



Love Always

Ann Beattie

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Lucy Spenser, the Miss Lonely hearts of a chic counter-cultural magazine, finds her unflappable Vermont life completely upended by her teenaged soap-opera-star niece, Nicole, and her hangers-on.

Love Always Details

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From Reader Review Love Always for online ebook

Spike says

Silly. Trite. 80's references drove me crazy. Annoyingly clever, but then 2/3 of the way goes off course into a serious story. Too many problems to expound on here. Don't waste your time reading this one.

Judith says

Love Always by Ann Beattie is a very 1980's comic novel about lifestyles of the glitterati. New Yorkers seek peace and beauty in Vermont, and they do find the beauty, but growing up is not for everyone.

Victoria Grusing says

I love books. I read every word. Rarely do I not finish a book as it makes me feel like the book has won. This was a book that I had to force myself to read and actually skimmed through pages. All the characters were shallow. There was no lesson to be learned from the book. It made me feel that I had wasted the part of my life spent reading the book. It is amazing that it was allowed to be published when there are probably many better writers. Sorry to Ms. Beattie; but I will probably not try any other of your books.

Aaron says

fun little book. was able to be 'straightforward and realist' [ie, didn't have any overt 'tricks'] while still keeping my attention, making me think / laugh consistently.

reminded me of lorie moore's novel 'who will run the frog hospital', in form more than theme.

for the most part, each chapter is from the viewpoint of a different character -- some characters get 2 or 3 chapters -- and i think this is why the book didn't ultimately do anything amazing for me. each character had an interesting story -- nicole's and lucy's the strongest for me -- but without giving each much time, and not having a very strong central bond which they surround (beyond all running in the same fairly expansive social circle), the book didn't end up feeling like it was 'about' much.

because of the hyper-fractured viewpoint, even the small moments of truth didn't feel like they contributed to some bigger, overall [something]

i would recommend this book to anyone interested in good writing about writers (which beattie does commendably and unusually well) and society in country life.

Unbridled says

First Beattie. Found her prose capable but less than stimulating and found many of her metaphoric efforts to be clumsy. She does have a storytelling talent. Her main characters are developed with skill and the story moves along at an easy clip. The book works when it combs through the textures of its main characters, but it also seems to throw away its gains for a compromised net effect. The humor was mild and tepid, consistently at play, and nothing to shake you out of the narrative. Overall I was reminded of reading 'contemporary' fiction in college and wondering if, as the old guard noted, it was true that this kind of referential writing would defeat itself with its looseness with the cultural/commercial spigot of its era. In this case, it would seem so – while there is nothing wrong with feeling a book is 'dated,' unless it has a singular nature, it grows moldy in the wasteland.

Daniel says

The best way I can think to describe "Love Always" is as a hybrid of John Updike and Jane Austen, or maybe just Updike from a female perspective. The book is Updikian in its depiction of a group of affluent New England adults and their various romantic entanglements as well as in its pinpoint descriptions. There's a poetry in the way both Updike and Beattie describe people, objects, places, and behaviors with crystalline clarity, and the observations are the primary strength of "Love Always." But whereas there's also a poetry to the construction of Updike's sentences and the vocabulary he uses, Beattie in "Love Always" resorts to a series of short, clipped sentences, reminiscent of James Ellroy. The characters are somewhat less than gainfully employed, although a couple of them--Hildon and Lucy--put in time at a magazine Hildon founded called Country Daze, which appears to justify their existence in Vermont. Mostly the characters are transplants from more urban settings and they appear amused with small town life, although Beattie spends little time actually describing the small town or its lifelong residents. The characters all share a curious lack of inertia. Hildon has loved Lucy for years and the two are involved in a longtime affair but Hildon can't bring himself to leave his wife. Lucy meanwhile hangs around to write an advice column for the magazine. (She was left by her husband, who makes a strange and somewhat unconvincing reappearance in the book's final pages.) Lucy has a sister, Jane, who suffers a tragedy, and a niece, Nicole, who became for me the center of "Love Always." Nicole is a 14-year old soap opera actress who hopes to appear more worldly than she really is. She seemed the most human to me, her emotions and desires the most vibrant. Beattie's gifts as a writer are obvious. She achieves a casualness of tone that is enviable. However, I think this particular book suffers from a lack of focus and forward movement. Characters come and go. An artist, Edward, gets into an embarrassing entanglement with Nicole that becomes a legal issue but then vanishes from the story. We get lengthy vignettes of policemen, a young journalist, and an unhappy young writer and his nurse fiancée, yet these people are all tangential to the novel's action. The end result is that it's impossible to connect with anyone. There's such a lightness of subject matter and tone through the first two thirds of "Love Always" that when Beattie inserts a more troubling incident into the book it seems just that--placed artificially by the author to lend weight to a story that, until then, had been floating lightly along. The event is discordant. And because there's no emotional connection to any of the characters, the event feels heavy and unnecessary. Maybe this was partly Beattie's point, to show the inability of people to connect, to depict their depressions and lack of inertia, but the side effect of this is that it creates a plodding and frustrating experience for the reader. One has the sense that when the author spends several pages describing two cops' daily habits and their McDonald's preferences, even she is unsure how to push the story forward.

