

Like What For Who?

Like Water For Chocolate

By Laura Esquivel

Translated by Carol & Thomas Christensen

Doubleday, 250pgs, probably +/-125,000 words

If I was an editor, I would have taken a pass on this novel. In fact, I probably would have put it down within the first twenty pages. For whatever reason, the fairytale, farfetched, super exaggerated nature of some of the events hit me the wrong way. I like Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, and other mythical heroes and the marvelous things that they can do, but they are tall tales through and through. Like Water For Chocolate is something else. It is a fairly straight romance with bits of over the top exaggeration here and there. No doubt the style has worked for many, but not for me.

Anyhow, the point being, I likely would have put the book down right away if it didn't seem to be held in such high regard. They made a movie out of it after all. So I put aside my prejudices and read it. I really do think I put my prejudices aside by the way. I was enjoying the story, and would even go so far as to say that the truth wasn't stretched nearly enough as I continued on with the story.

Anyway, I read the book, and when I was done with the second to last chapter--November--I would have said that I liked the book, and would have even recommended it, but the last chapter threw me for a loop, and just ended up pissing me off. Let me spoil the book for you. Like Water For Chocolate is a love story between Tita (the main character) and Pedro. Like Water For Chocolate is a phrase that means, water that is boiling over, and I suppose you can assume that Tita was head over heels in love with Pedro, but somewhere around June (the halfway mark) I started to hate Pedro. He's a bit of a chump, going so far as to marry Tita's sister, so he's not exactly a catch. And about the same time Pedro loses his bloom another possible romantic lead enters the story,

John. John is a doctor. He is nice to Tita, rescues her from her overbearing mother, nurses her back to health when she is on the edge of a mental collapse, and basically is everything you could want in a mate. There's only one problem, Tita loves Pedro, the jerk.

I can live with a misguided love affair, and it is not problematic to me that the second to last chapter ends with Tita trying to decide who to marry, Pedro or John. The set up is simple enough, so as December--the last chapter--starts I'm not too troubled by the fact that I can't figure out who Tita is preparing to marry. Maybe it's John? And maybe it's Pedro? A little suspense, a little back and forth action, as first one is hinted at being the chosen groom and then the other is acceptable, is fine. It's within the bounds of good taste. But what isn't within the bounds of either acceptability or good taste is to let on halfway through the last chapter that twenty odd years have gone by and that the marriage in question involves John's son Alex.

Who the fuck is Alex? Where did he come from? I don't know, and basically I don't fucking care. I mean the chapter started with Tita cooking as all the chapters do, and I might not be the most observant guy, but I'm pretty sure I would have noticed that Tita had aged from 20 or so to 39 in the blink of an eye. It's just basically bad narrative style. I mean, tell me how you'd feel if you suddenly found out that the second half of this book review was about another book altogether. Ha! You think I'm reviewing Like Water for Chocolate? Jokes on you! Well, that's not the case (I'm actually talking about Like Water for Chocolate through and through), but suppose you suddenly found that out that I had switched my review to a different book. You might rightly be thinking, what the fuck?

Well, that's exactly what I was thinking three pages from the end. What the fuck? The thing resolves, and she picked the nitwit Pedro *{and I think it turns out that she's cooking for her daughter's wedding, but it's been a few years since I've read the book, and I don't remember}*, and basically at this point I'm so annoyed with

the author that I just don't give a fuck. I can see how the ending could be good, and the idea could be workable, but bottom line, all I could think was that if I was her editor, I would have told Laura Esquivel to rewrite the last chapter. And then I remembered that the only reason I had gotten this far was because I thought the book had been vetted, and given the good literary club stamp of approval.

Clearly I missed something. Anyhow, halfway through the last chapter I was so pissed with the author, all I wanted to do was sit down and write a scathing review.

Is this a passionate love story with a satisfying ending? No fucking way!

What it ends up being is a good way to annoy this reader and insure they will never read another fucking thing that Laura Esquivel ever writes? What the fuck was she thinking? Rewrite the last fucking chapter. Here, I'll start it for you.

Twenty fucking years later...

That's all needed to know and I wouldn't be so goddamned annoyed.

Twenty fucking years later...

{I'm sorry, Water for Chocolate? My bad. I must have started reviewing another book half way through. So, sorry.}

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{{{If it looks like an opinion, it is an opinion.}}}

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