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Attending a London production of *The Immortal Hour*, Catherine, a widow in her forties, encounters the handsome young Christopher, and their unlikely romance scandalizes their friends and families.

Love Details

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Author : Elizabeth von Arnim

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From Reader Review Love for online ebook

Ayrinne says

Per ora il migliore della Von Arnim che mi sia capitato tra le mani. Uno stile classico per un contenuto estremamente moderno e tra le righe affiora l'immagine di una donna assolutamente unica.

Cos'è l'amore per un uomo, cos'è per una donna? Cos'è nella giovinezza, cos'è nella maturità? L'autrice se lo domanda e cerca di rispondere in ogni riga di questa coinvolgente storia, che narra di un giovanotto esuberante che si prende una bella sbandata per una donna molto più anziana di lui. E seppur alla fine, tutti facciano una ben magra figura, il miracolo della scrittura si compie: svanisce il cinismo e rimane la compassione, la simpatia e l'affetto per dei personaggi che racchiudono tutte le nostre fragilità e i nostri difetti.

Sharone Powell says

This book explores how a big age gap influences a relationship, one in which the woman is quite a bit older, and the other in which the man is older. It seems much harder for the older woman, who becomes obsessed with her looks to hide her aging from the younger husband, while the older man seems to be free of any critique by his young wife, his aging wholeheartedly accepted.

The biggest problem I have with this book is that one is never sure upon what young Christopher's great love for Elizabeth is based. She herself is unsure, whence her obsession commences.

I gave Elizabeth Von Arnim five stars for *The Enchanted April*, which is one of my all time favorite books. This book, too, had some merit, but at the end of the day, I didn't like it, hence the one star rating.

Toffeeapple says

It was very longwinded, but I stuck with it.

Sera says

I just read the 1925 hardback 1st edition of *Love*, by Elizabeth Von Arnim, that I found in a box of books from my grandparents' house. I enjoyed this book for many reasons. The simplest of reasons was that it was a happy diversion from the other book I'm reading, which details the suffering of Sudan's "Lost Boys" during and after a brutal civil war. The more complex reason I enjoyed the book is that I found it to be a very true account of love.

The main element of this story is its critique of society's hypocrisy regarding age: a young woman can marry and old man, but if a young man marries and older woman, it is scandalous. But the novel doesn't just point out this hypocrisy, it examines it in great detail through the parallel marriages of a widow and her daughter. The daughter (Virginia), at 19, marries a man (Stephen) who is a year older than her mother. Nobody bats an

eye. The mother (Catherine), at 47, marries a man (Christopher) who is only 6 years older than her daughter. The immediate family is scandalized, but nobody who doesn't know their ages bats an eye because Catherine looks so young. But as soon as she begins to show her age, which, unconvincingly, happens extremely rapidly after her marriage, she faces all sorts of embarrassing situations as people mistake her for her husband's aunt or mother.

I haven't read a good love story in a while, but this one was reminiscent of the best of them: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, or *A Room with a View*. It followed the same basic plot: two people fall in love, there are obstacles and misunderstandings, there is a "grand gesture"—the point at which one of the lovers does something irrational that "proves" the love, and a final coming together of the two lovers to live in presumed marital bliss—despite the fact that every other marriage in the story has been shown to be dysfunctional.

However, this love story is different in an important way: Catherine and Christopher get married in the middle of the book—not the end. In this way, the novel stays true to its title. It is about love, all aspects of love, not just the falling-in-love part, although it covers that quite thoroughly. We continue to follow Catherine and Christopher during and after their blissful honeymoon—when Christopher starts to realize that love all the time isn't good, and that he needs some purpose, some separation, to be able to fully appreciate being able to come home to his wife at the end of the day. We see Catherine, who was originally rather aloof, become more and more in love with Chris—and therefore more and more paranoid that as her beauty fades, so will his love. The novel also chronicles maternal love and filial love, as we see Catherine and Virginia experience being pulled away from each other by their husbands.

