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# ABUNDANT LOVE: EXPANDING THE TERMS OF BEAUTY

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would gurgle up and sputter dry.

I believe, at least in the past and, maybe still, now many thought fat and/or dark-skinned heroines wouldn't be relatable to mainstream romance readers. One unspoken standard of romance is it must provide a level of escapism, of fantasy. Even more unspoken is the correlation between beauty and love. Since Western beauty standards favor white skin and slim bodies, the lighter one is—both in hue and mass—the worthier of love one is. "This couldn't happen in real life," I have been cautioned regarding my own stories, and I patently reject such thinking. In fact, romance novels are the perfect place where the stars can align so it could happen. And furthermore, this tone-deaf disbelief is such a gross disservice to the realities of women with darker skin and/or larger waistlines who have the love they desire and, moreover, deserve.

Toni Morrison has said, "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." When I began reading romances as a teenager, there were so many books I'd wanted to read—books that featured fat heroines; books that featured young Black heroines; books that featured young, fat Black heroines—but unfortunately, those had been few and even farther between. In essence, I wanted to read stories that featured heroines that looked like the chubby, Black girl I was, but they were incredibly difficult to find. Searching for them at a time when the Internet was still in its infancy and, quite honestly, at an age I shouldn't have even been reading them, discovering romances where these heroines existed was like striking oil. However, oftentimes whatever oil I did find

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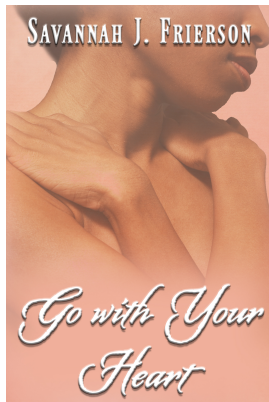
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As a younger, insecure author, I'd written these heroines not with the full bore of the righteousness I have now, but rather with timidity. I'd use euphemisms such as "plus-size" and "curvy"—harmless approximations of bountiful size without being explicit. I was more confident about describing skin color, even though the synonyms for brown and dark were more relegated to beverages and foodstuffs than I preferred. Now that I'm approaching year ten of my career, I've let go of much of those initial hang-ups. I'm not afraid of "fat", of "brown"; and I'm also not afraid of exploring different experiences fat, dark-skinned heroines might have walking through the world toward the love they desire and deserve.

I am now writing the stories I want to read; and gratefully, others are reading them too. In fact, more and more authors are writing the stories they want to read and they have clamoring audiences for their tales. Every person deserves to see oneself in the stories that are told. Every person deserves to escape in a world where the traits they possess are valued and adored. Romance, more than any other genre, gives both readers and writers the space where these things are possible. When the only requirement that matters is love wins out in the end, and happily ever after so, there should be pushback in saying a heroine "doesn't look the part" to have the love she desires and requires. If we allow it in our fantasies, it will then only be a matter of time before we demand the same in our realities.



Savannah J. Frierson completed her first original work, *Reconstructing Jada Channing*, as her senior thesis at Harvard University, earning the 2005 Dorothy Hicks Lee Prize for most outstanding thesis concerning African or African-American literature. In 2007, Savannah released her first novel, *Being Plumville*, which earned Savannah SORMAG Readers' Choice Awards in 2007 and an Emma Award nomination for Debut Author of the Year at the 2008 Romance Slam Jam Conference. She has also spoken at several book fairs, including the South Carolina Book Festival, Capital Bookfest in Charleston, South Carolina, book clubs, radio shows, and classes about her work. Savannah is represented by the wonderful Saritza Hernandez at The Corvisiero Agency and is also a member of the Authors Guild and the Independent Book Publishers Association, and a mentor with RT Academy.

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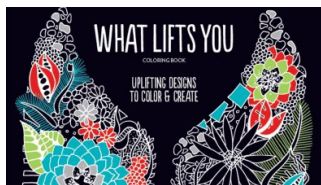
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