

Love is a Rebellious Bird

Elayne Klasson

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Elayne Klasson's Love is a Rebellious Bird is an operatic, enduring, and subtle romance.

Elayne Klasson's artistic and compassionate novel *Love is a Rebellious Bird* focuses on a lifelong love affair.

Judith and Elliot grow up in a Jewish neighborhood of Chicago in the 1950s. They fall in love when they're twelve over books and ideas, competing over reading awards and Zionist Youth recognition. They separate for college but come together again during summers, and they date between their marriages to other people. Judith comforts Elliot after people he loves die and is willing to make stunning sacrifices for them both, while Elliot remembers Judith's birthday every year with thoughtful gifts.

Judith narrates, addressing Elliot as "you," though that "you" later expands to include a wider audience. She asks two burning questions that give the novel focus: Who is it that we love, and why have we loved these people? The quality of Judith and Elliot's characters prove important to the story's progression, which emphasizes the ways that they are admirable and lovable. They each bring keen intellect to their relationship and are energized as they pursue exciting careers that grow out of shared childhood passions.

Romantic and family details add a domestic touch that brings the characters down to earth. In the context of Judith's social work and family devotion and Elliot's law practice, the text raises questions about justice and the nature of caring. Their mutual devotion to social justice plays into their love for each other, to such a degree that their love becomes a means of enacting good in the world.

Stringing together the right moments, the book condenses Elliot and Judith's life stories in a steady, clear way. It moves between anecdotes and reflections with poise, and the language is lyrical, clear, and to the point. Judith's sensuality adds lushness and depth; she relishes the smells of her lovers and children, the physical sensations of sex, bright colors, and the feelings of taking in art, music, and dance.

Chapters end with tidbits of wisdom gleaned from Judith's experiences, and the book's conclusion acts as a beginning and an opening to listen for signs and to take hold of love. The ultimate message, which is framed as a love letter, is hopeful and touching.

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MARI CARLSON (August 16, 2019)

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