Another unique feature of this love story is that the point of view is third person omniscient. We get to see inside everybody's head—from the main characters to their friends and servants—which is a difficult task for an author. But Elizabeth Von Arnim displays her skills as she develops a distinct voice for each character. I personally found Christopher's perspective to be the most endearing, as he seemed to know most what he wanted and wished to defenestrate society's rules whenever they interfered with his pursuit of his beloved Catherine.

An example of these wonderful narrative voices, and especially Christopher's, is at the point when Christopher has made his grand gesture: he shows up at Virginia's house, where Catherine has gone to run away from him, and finds her with Mrs. Colquhoun, Virginia's proper and stuffy mother-in-law.

"[Catherine:] and I," explained Mrs. Colquhoun, putting her arm through Catherine's, as though elucidating her, "are both the mothers-in-law of the same delightful couple—I of her daughter, she of my son. We are linked together, she and I, in indissoluble bonds."

Christopher wished to slay her as she stood. The liberal days were past, however, when one could behave simply, and as he couldn't behave simply and slay her, he didn't know how to behave to her at all.

"The woman has a beak," he thought, standing red and tongue-tied before her. "She's a bird of prey. She has got her talons into my Catherine. Linked together! Good God!" (152)

Christopher represents freedom, whereas Catherine represents bondage. She is a slave to society's expectation for how a 47-year-old widow ought to behave, and Christopher, through his youthful, boyish love, liberates her. It is ironic, then, when at the end of the novel, she is the one who has freed herself from her dependence on beauty aids to keep her appearance young, and it is Christopher who finds himself enslaved in his (and society's) expectations of what his wife should look like.

This novel is a rewarding read with vivid, rounded characters. It examines all aspects of love and, in my opinion, gives a very accurate depiction of the manic nature of falling-in-love and then the more placid and enduring nature of married love—and all the trials and tribulations of both phases.

--Sera Arcaro, 6-18-2010

Jane says

I remember, many years ago, falling in love with Elizabeth Von Arnim's writing as I read every one of her books that Virago republished. Back then I read library copies, and years later I started to collect her books for my own library, secure in the knowledge that I could happily read them over and over again.

'Love' was one of the most elusive titles, and even though many of the details had slipped my mind I remembered that it was a particular favourite, that it had an especially striking cover, and so I was delighted when I finally found a copy to keep.

This is the story of a romance between a young man and a somewhat older lady, and I on the second time of reading my love for the story grew and grew.

The young man is Christopher, who works in an office and shares a London flat with a friend. His favourite pastime is visiting the theatre, and there is one play he loves above all others and goes to see many, many times. He comes to realise that there is a lady who must love the play as much as he does, because he sees her there often; and one day, when they are sitting on the same row, Christopher broaches a conversation.

The lady is charmed, and the pair talk about the play and about many other things, but Christopher finds that she is reticent when it comes to talking about herself. All he learns is that she is Mrs. Catherine Cumfrit, and that she is a widow. He wishes she would say a little more, and that he could get to know her rather better.

When the perspective shifts it is easy to understand why Catherine is reticent. She had married a sensible, reliable man who was significantly older than her, and she had been a widow for a few years. He had been concerned that she might fall prey to fortune hunters when he was gone, and so he left his estate and his fortune to his daughter and just a small income to his wife.

His concern had been well-intentioned, but it had consequences that he hadn't considered. He left his estate and his fortune to their daughter, rather than to Catherine herself, because he was anxious that Catherine might be taken advantage of by a fortune hunter. Catherine's daughter, Virginia, had married at the age of eighteen; and that left Catherine in a rather uncomfortable position in the where she had once been mistress. She saw that her daughter was blissfully happy with the older clergyman who said that she made him feel young again, and she realised that it was time she found a new home of her own.

Her small income allowed Catherine to live modestly in a flat in London, with one servant to look after her. She missed her home, she missed the countryside, she missed having money to buy new things, but she told herself that she had to come to terms with a new way of life.

