



Love in Winter Wonderland

Abiola Bello

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Abiola Bello's provocative, swoonworthy yuletide romance novel *Love in Winter Wonderland* takes stage in a struggling bookstore.

Trey is popular at his college (the UK equivalent of the final two years of high school) and seems to have it all. But his family bookstore, Wonderland, is struggling, and he feels powerless to help. Ariel is an aspiring artist, desperate to share her creativity but unsure how to be seen. The two are thrown together in the fight to save Wonderland.

The narrative alternates between Trey and Ariel, who share their struggles in lighthearted and poignant terms. Ariel faces cruel taunts about her weight and navigates her peers' expectations of what a Black woman "should" look like. And Trey wrestles with his girlfriend, Blair's, shallowness. And the difficulties that small businesses—particularly Black-owned businesses—face is a key theme. Larger chain stores may offer cheaper book prices, but they enable none of the community and culture that Wonderland does. Creativity is celebrated as Ariel's art brings new life to the store.

The book also highlights the importance of fidelity—in all of its forms. Even as Trey and Ariel's attraction grows, they know it is unfair to pursue anything while Trey is with Blair. Trey's mother and father support each other even as the struggling store causes family tension. And Ariel's mother works tirelessly to provide for her two children after her husband's death. In time, Ariel finds new confidence in her art, and Trey holds Blair accountable for her cruelty.

With a feel-good conclusion featuring a kiss in the snow, an unexpected celebrity appearance, and a romantic playlist, *Love in Winter Wonderland* is a sweet novel about a hero's determination to save his family's business—and the help he receives from an artistic girl.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (September / October 2023)

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