

NATALIE CAÑA
A PROPOSAL
THEY CAN'T
REFUSE

READERS'
GUIDE

"This book bursts
with humor, heat,
love, and family!"
—DENISE WILLIAMS,
AUTHOR OF
HOW TO FAIL AT FLIRTING

EL COQUI

A NOVEL

Dear Readers,

It took me a long time, along with the encouragement from author friends, to give myself permission to write this book. At the time, it was hard to think of traditional publishing welcoming a book like mine, one featuring a diverse cast of characters and touching on some social issues not always discussed in books. I eventually decided that my desire to tell the story of this family, *The Vegas*, outweighed my concern about publishing not being ready.

My main goal with *A Proposal They Can't Refuse* was to pay homage to my own family with this story. The Vegas are not an exact replica of my own large, imperfect, boisterous, Puerto Rican family, but more of a salute to them and the love we have for each other. I wanted to highlight the cultural pride my family instilled in me. There is not a time I can remember where I wasn't keenly aware that my family (on my mother's side) is Puerto Rican. It colored everything in my world: the food we ate, the language we spoke, the way we dressed and decorated our home, the music we listened to and tv we watched, and the way we interacted with each other. Yes, we were part of the diaspora, but we love our culture fiercely. *Somos Boricuas pa' que tú lo sepas.*

One of the other things I wanted to explore in this book is the idea of self versus community. It's apparent in the Vega Family's struggle to find their place amongst the backdrop of their gentrified neighborhood. But it gets more personal with the main characters in this story who both grapple with finding a way to be themselves while also being a part of a larger group. I did this to focus on how hard it can be to find a balance between those two things. The expectations one feels to conform to the desires of the people you care about is something I think everyone struggles with, but I feel this is even more true for women, the children of immigrants, and people of color.

Kamilah, being a woman of color, feels the pressure to be everything for her family while also being successful in her own right. She is stuck in the in between, trying to figure out how to do both, and often failing (or at least feeling like she is). Liam's only parental figure is his grandfather, an Irish immigrant. Liam is battling the expectations to make something out of his family and cultural legacy before he runs out of time to make his grandfather proud. He feels an intense drive to make everything his grandfather went through "worth it".

Nowadays we are more able to recognize the, sometimes, unhealthy connection between self and family. We call these relationships out as toxic and discuss the need for boundaries, but to actually break the cycle is much more difficult. Especially when it comes to the people you love most. That's what I wanted to explore in this book. Is there a way to find the perfect balance or, like a tightrope walker, are we doomed to forever be teetering on the verge of going kersplat?

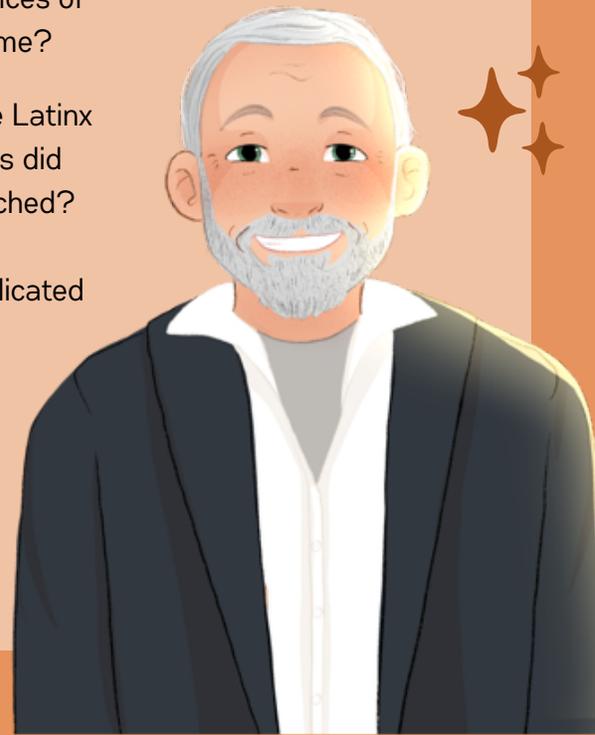
Of course, all of this seems so serious and dire, but I promise you this book is a RomCom with plenty of Com. It's like life, in that nothing is all drama or levity. Sometimes we laugh at the worst moments of our life and sometimes we cry during the best. All we can do is try to find some enjoyment in every precious moment. I hope you do that with *A Proposal They Can't Refuse*. Thank you for choosing to give some of your precious moments to my story.

