jackie Townsend lives in New York. *Imperfect Pairings* is her second novel.

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