



Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object

Laurie Colwin

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When Sam Bax, that charming daredevil of a Boston lawyer, sails his boat into a storm off the coast of Maine, Elizabeth "Olly" Bax, his wife and ardent sidekick, becomes a widow at the edge of twenty-seven. With no pretense of "courage", Olly grieves, coping with the warmth and awkwardness of family ties and trying to rethink her own life. Realizing that her risks are as daring as any of Sam's -- while he chanced life and limb, Olly risks her heart -- she finds that love can take some surprising turns.

Laurie Colwin depicts Olly's recovery with humor, compassion, and a decided lack of sentimentality, creating a real heroine who remains true to her heart and still manages to keep her head.

Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object Details

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Author : Laurie Colwin

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From Reader Review Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object for online ebook

Magdelanye says

If you are fond of tortured introspection and complex relationships dramas, you might like this book better than I did. For all her delving and explanations and classifications, it remained unclear to me just why the narrator felt the urges she resisted and indulged, and if I hadn't learned a thing or two from this book, I would have dismissed it as boring.

Diane says

Laurie Colwin was a beautiful writer. Unfortunately she died very young and left us with only four novels and three collections of short stories. This novel is about love and grief. Olly Bax loses her young husband, Sam, in a boating accident. (Sam is the bright and dangerous object of the title.) The rest of the book is Olly's movement through grief and love. Colwin has beautiful, lyrical language and tremendous character development. Her writing is to be savored. There has been some criticism of part three in the book. Some think that it shows a deviation from Olly's usual behavior. I think it rings true. It was the 70's. Olly was young and sex was somewhat more casual. (No AIDS scares, more acceptance of using sex to "find ourselves" etc.)

Lovely writing! About grief she writes: "I realized that grief is metabolic: it crawls through you like a disease and takes your energy away. Then it gathers and hits like a sudden migraine, like being hit by a car, like having a large, flat rock hurled at your chest."

William Baker says

I don't want to make anyone upset but this is one of the most boring and repetitive books I have ever read. It seemed to go on and on about essentially the same thing for the first two sections then the third section is this long and protracted explanation and justification of an affair with a married man.

Someone said that this author's characters are complicated and introspective. And they are right, only this main character is so introspective and complicated that they spend most of their time being introspective and complicated and eventually become nothing more than a self-ruminating bore.

Jackie says

I had forgotten how much I enjoy Colwin's particular voice. Loved this story.

Suanne Laqueur says

Tomorrow I'll be 48. I'm now as old as Laurie Colwin was when she died. She's a beautiful and sometimes infuriating writer. Her characters are complex, introspective to a fault, and often unlikable. Her prose is brilliant and sparse, and then it wanders off into a verbose swamp before coming back to clean, bracing brilliance. She must have driven her editor mad.

I love her. Not everyone does. But I do. And I'm grateful to have discovered her. In her own words:

"I felt something very close to gratitude, but it was only love and respect, mixed with something in me that she had freed and enlightened. If you can drink life in, I drank. I drank to love and death and friendship, to loss and complication, to deprivation and wisdom."

Jane says

When you read the story synopses of her novels, something about them seems very conventional. Love is either longed for or interrupted, and then something else happens that may be a solution for the longing or interruption. Also, the characters are usually people of privilege: money, education, New York address, culture, rarified occupations.

But, what the characters say to each other is surprising, and how they come to know themselves is full of struggle, mishaps, and insight. The worlds of this novel -- of Cambridge, New York, and a music camp in New Hampshire -- are fully made. Furthermore, Colwin's view of love is so expansive that it is transgressive. A character can deeply love more than one person at a time, and while Colwin explores the psychological dimensions of Olly and her love affairs, it is not neurotic. The heart is a big place and in it we can find ourselves.

Kat says

After 'Passion and Affect' I was in two minds about this one. I started it and once got to the usual stated- for some reason -Jewish outsider character amidst another snob family, of lawyers this time, I became uninterested and left it aside for a while. The plot revolves around Olly, a 27 year old widow, trying to re-adjust in the world, I guess. As someone who is not an avid fan of that Virginia Woolf style of writing: heavy on description (could be wrong- after reading Mrs Dalloway as a teen I was put off anything else) and this read like that.

To be fair, the middle of the book had some interest, I have to give it to her- she can easily lure me in. But this one didn't read as some of her other books (Goodbye without Leaving is a solid, good book) and when I got to part three of the Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object (it is separated into three sections) frankly, I knew what Colwin was saying, but I just didn't care.

