



A LOVE STORY

Bobbie Ann Mason

Spence and Lila

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Since the night they eloped as teenagers over forty years ago, Spence and Lila have spent a lifetime together. Now Lila has been diagnosed with breast cancer and faces surgery. Spence visits her in the hospital, but the notion of losing his wife is sometimes more than he can bear. He retreats to his fields, to his dog, and to the garden Lila has tended so lovingly through the years.

While the children rally to their mother and the neighbors stock the refrigerator, Spence and Lila each recall moments, spent together and apart, that have infused their shared life with subtle, unspoken meaning. Harmoniously, their strands of memory twine into a single narrative, revealing the humor, perseverance, and faith essential to turning two ordinary people into one enduring and happy union.

Spence and Lila Details

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Author : Bobbie Ann Mason

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From Reader Review Spence and Lila for online ebook

Alison says

Read this a long time ago, after I loved this author's *In Country*, but don't really remember that much about it. I do remember loving that both books I read by Bobbie Ann Mason revolved around rural, small-town people.

Pam says

Another of her wonderful stories - shorter than *Feather Crowns* and more conventional. Yet I like learning about these people - less educated than some yet profound and compassionate. Reminds me of my grandparents and even my parents' points of view.

Mmars says

In the hands of many writers this would have been a melodramatic tale. Published in 1988, this short novel graces the reader with two characters you cannot help but love and they love each other, too. Lila's health is a mess. She smokes heavily and has been having dizzy spells, and then there's the lump in her breast which turns out to be cancerous. She and Spence have raised three children on their Kentucky farm through frugality and hard work. Spence is a WWII veteran who served on a battleship in the Pacific that blessedly did not sink.

As Spence tries to continue his daily life, for example figuring out where to take his VW Rabbit for the least expensive tune-up, Lila, a buxom woman and proud of it, goes into her mastectomy surrounded by her children and expressing more concern toward her daughters and husband properly harvesting the garden. While Spence fetters, Lila pushes her way through.

Humor and the quiriness of human character kept this from becoming a really, really tough read. Mason absolutely nailed hospitals and cancer treatment thirty years ago. Her biggest fear was of getting cobalt treatments! People smoked in the waiting rooms. Actually, the entire book reeks of the 80s. Personally, I thought this enhanced the authenticity of the story. It portrayed two individuals from the generation who birthed the baby boomers. And Spence and Lila's children are just that.

Mason is such a marvelous writer, it's impossible not to close with a quote.

"On the edge of the field, he [Spence] steps across a ridge of dirt pushed up by a tractor tire. A few stray soybeans perch on the top, and the tire print beside it is dry like a scar. He thinks of the furrow the doctors may cut in Lila's neck.

When he was looking at her things, he ran across a postcard she had written him from Savannah. It showed a picture of a lighthouse. When he got home from the Navy, she seemed stronger, tougher, and he felt weaker, torn apart. After the Navy, Spence never wanted to travel again. Home was like that lighthouse."

Barbara M says

Mason is a good writer. I think I like how she makes her characters so real. This story actually got into my dreams where I was with someone facing breast cancer with a possible mastectomy. Then switched to include me and how I handled it, how I felt. That's a powerful response to a book!

Lila is a bit confused about why this is happening and exactly what the treatment has to be. She has hope and faith in the doctors, she's afraid of what it will be like and yet she's brave. We learn a little about her life as a young woman in bits and pieces. I think she's always been brave but also a bit naive. This situation has made a great impact on her family, her daughters come to her side and she's a bit surprised by this. Poor Spence, he is having a hard time, worrying about what he would do without his wife. However, he can't abide being at the hospital and has trouble expressing himself, Lila totally understands. Their son is so much like his father!

The story is sweet but not saccharine by any stretch! These are characters that will stay with me.

Betty says

Lila has breast cancer and clogged arteries, so this could be a darker novel than it actually is. The book is infused with light humor and nice memories, but so much as to be saccharine. Mason did a fine job of delicately handling an all-too-prevalent issue.

Sally Whitehead says

I'll hold my hands up and admit I am an absolute sucker for quirky tales of the small town American South. My only previous experience of Bobbie Ann Mason was the superb "In Country" many many years ago.

Quite simply, this is a gorgeous book. A short novel, chronicling a tense, difficult time in the life of the farming Culpepper family, it manages to be moving, funny, and uplifting. Quite an achievement for its slim volume.

By the end of the novel the reader feels as if they have spent a lifetime with the Culpeppers, even now they feel like old friends I want to stay in touch with from time to time.

