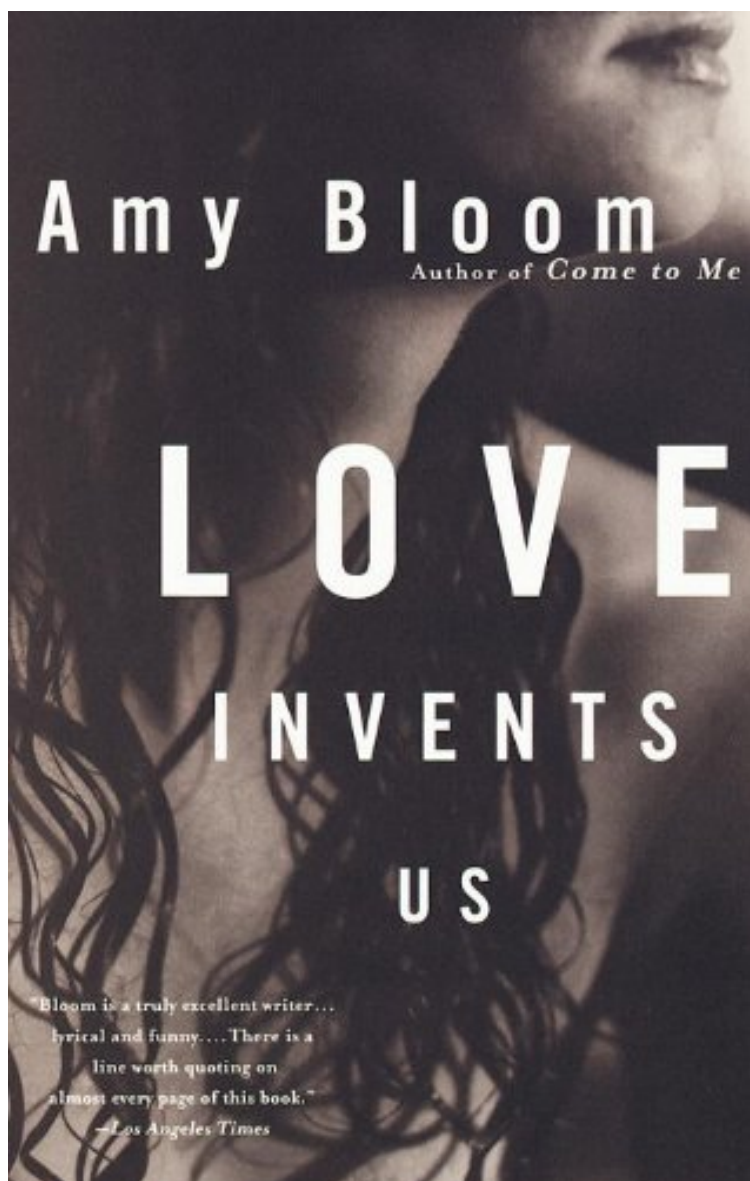


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# Love Invents Us



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNational Book Award finalist Amy Bloom has written a tale of growing up that is sharp and funny, rueful and uncompromisingly real.A chubby girl with smudged pink harlequin glasses and a habit of stealing Heath Bars from the local five-and-dime, Elizabeth Taube is the only child of parents whose indifference to her is the one sure thing in her life. When her search for love and attention leads her into the arms of her junior-high-school English teacher, things begin to get complicated. And even her friend Mrs. Hill, a nearly blind, elderly black woman, can't protect her when real love--exhilarating, passionate, heartbreaking--enters her life in the gorgeous shape of Huddie Lester.With her finely honed style and her unflinching sensibility, Bloom shows us how profoundly the forces of love and desire can shape a life.From

the Trade Paperback edition. Extrait Just as I Am I wasn't surprised to find myself in the back of Mr. Klein's store, wearing only my undershirt and panties, surrounded by sable. "Sable is right for you, Lizbet," Mr. Klein said, draping a shawl-collared jacket over me. "Perfect for your skin and your eyes. A million times a day the boys must tell you. Such skin." No one except Mr. Klein had ever suggested that my appearance was pleasing. My mother took time out from filling half the houses on Long Island with large French cachepots and small porcelain dogs to take me shopping at Lord and Taylor's Pretty Plus; her aesthetic sense made her look the other way when the saleswomen dragged me out in navy blue A-line dresses and plaid jumpers.

