

29 Dates

Melissa De La Cruz

Reviewed by: Sierra Irvine, 19

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With traditional South Korean parents, Jisu's overall lack of attention with school and effort for her future have her parents worried. To compromise with her parents, Jisu works with Seoul's lead matchmaker to find the right boyfriend, a key to her success. However when she fails a test and skips out on one of her scheduled dates, her parents ship her off to a private school in San Francisco to get her academics and dates in order. In her new life, Jisu finds comfort in taking photographs for her social media account and two different boys manage to complicate things even further. With a new passion, Jisu is unsure of what path to take and what her parents will think about her choices.

29 Dates is a pretty stereotypical YA romance book, which isn't necessarily a bad thing but doesn't make it perfect either. I found the plot to be interesting enough to hold my attention, with the concept of the match-making and all the dates to keep things new and different. I also really enjoyed Jisu as the female lead with her fun-loving attitude and her love for photography was something I found personally relatable and was a good thing to connect to given her situation isn't something very easy to relate to. The book had a lot of funny moments and was pretty light-hearted, making it a nice and easy read. The ending also had a few minor plot twists that I found to be a good way to end the story.

My biggest problem with the book lies with its portrayal of Korean culture and family. When I first read the plot synopsis, I was a little worried that the book might play too much into the "overbearing Asian parents" trope and I'm sad to say that it did. I don't feel like De La Cruz was able to appropriately explore Korean values and traditions with this book, especially given that she herself is not from that background. I think the book overall, held a favoritism for American values over Korean ones, which was a little weird to read. I think this issue really is what brings this book down because it would be decent without it.

Overall, 29 Dates is exactly what you think it might be, a typical YA romance novel with an unusual feeling of cultural stereotyping in the background. It is certainly one of the weaker pieces of fiction that Melissa De La Cruz has managed to come up with over the years and I would highly recommend reading one of her other works before this one. In terms of audience, I would recommend this book for a teenage audience. I would not recommend this book as a gift as there are many greater options in the YA romance genre, and if you do find yourself interested in reading, I would rent over buying.

Recommended Titles:

Field Notes on Love by Jennifer E. Smith

To All the Boys I've Loved Before by Jenny Han

I Love You So Mochi by Sarah Kuhn

Dash and Lily's Book of Dares by Rachel Cohn

The Selection by Kiera Cass