Mason takes a simple family with a simple story, places them lovingly under the microscope, and makes us lose ourselves in their world for a brief period. And it would take a cold, hard person to come back to their own world not feeling a little emotionally elevated.

Anesa says

This is a novella about a 50+ year old woman in rural Kentucky who learns she has breast cancer. Lila goes through surgery attended by the loving care of her husband, Spence. The narrative includes many

recollections of their life together: courtship, the WW II years, child-rearing issues, etc. At first, the tone struck me as overly ingenuous (Gee, gosh, golly--), but as I read on, I recognized this for an absence of irony, which has become so rare in contemporary literature. Spence and Lila are very straightforward, sincere people! In the end, I found this quite refreshing.

The title couple realizes that they are facing a dire threat to the peaceful, largely satisfying, life they have made together. The author strikes a balance between the themes of pop culture—represented by Spence's famous epiphany in the K-Mart parking lot—and higher values, including ecological consciousness, the use of heirloom seeds, and reaching across the racial divide. I found myself praying for Lila to pull through and stay with Spence for many years to come.

Amy Kitchell-Leighty says

I am a fan of Bobbie Ann Mason so it's not a surprise that I loved this book. A little depressing at times (sometimes that's a tough one for me), but told with such lovely realism and symbolism that it was ok to be a little sad at times.

It's a story of love and strength with such honest and believable characters I feel like they could be my own neighbors.

Sarah says

I love Bobbie Ann Mason--she's awesome AND practically from my hometown (it's the next town over--whatever). This is somewhat slight--actually I think this is probably considered a novella--but so charming, earthy and romantic.

Karla Sanchez says

Spence + Lila

by Bobbie Ann Mason

Review by Karla Sanchez

Do you ever wonder what it's like to really be in love? That feeling you get when you see the person you really care about and you know will always be there for you no matter what like they say "through thick & thin". Bobbie Ann Mason made me feel as if I had my own romance going on, I was able to put myself in Lila's position and I was able to imagine someone else in Spence's position, possibly Kevin Ortiz, it sounds silt it felt real.

The person that made me feel connected to was Lila. I felt connected to Lila because she is a strong women

who has been through so much. When she was sad I would feel sad and when she was happy i would feel happy. Even when she had her flashbacks I would imagine those flashbacks. “And they’re telling me I can’t eat what I’m used to,” I felt her sadness and disappointment because she expressed it so clearly that she couldn’t eat what she wanted.

Spence is Lila’s husband. He is one of the people who is mostly affected by the fact that Lila has breast cancer. He has been through so much with her that just thinking of the fact that he may lose her really hurts him. When he starts thinking of everything they went through I can feel his pain and happiness all at the same time. Like for example when he was thinking in how much it hurt him seeing his wife in the hospital I felt the pain and when he was thinking of the time his kids were born I felt the happiness he had in him.

Spence and Lila have children theres Lee, Nancy, & Cat. Their kids really care about both Spence & Lila, but not much about each other. Lee & Cat have been having problems for a very long time and for something that isn’t really a good reason. As for both of them with their relationship with Nancy is good they all talk to each other like nothing.

The main idea of the story would be the struggle of Lila and Spence go through with her having breast cancer. It may be a tough situation for them but it also proves how strong their love for each other is. In Spence + Lila you will learn that true love does exist.

Barbara says

A short, sweet little book that beautifully captures that depth of companionship and friendship and romantic love that develops over decades with couples fortunate enough to love each other long enough.

Sarah says

I bought this book in the early 2000s for an English class. I think I enjoy it now more than I did at the time. Especially since I've worked in healthcare and I understand the other side of what they're going through. I love how Mason captures her characters as believable well rounded people. I want to read the Nancy Culpepper book next.

I still get that Rick Travino song in my head whenever I pick up a Bobbie Ann Mason book.

Nancy says

Never read when I was supposed to, back in college, but picked up last week at a Little Free Library. Will go back and read In Country, now, too. Just a week or two in the life of this family, but filled with small

glimpses into the memories of a lifetime. Very nicely done.

Susan says

Spence and Lila are a middle-aged farming couple from western Kentucky. The book is about Lila's time in the hospital after she finds a lump in her breast and has to have a mastectomy. Spence has a hard time expressing his love to Lila, but it comes through loud and clear in his actions. The book is very small and moves quickly. The thing I really love about Mason's writing is that her dialogue is so genuine. I guess because I'm from Kentucky and I relate so well to the regional language, these characters come alive for me and make me feel right at home.

Carolyn says

Wonderful novella of an enduring marriage with all of its warts and sparkle!!
