

Reader's Report: *Untitled RomCom*

Untitled RomCom is a 63k-word adult rom-com set in New York City around the winter holidays, written in past tense told from two third-person POVs.

Rachel Rubenstein-Goldblatt is a Jewish woman who loves Christmas so much that her office resembles the North Pole as seen in Christmas movies and is full of Santa figurines, and she writes Christmas-themed rom-com novels under a pseudonym. To Rachel's dismay, her publisher asks her to write her next book about Hanukkah under her real name. Rachel is dependent on her income from her novels to sustain her life with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, as most traditional work is incompatible with her medical condition, so Rachel has no choice but to accept her publisher's directive. Feeling that Hanukkah lacks the magic of Christmas, Rachel scrambles for inspiration until she alights on an advertisement for the Matzah Ball, a glamorous event planned for the eighth night of Hanukkah. It sounds like just the thing to help Rachel generate an idea for her next novel. The only problem is the event is sold out and its organizer, the one person who can get her a ticket anyway, is her arch nemesis from Jewish summer camp, Jacob Greenberg.

In just the first 7k words, the novel is populated with characters. Rachel is relatable and quirky and has a sense of humor that occasionally turns delightfully dark. Rachel's mother is a high-powered fertility specialist who stops by unexpectedly and is generally meddlesome. Rachel's father is a famous rabbi. Her best friend Mickey has been part of her life since their summer camp days and knows all her secret Christmas figurine longings and her secret Christmas romance author identity. Jacob Greenberg, who Rachel's mother wants her to reconnect with, has become a high-rolling businessman working in events production, with his assistant Shmuel by his side.

The voice is striking throughout, charming and funny and darkly quirky.

Jacob has one chapter of the first four, so it's unclear how often the manuscript will go to his POV, but it is clear that he and Rachel have very different memories of what happened between them at Camp Ahava, setting up a classic enemies to lovers rom-com based on misinterpretations from the past, reminiscent of holiday rom-coms like *The Most Wonderful Crime of the Year*.

Though the main character, Rachel, is obsessed with Christmas and Santa figurines, the book feels authentically Jewish, with Jewish sayings and customs sprinkled consistently throughout. The Jewishness of the story and its characters feels lived-in.

The manuscript needs some editorial work. While it's challenging to assess pacing in just 7k words of a 63k word novel, there is stagnation in revealing Rachel and Jacob's history from Camp Ahava—the same sentiments and phrases are repeated by each party without much forward momentum. Rachel's CFS could also be introduced earlier and integrated more thoroughly.

This book hits a sweet spot in the market: the burgeoning demand for Hanukkah-themed romance novels. *Untitled RomCom* would sit nicely next to books like *Love You a Latke*, *Eight Nights of Flirting*, and *Three Holidays and a Wedding*. Because of Rachel's obsession with Christmas and secret identity as a Christmas romance novelist, there is potential crossover appeal to Christmas romance readers. Additionally, the CFS angle might draw a new readership: Estimates show that about 25 million adults suffer from autoimmune or other flare-type chronic illnesses like CFS, and that the overwhelming majority are women. It's rare for main characters to have a chronic illness like CFS, and even more so in romance novels, so this book has the potential to reach that audience.

With the caveat that the author only provided the first 7k words, I strongly recommend accepting this manuscript. The flaws in it are all fixable, the voice is memorable and fun and quirky, the concept is charming and has all the expected elements of a holiday romance, and the market is growing for Hanukkah rom-coms. Of course, you'll want to see the full manuscript, but all the ingredients are here for a romance that hits all the marks of the holiday romance subgenre.