Looking at me sideways, she saw the chewed ends of my hair, smudged pink harlequin glasses, a bad attitude. I stood on a little velvet footstool and modeled fur coats for Mr. Klein. He had suggested I take off my perpetual green corduroys and hooded sweatshirt so we could see how the coats really looked. I agreed, only pretending to hesitate for a minute so I could watch his thin grey face expand and pinken. I felt the warm rushing in my chest that being with him gave me. He also gave me Belgian chocolate, because he felt Hershey's wasn't good enough for me, and he told me that if only God had blessed him and Mrs. Klein with a wonderful daughter like me, he would be truly happy, *kayn ahora*. My mother never said I was wonderful.

My father, whose admiration for my mother had diminished only a little over the years, was certainly not heard thanking God for giving him the gift of me. "This one next, Lizbet." Mr. Klein handed me a small mink coat and set a mink beret on my dirty hair. "This is my size. Do kids wear mink coats?" If you had to dress up, mink was the way to go. Much better than my scratchy navy wool, designed to turn chubby Jewish girls into pale Victorian wards. The fur brushed my chin, and without my glasses (Mr. Klein and I agreed that it was a shame to hide my lovely eyes and so we put my glasses in his coat pocket during our modeling sessions) I felt glamorously Russian. I couldn't see a thing. He put the beret at a slight angle and stepped back, admiring me in my bare feet and my mink. "Perfect. This is how a fur coat should look on a girl. Not some little stick girl in rabbit. This is an ensemble." I turned around to see what I could of myself from the back: a brown triangle topped by a white blur and another brown smudge. I modeled two more coats, a ranch mink, which displeased Mr. Klein with its careless stitching, and a fox cape, which made us both smile. Even Mr. Klein thought floor-length silver fox was a little much. As always, he turned his back as I pulled on my jeans and sweatshirt. I sat down on one of the spindly pink velvet chairs, putting my sneakers on as he put away the coats. We said nothing on the drive home. I ate my chocolate and Mr. Klein turned on WQXR, the only time I ever listened to classical music. Mr. Klein rounded my driveway, trying to look unconcerned. I think we

both expected that one Monday my parents would finally come rushing out of the house, appalled and avenging. I went inside, my shoelaces flapping against the hallway's glazed, uneven brick. Could anything be less inviting than a brick foyer? It pressed into the soles of my feet, and every dropped and delicate object shattered irretrievably. I know some cleaning lady greeted me; we alternated between elderly Irish women, who looked as though they'd been born to rid the world of lazy people's private filth, and middle-aged Bolivian women quietly stalking dust and our greasy, oversized fingerprints. Every dinner was a short horror; my eating habits were remarked upon, and then my mother would talk about politics and decorating and my wardrobe. My father talked about his clients, their divorces, their bank accounts. I would go to my room, pretend to do my homework, and read my novels. In my room, I was the Scarlet pimpernel. Sometimes I was Sydney Carton and once in a while I was Tarzan. I went to sleep dreaming of the nineteenth century, my oldest, largest teddy bear held tightly between my legs. Mr. Klein usually drove up beside me as I was walking to the bus stop. When I saw the tip of his huge, unfashionable blue Cadillac slowly slide by me and pause, I skipped ahead and dropped my books on the front seat, spared another day of riding the school bus.