Carol Storm says

Lucy the heroine is supposed to "shimmer" but she comes across as cold and basically lifeless. Her inability to love is never really explained, but we're meant to understand it's not her fault because . . . well just because. On the other hand, boyfriend Hildon is ultimately dismissed as a "cad" but Beattie never really gives him a chance, or explains why the stunning Lucy can't do any better. People who are meant to be tragic come across as grotesque, and people meant to be funny come across as not nearly as ridiculous as the author intends.

I really admired Anne Beattie 25 years ago, when I was just out of college. I read this book back then and thought it was amazing. Looking back though, it's actually pretty shallow. People say it's about the Eighties, but it's more like an autopsy on the Sixties. It captures everything that was ugliest about the generation -- the narcissism, self-indulgence, the veiled snobbery. But absolutely nothing of the energy, imagination, or excitement of change. Under the hippie chick veneer Anne Beattie is really a very sour personality who only sees the worst in people. And even that isn't right because she never captures the power of evil, but only the absence of goodness. At one point she invokes a quote by Yeats, "the best lack all conviction, the worst are full of passionate intensity" but she doesn't read beneath the quote to grasp how fraudulent and self-indulgent pessimism really is.

Michelle says

"A master chronicler of our life and times." —Newsday

"A very funny book. . . . If Jane Austen had been crossed with Oscar Wilde and re-crossed with the early Evelyn Waugh, and the result plonked down among the semi-beautiful people of late 20th-century media-fringe America . . . the outcome might have been something like this."
—Margaret Atwood

"Ferociously funny." —The Los Angeles Times

"Beattie's new novel, her third, is a gratifying surprise. Love Always will be welcomed by the large and loyal Beattie readership, but there is much that recommends it to the previously unconverted." —Harper's Bazaar

"Beattie's most comic—indeed her first satiric—work to date. . . . Much of the book's authenticity derives from the accretion of felt detail—a Beattie trademark. She captures 1984 Vermont with right-on references to Cyndi Lauper, Horchow catalogs, and 'pre-Cabbage Patch' Coleco." —The Christian Science Monitor

LIE. LIE. LIE.

Okay, so this is my first ever foray into Ann Beattie's writing. But still, none of the blurbs matched my feeling when I read it. I didn't laugh, i didn't sympathise with the characters, i didn't invest in any of them, and to be honest, for such a little book, it felt terribly long. I skimmed through most of the pages and I still couldn't find anything of substance.

The novel is basically about nothing. There is no character development, it tried to tell several stories at once which achieved nothing, and in the end, none of the characters changed for the better! They just remained....

What a waste of time.

The only one that truly reflects this book is a remark from John Updike.

"The novel is sadder than satire, for it is about the emptiness not of these lives but of our lives."