*Con cariño,
Natalie*



Discussion Questions

1. Kamilah's family is facing the challenge of gentrification in their neighborhood and they all have different takes on it. If your neighborhood was being gentrified, how would you feel about it? What would you do?
2. Kamilah and Liam's families are quite important to them. Did their family dynamics remind you of your own experiences in any way?
3. Killian and Papo are known in their Senior Living facility for being troublemakers. If you were in a Senior Living facility, what would you be known for?
4. Kamilah has a close bond with her cousin, Lucy, and her best friend, Sofia. While Liam has one with his friends Ben and Devon. In what ways do these characters give and receive love? How do they show they care?
5. Kamilah and Liam are the protagonists, but they're surrounded by a diverse cast of secondary characters. Which secondary characters stood out to you the most, and why? Who else's story would you like to see told?
6. Liam experienced a traumatic event as a child that affected his ability to connect with others. How do you think these experiences affect us as adults? What would you have done in his place?
7. In the story both MCs lie to further their own agendas, avoid confrontation, and/or protect the feelings of the ones they love. Is there ever a time when lying is okay? Why or why not?
8. Kamilah is second-generation Puerto Rican and Liam is basically a second-generation Irish American (being mostly raised by his grandfather). How did you see their experiences of being part of a cultural diaspora differ? In what ways were they the same?
9. Latinx culture is not a monolith. Why is it important to portray multiple Latinx stories and experiences in pop culture? What similarities or differences did you see between this book and other Latinx stories you've read or watched?
10. At its heart, *A Proposal They Can't Refuse* is a romance about complicated family dynamics and living life on your own terms. How would you have managed the conflicts these characters faced?





The Proposal Drink

2 oz. of Malahat Straight Bourbon (Yes, it's not Irish whiskey, but Killian and Liam would still approve)
1/2 oz. passion/mango juice (Trader Joe's Brand)
1/2 oz. fresh squeezed lemon juice
Heavy 1/2 oz. of simple syrup
a dash of Peychaud's bitters
Ice
Garnish: orange peel and a flower.
Cocktail Shaker or mixing glass
Cocktail Glass (preferably a champagne coup or martini)

EQUIPMENT & INGREDIENTS



In a cocktail shaker with ice, add the bourbon, passion/mango juice, lemon juice, simple syrup, and bitters. Stir until chilled. Strain into the glass and garnish with the orange peel and flower.

INSTRUCTIONS

Kamilah's Limber de Tamarindo con Whiskey

INGREDIENTS

- ½ lb of Tamarind pods
- 1 cup of white sugar (you can really use any kind of sugar you'd like)
- 1 liter of water
- ⅓ cup of Irish Whiskey

EQUIPMENT

- Medium Saucepan
- Mixing bowl
- Large Spoon or potato masher
- Ladle
- Medium Strainer
- 6-8 oz plastic cups with or without lids (We are doing this real PR style. You can always, of course, use a popsicle mold)



DIRECTIONS

The first thing you are going to do is set your water to boil in the medium saucepan. While the water heats, remove the shells and veins of the tamarind pods from the fruit. They tend to break into little pieces, so just be careful to get most of the shells and larger veins. We will strain the juice later, so if some small pieces stay it's no big deal. There is a seed inside which is fine for now.



Once you are done removing the shells, go ahead and put the tamarind fruit with the seeds in the boiling water (if it's not boiling yet, no big deal put them in anyway). Now it's time to use the spoon to continuously move the tamarind around. As the water boils and you move the fruit around and push on it a bit, the pulp will loosen from the seeds (you could also use a potato masher for this step). This is probably going to be the most labor you'll do for this recipe, so just keep doing this until you've most of the fruit pulp from the seeds and the water is now a reddish brown. As you do this part you may want to turn the heat down after a few minutes and eventually turn it off to allow the mixture to cool. You can continue to remove the pulp from the seeds as the water cools. You want to allow the water to cool completely before the next step.

Once the juice has cooled, you will put the strainer in the bowl and strain the juice. Use the spoon to move it around and get as much of the pulp as you can. You can even strain the juice back into the saucepan then back into the bowl. Repeat that as many times as you want to get more pulp off the seeds.

Now that we have the cooled juice, it's time to add the sugar and mix it well. Tamarind is very sour and a little bitter, so it's important to do this step to taste. This is now the time to add more cool water if you think the taste is too strong and the mixture too thick. This is really to taste, so make it taste like a juice you wouldn't mind drinking whether that means more sugar and water or less.

Add in the Irish Whiskey and mix everything well.

Now it's time to ladle the juice into the cups. In Puerto Rico, they usually use 7 oz cups without tops, but it's nice to have the tops and 7oz cups are not always easy to find. Whichever cups you have, ladle the juice into each cup but leave about a half an inch at the top to give the limber space to expand as it freezes. Stir between pours just to make sure the sugar and whiskey is incorporated well.

Put the cups in the freezer for 8-12 hours. Then enjoy!

Here's a little tip about eating limber (pronounced more like limb-bear). We squeeze the cup to lift the limber like a push pop. No need for sticks or a spoon!

About the Author



Natalie Caña loves to incorporate her you'll-never-believe-what-just-happened-to-me personal experiences, enthusiasm for telenovela tomfoolery, and love for her Latinx culture into creating funny, heartfelt, and just a little bit over-the-top contemporary romances for characters who look and sound like her.