He dropped me off in front of Arrandale Elementary School as the buses discharged all the kids I had managed to avoid thus far. On the mornings Mr. Klein failed to appear, I kept a low profile and worried about him until the routine of school settled upon me. I was vulnerable again only at recess. The first two days of kindergarten had taught me to carry a book everywhere, and as soon as I found a place on the pebbled asphalt, I had only to set my eyes on the clean black letters and the soft ivory page and I would be gone, spirited right out of what passed for my real life. Our first trip to Furs by Klein was incidental, barely a foreshadowing of our afternoons together. Mr. Klein passed me on the way home from school. Having lost two notebooks since school began, I'd missed the bus while searching the halls frantically for my third-bright red canvas designed to be easily seen. I started home, a couple of miles through the sticky, smoky leaf piles and across endless emerald lawns. No one knew I liked to walk. Mr. Klein pulled up ahead of me and signaled, shyly. I ran to the car, gratified to tears by a smile I could see from the road. "I'll give you a ride home, but I need to stop back at my shop, something I forgot. All right?" I nodded. It was better than all

right. Maybe I'd never have to go home. He could drive me to Mexico, night after night through the Great Plains, and I wouldn't mind. Furs by Klein stood on the corner of Shore Drive, its curved, pink-tinted windows and black lacquered French doors the height of suburban elegance. Inside stood headless bodies, six rose-velvet torsos, each wearing a fur coat. There were mirrors everywhere I looked and a few thin-legged, armless chairs. The walls were lined with coats and jackets and capes. Above them, floating on transparent necks, were the hats. Mr. Klein watched me. "Go ahead," he said. "All ladies like hats." He pulled down a few and walked discreetly into the workroom at the rear. I tried on a black cloche with a dotted veil and then a kelly-green fedora with a band of arching brown feathers. Mr. Klein emerged from the back, his hands in the pockets of his baggy grey trousers. "Come, Lizbet, your mother will be worried about you. Leave the hats, it's all right. Mondays are the day off, the girls will put them back tomorrow." He turned out the lights and opened the door for me. "My mother's not home." I'm really an orphan, adopt me. "Tcha, I am so absentminded. Mrs. Klein tells me your mother is a famous decorator. Of course she is out-decorating." He smiled, just slightly, and I laughed out loud. He's on my side. Almost every morning now, he gave me a ride to school. Without any negotiating that I remember, I knew that on Monday afternoons I would miss my bus and he would pick me up as I walked down Arrandale Avenue. I would keep him company while he did whatever he did in the back room and I tried on hats. After a few Mondays I eyed the coats. "Of course," he said. "When you're grown up, you'll tell your husband, 'Get me a sable from Klein's. It's Klein's or nothing.'" He wagged a finger sternly, showing me who I would be: a pretty young woman with a rich, indulgent husband. "Let me help you." Mr. Klein slipped an ash-blond mink jacket over my sweatshirt and admired me aloud. Soon after, he stopped going into the workroom, and soon after that, I began taking off my clothes. The pleasure on Mr. Klein's face made me forget everything I heard in the low tones of my parents' conversation and everything I saw in my own mirror. I chose to believe Mr. Klein. At home, to conjure up the feeling of Mr. Klein's cool round fingertips on my shoulders, touching me lightly before the satin lining descended, I listened to classical music. My father made approving snorts behind The Wall Street Journal. I lay on the floor of the living room, behind the biggest couch, and saw myself playing the piano, adult and beautifully formed. I am wearing a dress I saw on Marilyn Monroe, the sheerest clinging net, with sparkling stones coming up over the tips of my breasts and down between my legs. I am moving slowly across the stage, the wide hem of my sable cape shaping a series of round, dark waves. I hand the cape to an adoring Mr. Klein, slightly improved and handsomely turned out in a tuxedo cut just like my father's. My mother stepped over me and then stopped. I was eye to toe with her tiny pink suede loafers and happy to stay that way. Her round blue eyes and her fear of wrinkles made her stare as harsh and haunting as the eyeless Greek heads she'd put in my father's study. "Keeping busy, are you, Elizabeth?" I couldn't imagine what prompted this. My mother usually acted as though I had been raised by a responsible, affectionate governess; guilt and love were as foreign to her as butter and sugar. "Yeah. School, books." I studied the little gold bar across the tongue of her right loafer. "And all is well?" "Fine. Everything's fine." "You wouldn't like to study an instrument, would you? Piano? Perhaps a piano in the library. That could be attractive. An older piece, deep browns, a maroon paisley shawl, silver picture frames. Quite attractive." "I don't know. Can I think about it?" I didn't mind being part of my mother's endless redecorating; in the past, her domestic fantasies had produced my queen-size brass bed, which I loved, and a giant Tudor dollhouse, complete with chiming doorbell and working shower. "Of course, think it over. Let's make a decision next week, shall we?" She started to touch my hair and patted me on the shoulder instead. I didn't see Mr. Klein until the following Monday. I endured four mornings at the bus stop: leaves stuffed down my shirt, books knocked into the trash can, lunch bag tossed from boy to boy. Fortunately, the bus driver was a madman, and his rageful mutterings and yelping at invisible assailants captured whatever attention might have come my way once we were on the bus. It was raining that Monday, and I wondered if I should walk anyway. I never thought about the fact that Mr. Klein and I had no way to contact each other. I could only wait, in silence. I pulled up my hood and started walking down Arrandale, waiting for a blue streak to come past my left side, waiting for the slight skid of wet leaves as Mr. Klein braked to a stop. Finally, much closer to home than usual, the car came. "You're almost home," he said. "Maybe I should just take you home? We can go to the store another time." He looked rushed and unhappy. "Sure, if you don't have time, that's okay." "I have the time, tsatskela. I have the time." He turned the car around and drove us back to Furs by Klein. I got out and waited in the rain while he unlocked the big black doors. "You're soaking wet," he said harshly. "You should have taken the bus." "I missed it," I lied. If he wasn't going to admit that he wanted me to miss the bus, I wasn't going to admit that I had missed it for him. "Yes, you miss the bus, I pick you up. Lizbet, you are a very special girl,