When Christopher came into her life, Catherine was flattered by his attentions, and she began to think that

maybe she wouldn't be a widow for the rest of her life. She was anxious though, because she knew that Christopher hadn't really thought about how much older than him she was, and what the consequences of that might be. Not knowing quite what to do, she decided to escape to the country for a little while.

The household staff were delighted when Katherine arrived with two trunks, but Virginia and her husband, Stephen, were rather alarmed by the prospect of a long visit. They were too polite to say so, but their behaviour made their feelings clear, and Katherine was appalled to find herself considered of an age with Stephen's mother when she was in fact a little younger than Stephen.

They completely forgot that Katherine had been mistress of the house for more than twenty years, until just a few months ago; and they didn't give a thought to how she might feel. They were completely wrapped up in their own love story, and they were oblivious to anything else.

Katherine couldn't explain why she had come to stay, and she began to realise that she was an unwelcome guest.

Then Christopher – unwilling to give up his pursuit – arrived with on his motorbike, with a sidecar to carry her back to London. Katherine was delighted, her family were scandalised, and the trip back to London put the relationship between the pair onto a new footing.

They married.

There would be drama in London as Katherine tried to keep up with her young husband and to be the kind of wife she thought he would want; and there would be drama in the country when the time came for Virginia's first child to be born.

Would the relationship between come through the approbation of friends, family and society, AND all of that?

The answer wouldn't come until the last pages, and I flew through the book until I got there, because I was so caught up with the characters and their stories. Those characters and their relationships are so well drawn; and there are many lovely reminders that love is blind, and that it can make us blind.

The juxtaposition of two relationships with age gap – one considered quite normal by society and one not – is particularly well done.

The plot is so cleverly constructed, balancing expected and unexpected developments, confirming some assumptions and overturning others, changing some things and leaving others just as they were. There are big questions and small questions to ponder, wrapped up in a wonderfully engaging story.

Best of all is the narrative voice. It has the warm, wry wit that is so typical of Elizabeth Von Arnim, and also has things it wants to say and points that it wants to make. I wasn't at all surprised at all to learn that the author was inspired by a relationship of her own with a much younger man.

She really was inspired, and I really think that 'Love' is a marvellous novel.

Marina (Sonnenbarke) says

Recensione originale: <https://sonnenbarke.wordpress.com/201...>

Se vi iscrivete alla newsletter, Il Libraio vi regala sette ebook, o almeno così era fino a qualche tempo fa, non so se la promozione è ancora in corso. Fra gli ebook che Il Libraio mi ha regalato c'era questo romanzo di Elizabeth von Arnim, un'autrice che non avevo mai letto e un libro che non avrei mai degnato di uno sguardo se non me l'avessero regalato. Invece è stato una piacevole sorpresa.

Prima di tutto occorre dire che il libro è stato pubblicato originariamente nel 1925, quindi il modo in cui affronta il tema è piuttosto controcorrente per l'epoca. Inoltre, l'autrice ha tratto spunto per questo romanzo dalle proprie vicende, rendendo il libro parzialmente autobiografico, seppure ovviamente in modo romanzato.

Siamo a Londra negli anni Venti del Novecento, Catherine è una vedova di 47 anni a cui piace andare a teatro, e proprio qui farà conoscenza di un altro appassionato di teatro e musica, Christopher Monckton, che di anni ne ha 25. Inizia fra i due una bellissima amicizia che presto Christopher trasforma in amore. Catherine si schermisce e cerca di tenerlo a distanza, pur apprezzandone moltissimo l'amicizia. Cerca in tutti i modi di fargli capire che è più vecchia di lui, ma non riesce a dirgli di avere una figlia ormai sposata. Di fatto non gli rivela mai la sua età. Catherine è estremamente giovanile, tanto che Christopher pensa che abbia solo pochi anni più di lui. Questo non lo spaventa minimamente, perché quando si è innamorati pochi anni di differenza non sono certo un problema. Finalmente Catherine riuscirà, dopo diverso tempo, a fargli capire che la differenza di età fra loro due è molta, ma Christopher, innamoratissimo, non si fa spaventare. Del resto anche Virginia, la figlia diciannovenne di Catherine, è sposata con un uomo molto più anziano di lei, coetaneo della madre e che ha addirittura un aspetto decrepito, perlomeno agli occhi di Christopher.

