



How to Love

Books Reviewed:

[How to Love](#) [1]

Issue:

[203](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Rebecca Butler](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Serena is a seemingly promising sixteen year old. Although her mother is deceased, until recently Serena has got on well with her father and step mother. She does well at school and is expected to graduate a year early. But then she meets Sawyer, outstandingly handsome but trouble.

Serena's family runs a restaurant in Florida, which they manage jointly with Sawyer's family, the Le Grands. But there is a problem. By the time she is eighteen Serena has a two year old daughter named Hannah. Sawyer, the child's father, has been absent for two years. Serena's father is enraged by the situation.

The story is told in retrospect. It begins with Serena as she is at the time of writing. But then it tracks back to her first encounter with Sawyer and the development of their relationship. How will it end?

The popular mythology around teenage pregnancy paints a picture of irresponsibility and indifference to consequences. This book sets out to paint a different picture. It portrays two young people swept off their feet by the power of grand romantic love. Why do we credit Romeo and Juliet with feeling the power of romantic attachment, yet insist that the young people of our generation feel much baser motivations?

Cotugno describes the noble and spiritual side of romantic love ? then tempers it with a full understanding of the consequences, which can be beastly and degrading. Sawyer is a flawed hero a reluctant and imperfect father. We see him taking drugs, for example. Serena, deprived of Sawyer's company, turns to her best friend's brother ? and then experiences a painful separation from him.

The most tragic penalty paid for the birth of an unplanned child is paid by Serena and her father. Their former closeness is destroyed. They live as strangers in the same house. The reader is constantly hoping that something might happen to bring father and daughter back together.

This book stands or falls on the reader's response to the way the relationships develop and change between the main characters. And the authenticity of those changes in relationship depends in turn on the depiction of character. We believe in Serena, Sawyer and the rest of the dramatis personae because they are real live flawed people moving in a credible world of action and reaction. Young readers who want to understand the mixture of strengths and weaknesses,

accomplishments and defeats, that mark every life story and every family on the surface of the planet will benefit from Cotugno's novel.

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Links:

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/how-to-love>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/203>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/rebecca-butler>