and standing around an old man's shop in wet clothes is not what you should be doing."What I usually did was stand around in no clothes at all, but I could tell that Mr. Klein, like most adults, was now working only from his version of the script.I sat down uneasily at the little table with the swiveling gilt-framed mirror, ready to try on hats. Without Mr. Klein's encouragement, I wouldn't even look at the coats. He didn't hand me any hats.He pressed his thin sharp face deep into the side of my neck, pushing my sweatshirt aside with one hand. I looked in the mirror and saw my own round wet face, comic in its surprise and pink glasses. I saw Mr. Klein's curly grey hair and a bald spot I would have never discovered otherwise."Get your coat." He rubbed his face with both hands and stood by the door."I don't have a coat.""They let you go in the rain, with no coat? Gottenyu. Let's go, please." He held the door open for me and I had to walk through it.The chocolate wasn't my usual Belgian slab. It was a deep gold-foil box tied with pink and gold wisps, and topped with a cluster of sparkling gold berries. He dropped it in my lap like something diseased.I held on to the box, stroking the fairy ribbons, until he told me to open it.Each of the six chocolates had a figure on top. Three milk, three bittersweet, each one carved with angel wings or a heart or a white-rimmed rose. In our fat-free home, my eating habits were regarded as criminal. My parents would no more have bought me beautiful chocolates than gift-wrapped a gun for a killer."Lizbet . . ."He looked out the window at the rain and I looked up at him quickly. I had obviously done something wrong, and although my parents' anger and chagrin didn't bother me a bit, his unhappiness was pulling me apart. I crushed one of the chocolates with my fingers, and Mr. Klein saw me."Nah, nah," he said softly, wiping my fingers with his handkerchief. He cleared his throat. "My schedule's changing. I won't be able to give you rides after school. I'm going to open the shop on Mondays.""How about in the morning?" I didn't know I could talk through this kind of pain.Prsentation de l'diteurNational Book Award finalist Amy Bloom has written a tale of growing up that is sharp and funny, rueful and uncompromisingly real.A chubby girl with smudged pink harlequin glasses and a habit of stealing Heath Bars from the local five-and-dime, Elizabeth Taube is the only child of parents whose indifference to her is the one sure thing in her life. When her search for love and attention leads her into the arms of her junior-high-school English teacher, things begin to get complicated. And even her friend Mrs. Hill, a nearly blind, elderly black woman, can't protect her when real love--exhilarating, passionate, heartbreaking--enters her life in the gorgeous shape of Huddie Lester.With her finely honed style and her unflinching sensibility, Bloom shows us how profoundly the forces of love and desire can shape a life.From the Trade Paperback edition.