Tuttavia sappiamo bene come vanno le cose, e uso volutamente il presente perché disgraziatamente è tuttora così, anche dopo più di 90 anni dalla pubblicazione del romanzo. Quello che intendo dire è che, sebbene si storca sempre un po' il naso di fronte alle unioni in cui i due hanno una grande differenza di età, questa differenza è tollerata piuttosto tranquillamente se è l'uomo a essere più anziano della donna, ma mai se è il contrario. Basti pensare al nuovo presidente francese, salito inizialmente agli onori delle cronache soprattutto perché la moglie è molto più anziana di lui, e capirete di cosa sto parlando.

È per questo motivo che Catherine cerca di svincolarsi dall'opprimente amore di Christopher, cerca in tutti i modi di sfuggirgli, e si convince lei stessa di non esserne innamorata. Ma poi, è innamorata davvero oppure no? Non è molto chiaro, nel corso del romanzo, anche se il mio parere è che lei non sia tanto innamorata di lui, quanto di quello che lui offre alla sua vanità, cioè la possibilità di sentirsi più giovane.

L'idea, dunque, che i due possano unirsi in matrimonio, è del tutto ridicola agli occhi di chiunque, Catherine per prima, mentre per Christopher non rappresenta il minimo problema dato che lei ha un aspetto così giovanile. Tuttavia, quando si inizia a far notare che Virginia e suo marito Stephen hanno una differenza d'età ancora maggiore, questo suscita scandalo, perché *non è la stessa cosa*. Naturalmente, come potrebbe, lui è un uomo che si prende cura di una giovane creatura indifesa, mentre nel caso di Catherine e Christopher è una cosa del tutto immorale.

Come si dice nella postfazione questo, pur essendo pieno di tinte pastello, è un romanzo con un tema molto serio. Le tinte pastello sono evidentissime, nel corso di quasi tutto il libro siamo di fronte a un vero e proprio romanzo d'amore, come del resto dice il titolo. È verso la fine del romanzo che ci accorgiamo che le cose non

stanno proprio così per l'autrice, ma naturalmente se siamo lettori attenti ce ne saremo già accorti da un pezzo. Insomma, se vi avvicinate a questo libro cercando una storia d'amore, la troverete senz'altro, ma sbaglierete completamente l'approccio e vi perderete il senso ultimo del libro.

Ciò che interessa all'autrice è mettere a nudo l'ipocrisia di una società dal doppio standard, che accetta che a fare certe cose sia un uomo ma non una donna, la quale invece, come viene ripetuto nel corso del romanzo, deve relegare se stessa a un ruolo subordinato (per tutta la vita ma soprattutto) quando diventa vedova e quando sta per diventare nonna. Ormai la morte è vicina anche se la donna in questione non ha ancora 50 anni, perciò quello che si richiede alla donna è comportarsi come la vecchia che la società crede lei sia. Oltre a questo aspetto, riveste un'enorme importanza l'incapacità di lasciar andare la giovinezza. Elizabeth von Arnim sa perfettamente che Catherine a 47 anni è tutt'altro che vecchia, ma sa anche che non è più una ragazza. Tuttavia Catherine vorrebbe disperatamente essere ancora una ragazza, e questo comporterà grossi problemi per lei e per Christopher. L'autrice sembra volerci dire che non dobbiamo accettare la doppia morale imposta dalla società inglese del tempo, ma che allo stesso tempo non dobbiamo illuderci di essere ancora quel che non siamo e non saremo più. Inoltre, l'autrice mette in luce la fatuità di alcuni tipi di amore che, sebbene sembrino essere totali e pieni di dedizione, non sono in ultima analisi che basati sulle apparenze, e si sgretolano quando queste apparenze per un motivo o per l'altro vengono messe da parte e viene mostrata la verità.

