



The Rules of Arrangement

Anisha Bhatia

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In Anisha Bhatia's romance novel *The Rules of Arrangement*, a woman struggles to reconcile her traditions with her ambition.

At twenty-six, Zoya is reflective and driven. She already has an accomplished career in advertising; her thoughts are filled with advertising campaigns and catchy hashtags. But she's also ancient in the eyes of her traditional Indian family, for whom her future marriage is a constant topic. Her Aunt Sheila, a whirlwind of colorful chaos, carries photographs with her of potential arranged partners for Zoya, all while hiding a personal history that complements her niece's struggles and reveals the generational trauma of discrimination.

Zoya herself is most insecure about her dark skin and weight. Her life is a balancing act between modern influences and ingrained expectations. She expresses her struggles with vulnerability, questioning and celebrating aspects of Indian culture. When she is introduced to Lalit, she gives into social pressure and becomes engaged.

Zoya hides aspects of herself from Lalit, but one secret is bigger than the rest: she has applied for a prestigious advertising job, and could end up moving to New York instead of getting married. Only her boss, Arnav, seems to see Zoya's true potential—and as he and Zoya become friendlier, he begins to see something more in her, too. Their obvious but irresistible connection results in tense moments; it features tender touches and close calls. It also exists in stark contrast to her arrangement with Lalit, who is loathsome when it comes to Zoya's weight and insecurities, encouraging her inclination toward appreciative, adorable Arnav.

Humor and introspection drive *The Rules of Arrangement*, a romance novel whose heroine contends with social expectations around marriage.

DELIA STANLEY (July / August 2021)

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