Madeleine says

Love Always did a lot of things well but it did a lot of things that annoyed me, too. And then sometimes it annoyed me because it did certain things too well, like perfectly capturing the zeitgeist of the 1980s. I bloody abhor the '80s, from its self-righteous excess to its synthesized music (which, blessedly, stayed far away from this novel) to its regrettable fashion choices to all of the other ways it was a reaction against the decade that preceded it, as is the nature of generational shifts, I suppose. But is it natural to feel such animosity toward the decade in which one was born but did not come of age? I've always felt that I was born way too late so I think the sense of having missed the things I most wanted to see feeds into the same grass-is-always-greener, contempt-breeding familiarity that I harbor toward my blandly homogenous adopted hometown: Perhaps being born in Wisconsin of the '80s but growing up in the Jersey of the '90s (while feeling like I should have been a transient child of the '60s) further warped the perspective of an individual who was probably already destined for some prodigious weirdness.

Anyway. I rescued this novel from the local library's sea of used books solely because it's set in Vermont. I had no idea that it was about a decade I have no desire to revisit (in hindsight, the cover's time-capsuley, stylized cover art should have been a clue), but I also didn't expect journalists and writers and magazine employees to be the vehicles moving the story along, which was a much more pleasant surprise. And I certainly wasn't familiar with Ann Beattie, who I now know to be a celebrated short-story writer. Having read one of her novels leads me to believe that I'd like her shorter works better, as her writing in novel form seemed a little too meandering and a little too bogged down by details, which I assume is an easy trap to fall into while looking for a way to beef up a text that would have been just fine at half the length.

This novel did feel more padded than fleshed-out; similarly, the myriad points of view offered by the voices comprising this yuppie Greek choir felt like several interconnected short stories with some of the connections being more intimate, more realized and more successfully rendered and resolved than others. The problem wasn't the dimensional, believable characters, nor was it the way that the overall weaving together of many stories felt like a bunch of short stories coalescing into one bigger picture. This deceptively carefree, quickly moving book even had a number of messages worth sending -- they just got lost in the frivolity of the times. Part of me feels that may have been a deliberate move on the writer's part, an attempt to convey that lives still shatter even in the most ebullient of eras, but it just didn't feel as well-executed as it could have been with just a little more restraint.

The characters themselves were, in fact, fully realized, with the least likable among them being at least sympathetic in their own self-pitying, desperately self-actualizing ways. An example: Maureen, the second-place-trophy wife of Hildon, one of the main characters and the founder of the magazine that ties so many characters together, is an odious little shrew serving only her own interests but the novel begins with her

perspective (we see how she's planned a themed summer bash with meticulous dedication, an attentiveness that she feels her husband's employees do not deserve), which sets a tone that's immediately reversed as more characters are offered their chances at more flattering second impressions. Through her, we're offered a superficial introduction to many of the POV characters; she feels above them and we, too, feel a sense of sanctimonious superiority -- until the next chapter, when Maureen's self-declared arch nemesis (and, admittedly, nearly pitch-perfect foil), Lucy, Hildon's closest friend and presumed lover -- and the closest thing to a protagonist this novel has -- lets us take a peek into her head. Lucy is nursing a long-suffering sense of dejection over the lover who deserted her five years ago, more from a lack of closure than any real attachment to a guy we find out to be a pretty self-obsessed character in his own right, while trying to offer her teenage soap-opera star niece, Nicole, some of the normalcy, adult guidance and support she's not getting from her own mother, Lucy's sister Jane.

What ensues is a decidedly lighthearted frolic through some serious (and, eventually, unexpectedly tragic but enlightening) terrain, which, to me, sums up the '80s more flatteringly than I ever could. For all the issues I have with the decade of my origin, I get that it needed to be life-affirming through its desperate capriciousness, that the Cold War and rise of AIDS were only two of the ominous storm clouds hanging so heavily that the end of the world must have felt like a constant threat, a perpetual reminder that death is always just minutes away. One of the biggest successes of this book is that it emulates that need to celebrate every time a ray of light pokes through, however fleetingly, because there are no guarantees the sun will come out again. Every joyous moment existed between successfully dodging one bullet and hoping that luck will repeat itself when the next one comes, and Beattie is frightfully adept at conveying that frantic version of what it was like for anyone alive and kicking in the '80s to la la la la live for today.