Il romanzo è dunque ricco di spunti interessanti che sono sapientemente nascosti dietro una facciata dolce, amorevole e carina (parola che ricorre spesso nel corso del libro). Quasi come se l'autrice volesse ricreare nella struttura narrativa proprio quello che con la trama ci vuole far vedere: cioè nascondere con un'apparenza di tonalità pastello quella che è la verità, ovvero un romanzo fortemente impegnato dal punto di vista sociale.

Non l'ho trovato un romanzo eccelso, anche perché io non sono nota per amare i toni pastello anche quando questi celano qualcosa di più profondo, tuttavia mi è piaciuto e lo consiglio.

Ali says

Catherine Cumfrit and Christopher Monckton, meet at a production of a play *The Immortal Hour*, playing to reduced audiences, the pair have each attended numerous performances. Recognising each other among the dedicated followers of *The Immortal Hour* Catherine and Christopher move to sit near to one another. Christopher is pretty much immediately smitten, Catherine aware of his interest is flattered. Christopher is twenty-five, Catherine is in her mid-forties, a young looking widow, with a newly married daughter. While Christopher believes Catherine is probably a little bit older than him – he is sure it is nothing much – Catherine is very aware of the age difference – but enjoys being assumed to be much younger.

Full review: <https://heavenali.wordpress.com/2016/...>

Richard says

I love Elizabeth, and this is one of my favorite of her books. The beginning is soooo charming, and the protagonist is adorable. Oh. It's about a woman and a younger man. It's gorgeous.

Grier says

It's hard to believe this book isn't better known. I loved it, especially what it had to say about the efforts of women to look younger. There were some very funny parts, too. Highly recommended.

Phrodrick says

Elizabeth Von Arnim's heroine in *Love* was too conventional to think of herself as retaining any qualities that might attract a man. Catherine is a widow of ten years and if not happy in her role as a not very popular mother-in-law and soon to be grandmother she is resigned to perform this role. Most of her life she has been whatever the conventions of her time and place have demanded of her and if not happy than at least earnest.

Her not yet out of her teens daughter has been swept up by the longtime family minister and in their marriage Catherine has been pushed from being the lady of the manor to a barely getting by genteel lady of a certain age, surviving on a fixed and limiting income in a prepaid modest city apartment.

At a London musical play she meets the much younger Christopher. He quickly decides that he loves her. Being a young man, if older than Catherine's daughter he is represented as all energy and action. Overcoming her reticence and shucking off all pre-World War II English conventions he weds her.

What Author Von Arnim accomplishes is a novel focused on Catherine's thoughts and emotions. The reader will see briefly all of the then typical reaction to this unconventional couple, but only as they impact or do not impact on her thoughts. Great drama is going to unfold at what is now her daughter's manor house but everything is about Catherine and how she feels about events and people.

There are some moments of great humor built around her almost her age minister son-in-law, and around how Catherine is clearly the less favored mother in law. Her teen daughter is almost modern in her embarrassment over her mother.

Speaking of modern, it is hard to read about how the minister had, to use the modern word groomed the pre-adolescent daughter to love him such that by her 19th birthday the marriage was a done thing and the bride completely convinced of his love. He does love her but there remains something creepy about their history and her blind adoration of him.

Overall Elizabeth von Arnim is a good story teller. Her version of this plot avoids being about the obvious and keeps Catherine in the center of our attention. She is the only fully developed character, but hers is the character we need fully developed. The audience for *Love*, is female, though not exclusively, and for almost any person old enough to understand the vocabulary. There is nothing in the language and very little in the action that would keep this banned from the shelves of any but the youngest children.

Mairi says

This is a novel I have read at least twice before. It is a very unusual and worthwhile book. At times laugh-

out-loud funny, and at others so touching as to draw tears. It is about a young man of about twenty-five who falls in love with a woman twenty years older than he is, but that is only the very beginning of it. Definitely one of my favourite novels of all time.