Also, she died at 48. Did you know?

JodiP says

Colwin died far too early, at age about 48. This is a lovely, lovely book of grief and re-building. There were so many paragraphs that were beautiful, and the way she led you to understand the characters and their relationship was achingly well-done.

Miranda says

While I love her writing, I had a difficult time relating to Olly. I thought Part 1 was excellent but Part III seemed strange. How can cheating on the love of your life be such a wonderful choice? Maybe the book just made me uncomfortable, but I couldn't relate.

Lauren says

"We ordered a massive breakfast. There was a sheen on everything, on that cheap Formica table, on the dented cream pitcher, on those horsey locals in their muddy boots. I thought I would keep it with me forever, the faint whiff of horse the place exuded, the faded design on the plates.
As I looked at Charlie, looming up on his side of the table, I felt something close to gratitude, but it was only love and respect, mixed with something in me that he had freed and enlightened. If you can drink life in, I drank. I drank to love and death and friendship, to loss and complication, to deprivation and wisdom.
We polished off that breakfast like a pair of tigers and went through two pots of coffee. Charlie sat back in his chair, smoking a cigar. There was nothing specious in my happiness. It rang through me like a bell."

Eric says

Weird and often moving story about a young woman pianist suddenly widowed in her 20s. Dated in the best way, when you could land in NYC and find a cheap, cozy one-bedroom apartment on Bank Street (overlooking a garden, of course), smoke cigarettes and be sort of slutty without even knowing it. A little warm and fuzzy, like a nice old blanket.

Nina says

I just love her writing. It is always so beautiful and smooth. Even if you can't get behind the characters decisions, you still love them and care about what happens to them. I wasn't prepared for the serious nature of this particular book since most of her other writings I have come across feature almost no sad topics. It is good to know she can go there and still carry her appreciation for how wonderful life can be, even in the face of a tragic event.

Deb says

a 27 yr. old woman becomes a widow after 5 yrs of marriage. how she copes, how she lives life and learns to enjoy life is all at the hands of the author. The book is a fast read and one that makes u feel good -- not depressed -- the writer leaves one thinking! I've read other books by Laurie Colwin and haven't been disappointed yet.

Kathleen says

This book is one of my all-time favorites. Was entranced with the story and Olly the main character is a flawed yet lovable character with a cool wit. Ms. Colwin writes such great character studies. I have purchased so many copies of this book and gifted them to friends. It is dated by now, but the emotional lives of these characters are relevant for comtemporary life. I believe I first read this book in the early eighties and still remember parts of it clearly, probably because I've reread it so many times. It's an easy read with characters you will either love or dislike.

Mike Coleman says

An elegant escape and a great beach book. I've always admired Laurie Colwin and the unique world she carved out in the novels she wrote in the 1970s and 80s before her death in 1992 at the age of 48, and this is one of her best. Writing about the romantic experiences of mostly happy, well-adjusted young New Yorkers, she's like Woody Allen without the neurosis. There is a warmth, a gentleness and gentility to her work, so unlike the many angry anti-Establishment novels from the same period. No wonder she got noticed, and deservedly so.

It could be cloying stuff in lesser hands. Banking the fire in her spacious New York apartment, shopping in stationery stores, gazing at the snow falling outside the coffee shop in the Museum of Modern Art, Olly Bax, Colwin's protagonist in this book, always manages to be interesting and likeable despite her privilege and comfort. As she copes with the death of her wealthy young husband in a sailing accident, we root for her to recover her spirit and discover her need for love again. Introspective, non-formulaic, unabashedly romantic-- Colwin makes it all work with humor, vibrant scenes, a great sense of place, sharply drawn characters, and always smart observations about love, loss and family.

I love this one paragraph alone: "When I met him, he seemed to me like some bright, dangerous object on a dark road that you go toward because it shines at you. Up close, you see it is a phosphorescent marker, or a white stone, or a patch of luminescent tape, but before you see what it is, all you see is brightness facing you out of the night, and if you are alone on the road, it is beautiful and frightening." On this single paragraph the novel rests.

Though she died very young, Colwin left behind a substantial body of work--novels (many with happy endings--imagine!), short stories and essays about cooking and casual entertaining--that is well worth reading today, in my humble opinion. She was, and still is, an original.