The prevailing message I picked up from this is twofold: No one person is any one thing all the time. We are all as multifaceted as the story within this novel, with different voices jockeying for prominence and different circumstances necessitating any array of reactions. Knowing this, it is imperative to realize that we have no business assuming that we can ever truly know anyone because we are never privy to the day-to-day thoughts that propel a person down one path instead of the many others they could take to arrive at the end of the day, assuming they get there at all.

Jen says

I gave up, just couldn't finish it. wanted something light to read in the bathtub. the cover had people all over it saying how comic it is but I didn't agree.

David says

There are some great moments in this one, but I got left a little cold in when they were put together. I either missed the totality, or it didn't do much for me. The book sprawled a bit for being short and I just wondered where we were going, because it seemed like it should be somewhere. It was probably just me, but it was disappointing since I liked it so much on a moment level.

Monica says

I would like to be more driven to read fiction, I sure collect enough of it.

I'm not exactly bowled over by the first twenty pages, it seems kind of vacuous, but I'll keep with it.

I've finished and I still say reading this book was almost torture for me. Supposedly it was meant to be this way -full of vacuous characters: a closeted bisexual wife abandoning magazine publisher, the abandoned wife advice columnist, her sister, her mother and assorted acquaintances I didn't care enough about to keep track of so most of the time couldn't figure out who they were. They were all hopeless except for a slightly more sympathetic 14 year old soap star who was spending time away from LA in Vermont with her aunt. (I could say I felt sympathetic toward their St. Bernard.) It's scatological style, characters who pop up from nowhere, a delivery man, a rich man working in a nursery instead of living off his parents' dole, etc., etc. did nothing for me. This is the first time I read a book about nothing. Mothers and daughters who don't get along. Inconsiderate daredevils - a whole bunch of nothing. It didn't get semi-interesting until an under-age girl gets caught nude with a friend of the family taking photos to get his girlfriend jealous. The only bit I thought was funny was toward the end when feminists got vocal in a girly boutique. If anyone else has something to discuss about this book, please do. The hype on the book jacket didn't reflect what I encountered on the inside except for John Updike's remark: "The novel is sadder than satire, for it is about the emptiness not of these lives but of our lives."

Peter says

I was uncertain what Beattie felt about these characters. Were they laughably pathetic and self-centered, or were they sadly deluded and lost? Ultimately I guess they were both, but also very human and sympathetic. The end where Lucy and Jane's mother is remembering when her daughters were children is very heart-felt and tender. The men, of course, don't come off too well in this story—they are mostly absent or drone-like, except for the wimpy writer guy, who is so pathetic he needs to give up his man card. The dialogue between Piggy and the doctor about Yeats' poem, *The Second Coming*, was brilliant. One sour note was when Beattie paired a farmer's (wholly appropriate) note of indignation at being given cash rather than an apology for the death of a farm animal, with his misspellings, prudishness and threats; this made the initial indignation at the poor manners of Lucy seem laughable—but the indignation is not laughable—in fact, it is no laughing matter. The thinking that cash is sufficient and apologies or sincerity don't count for squat is part of the pavement on the road to hell Americans were putting in one stone at a time back in the 70s and 80s.

Scott E says

Generally enjoy this kind of story, multiple interrelated characters with no real protagonist and many story lines. This is the first of Beattie's novels that I've read. I'm a big fan of her short stories, of which she is a master. Unfortunately, *Love Always* didn't last for me throughout. May give it another shot down the road. Rating: 3.4

Lisa says

I remember reading this like at least 20 years ago and it caused me to scratch my head over why AB was granted SO MUCH literary cred. I know that back then chick lit wasn't the established genre it is now (or that her writing necessarily belongs in it) but it stuck me as a novel that would be more popular than critically acclaimed. I didn't much like the characters or the story that much but I also didn't trust my own critical judgement much back then so I assumed it was just me.

Well I just got *The State We're In*, a short story collection, from the library so I'll have a chance to reassess her writing.