Jane Gregg says

A quirky little number from 1925 that sort of has one foot in the century prior and one in its current time. Catherine, our heroine, is the vehicle for much insightful play and in the very capable hands of her author, is an engaging focus for the moral lessons to be rolled out (not in a bad way - this is not preachy).

classic reverie says

How do I Love Thee, Elizabeth von Arnim, let me count the ways! That is how I feel about Elizabeth and her stories! I still have many more reads of hers to go but know I am going to love them all and the reason being is her insight into life and our human weakness and strengths.

"Love" is a novel that I wished I had read in my youth, so I could compare my thoughts then with my middle aged self, now. Catherine, one of the main characters, is 47 years old and even though I am 6 years older, I could feel along with her in every stage of the story. There are two sections in this book; the difference in them was shocking. I cannot remember a book's feeling, or lets say direction, being so starkly contrasted. I mean I was so in such a light hearted mood and then the storm clouds descended. "Love" is not just a love story, it is so much more. Hypocrisy, society's norms, the lengths on trying to obtain youth, marriage and family relationships are all here, not in a light lovely dovey way but a hard look at life in all its views.

Even though I have only seen Bette Davis in "Mrs. Skeffington", and when I saw that movie I had no idea who Elizabeth von Arnim was; and loved the movie. Yes, I have that book on my list to read and comparing the novel to the movie will be fun to do; "Love" reminds me of "Mrs. Skeffington" and even though they are quite different, they have a similar desire to be youthful. I loved Catherine in "Love" and it will be interesting to see what I think of "Mrs. Skeffington" after I read it and seeing how it differs from Bette Davis quite unlikable character.

Elizabeth gives life to even the minor characters in "Love". The confirmed bachelor friends thoughts on marriage and Mrs. Mitcham, the housekeeper, thoughts on her mistress are just so real, you can see her looks and reactions with clarity. Elizabeth has humor sprinkled in her as all her books but the ironies are also mixed in to make a point.

I thought the introduction on this edition, wonderfully insightful into Elizabeth the person and the story. It is loosely based on a romance with her and Michael Frere, who she first meet in May 1920. Elizabeth was 54 and he was 24. In the story Catherine is 47 and Christopher is 25. In the story and as in life, especially back then it must have been a great difference in an older woman and younger man verses older man and young woman, it was okay for the latter but the former was something repulsive to see. Elizabeth does such a good job at looking at this from many angles and if it is something that should be desired. I had many thoughts on Christopher and other characters and my feelings changed as the story proceeded. Like, I said there is so much to this story and it is not something easily answered then or even now. I had no clue at all how this would end and was surprised at many occurrences but it all seemed so real and true to life.

Trying to find "the fountain of youth" and what lengths one must go to is here in all its ugliness which is a section of this story, Elizabeth took from her cousin, Katherine Mansfield's experience. Excerpt from introduction below.

"The account of the face treatment that Catherine had undergone at the hands of a quack was taken from a description given to Elizabeth by Katherine Mansfield, her New Zealand cousin, of her own experience in Paris when she was searching for a cure for consumption. This may have been too tragic a source. If Elizabeth needed copy she had, if Frere is to be believed, her own experience to draw on."

The storyline, you basically got already, a young man and older woman and all that comes their way from society and themselves. Did I tell you before how much I love Elizabeth? LOL ???

Morag says

This novel was way before its time. Such a great exploration of human nature.

Bree (AnotherLookBook) says

A novel about a younger man who pursues an older widow, much to the chagrin of their friends, family, and society in general. 1925.

Full review (and other recommendations!) at Another look book

A book with a straightforward plot that carries a powerful punch. I wouldn't recommend it if you can't handle the slower, delicately crafted type of book. But if you CAN handle that type, then this book is a must read! Von Arnim clearly had some things she wanted to say on relationships, age differences, and the hypocrisy of social norms. A great representation of intelligent, 1920s literature.
