

Unconventional Love Affair: Should Age Difference Really Matter to Make You Happy

Robert Miller

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A couple are made for each other in this convincing romance.

The tension in this coming-of-age romance hinges on a twelve-year age difference between Brad, an Iraq War veteran, and Linda, a recently divorced single mother. Their shared values bring the pair together, but are they on the same page when they're not in bed? Robert Miller's novel *Unconventional Love Affair* tells the story of a couple who are made for each other, even if they weren't made in the same year.

Brad Wilson is a stereotypical All-American guy. He likes football, fast cars, doing the right thing, the United States Army, women with nice figures, and steak. He's twenty-five and recently returned from three years of combat duty in Iraq. Excited by the prospect of a normal life, he looks forward to getting back to a daily routine that doesn't involve camels and missiles.

Checking into admissions at his new college campus, he meets Linda Wallace, who immediately catches his eye: "Linda wore a clean, wrinkle free dress and was actually wearing real shoes. The dress was the proper length ... She didn't appear to have any tattoos and none of her underwear was showing." She's definitely not a college girl, but she isn't exactly a cougar, either. Brad quickly determines that Linda is old-fashioned, and he's curious about what lies beneath her polished exterior.

Though dialogue and scenery are carefully described, there is little chemistry between Brad and Linda. The text asserts that sparks fly, but they fail to fully catch fire. Dialogue is pedestrian, and it's sometimes so realistic that it dulls a scene's excitement. Though an important part of romance is escapism, the book stresses its characters' ordinariness.

Although the romance is plausible and has plenty of potential, it's also dampened by frequent asides. Too much detail kills the excitement. Chapters exhibit an eagerness to relate exactly what happened, but this information comes at the cost of leaving something to the imagination. An introduction that outlines every plot point erases any hope of surprise and spoils the novel's twists and turns.

Is twelve years that great of an age difference? Fifty years ago, yes, but not as much now. The book hinges on the notion that Brad and Linda's relationship is somehow transgressive, but in its modern setting, it isn't very convincing. As a result, this "unconventional" love story ends up being about as racy as one of Linda's semitransparent dressing gowns.

Natural storytelling makes *Unconventional Love Affair* an earnest romance that, with a bit more mystery and a sense of real risky business, could sizzle.

CLAIRE FOSTER (September 6, 2016)

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