



Author of *Waiting for the Moon*

# Elizabeth Hand

"A literary page-turner... a darkly  
pleasurable... meditation  
world between a realist and insidious...  
It is a delightful waking dream."  
— *People's Choice Award*

# MORTAL LOVE

*A Novel*

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# Mortal Love by Elizabeth Hand

Elizabeth Hand

within the Victorian Age, a mysterious and impossible to resist girl turns into entwined within the lives of numerous artists, either as a muse and because the item of all-consuming obsession. Radborne Comstock, one of Mortal Love many early 20th Mortal Love century's such a lot extraordinary younger painters, is helpless less than her risky spell. In modern day London, journalist Daniel Rowlands meets a beguiling girl who holds the key to precious — and misplaced — Pre-Raphaelite paintings, whereas prosperous dilettante-actor Valentine Comstock is ate up through enigmatic visions. Swirling among eras and continents, Mortal Love is the serious story of unforgettable characters stuck in a whirlwind of art, love, and intrigue that might take your breath away.

The event of interpreting Mortal Love is slightly resembling constantly waking from a day dream. there's a similar psychological dislocation—and an identical accompanying interval of scrambling to split truth from fantasy. The speculative portion of Mortal Love is especially strong, by no means hidden, but it really is your time prior to the reader orients himself thoroughly to Hand's technique. As a author who's regularly being instructed to provide an explanation for extra (as in, "How does this laser-thingy work?"), the methods an writer establishes and grounds her speculative parts is of specific curiosity to me. I learn Mortal Love with Mortal Love a willing eye for the fantastic, but additionally an eye fixed for the evocation of the fantastic—and the way it contributes to the general effect. First, i'll learn a pretty straight-forward concept: The mundane as extraordinary. Hand is a grasp at freaking the reader out with really unusual descriptions—something she does very often within the novel. Her ancient evidence approximately London are usually grisly, slightly believable. In Hand's able hand's, they tackle a near-supernatural strength all via themselves. Take this description of a Mortal Love minor character, for instance, which turns out to defy a rational explanation: Her reduce jaw was once gone, eaten away in order that a spur of soft-looking black bone remained, like slightly charred wood. yet her eyes have been sly and mocking, a pellucid blue within the skinny gentle forged through the window of the eternal Arms, and her voice used to be candy and coaxing. [...] Her arms slipped again underneath her cloak; he famous that she didn't put on gloves, yet now not that her fingernails had the deep-blue glow of a lit gasoline mantle. (10) But as we find later within the novel, this situation is called phossy jaw, a sickness reduced in size by means of matchmakers within the nineteenth century from consuming a kind of phosphorous. The jaw could rot and, extra usually than not, the resultant infections might finally kill the bad soul who had gotten smaller the disease. The really remarkable characteristic of the situation is that because of chemical interactions with the phosphorous, the contaminated bones of the sufferer may glow! Hand evidently takes a few liberties here—the sparkling of the fingernails—but her description of the disorder is differently factual. Coming because it does on the establishing of the novel, however, the reader is blind to its factuality (positing the reader isn't an expert on operating category Victorian diseases). This contributes a lot to the tone of the novel, the place the mundane mixes fluidly with the fantastic. This leads certainly to the following speculative suggestion in Mortal Love: the extreme within the perceived mundane. As Daniel is speaking to Nick approximately his evening with Larkin, he studies anything phenomenal with Nick, a

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personality the reader has hitherto had no cause to suspect of supernatural skills (and in truth doesn't own them). As with the past example, this suspension of disbelief—of discovering the extreme in quotidian circumstances—causes the reader to query the very nature of truth in Hand's world: Around him the room shuddered, the way in which the picture thrown by means of a jammed projector shifts, then changes. Then the room was once gone. In entrance of him, a fireplace burned; he may consider the heat, close to scorching, of whatever in his hands. He regarded down and observed that he used to be conserving a blackened iron pot with anything cooking inside of it: a complete fish. (145) Nick moved ahead and pressed Mortal Love a finger to his decrease lip. Daniel's mouth choked with the flavor of scorched fish and burned honey. Not simply his mouth. His complete sensorium was once flooded—burning leaves, eco-friendly sap, wormwood, a dazzling aureole of emerald light, the style of anisette and salt and— (151) What happens during this scene is pivotal, since it establishes how permeable the road among notion and reality particularly is. Nick, touched as soon as by way of Larkin within the comparable method Daniel is touched, is ready to disclose to Daniel the real nature of the woman—without recourse to an analogous supernatural powers as Larkin herself possesses. Instead, he finds the magic that already exists via their shared interplay with a creature instantly out of Cornish legend. In different words, either are conduits Mortal Love for an influence more than they could think alone, as “ordinary” creatures. It is beneficial additionally to examine this concept: The supernatural fastened right into a character. Larkin—arguably the main superbly robust of all of the characters within the novel—has a distinct personality arc in that her historical past spans eras and shows itself in several actual materials. via the shut of the novel, the reader is familiar with her nature intimately; yet, as turns out right for a mythological being, she continues to be slightly of a mystery. Hand by no means explains her real motivation and, in conventional “fantasy literature” style, by no means explains how she impacts her magic: Because there have been nonetheless extra figures within the painting, hidden within the bushes and leaves: all watching, all looking at the sleeper and the peeking man—but also, I realized, observing me, Valentine, the peeking boy. “Remember me,” stated a woman's voice. She stated a be aware then that i didn't recognize; but it was once by some means common to me, and that i knew it was once not only a be aware yet a name. Her voice got here again, a whisper, but if I whirled to look, nobody used to be there. (24) Thrusting from the crack within the acorn used to be a tiny root—bright red, pomegranate red—curling like an inchworm. Mortal Love A minute droplet of transparent fluid clung to the root's tip. Daniel stared at it, bemused, then, with a part smile, caught out his tongue and touched it. The fluid had no taste, but if he swallowed, a sour heat unfold around the again of his tongue. (65) She tasted of honeysuckle, candy bittergreen, and salt. Milky heat unfold underneath his arms and tongue; while she came, hot liquid seeped not only from her labia and cunt yet from the interior of her thighs, like sap sweating from cut up bark. (204) Here, modern characters react to an analogous woman, embodied in a painting, an acorn, and her actual form. The development is fascinating, because it strikes from an simply deniable—though odd—experience to an undeniably supernatural experience. A development of this kind cements Larkin's prestige as a real supernatural being. What regularly surprises in Hand's narrative is the way in which she manages to infuse those suggestively outstanding components into approximately each interplay among Larkin and the boys infatuated with her. Now we flip to the final notion linked to Hand's characterization of the fantastic: the looks of the mundane turns to supernatural. along with Larkin, Juda Trent is the main evidently supernatural personality within the novel. Her improvement is noteworthy since it occurs at a far slower speed than Larkin's. The reader has short intimations of her precise

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nature, yet simply involves realize it close to the tip of the novel—and then purely partially. word the advance and a spotlight to paint within the following scenes: “Hey.” A voice got here at his shoulder. For an quick he notion it was once Larkin, and the realm flared white and green; then he observed a hand with blue-painted fingernails. (261)[...] as he watched, Daniel felt a even though blazing mild unexpectedly infused the scene: Shadows crackled and sparked like lightning, then dissolved into the grass like water into parched ground. The robin on its department used to be now not a chicken yet a part of the tree. The elegantly dressed lady within the doorway used to be now not a lady in any respect yet whatever else, something— (265)She had become free cornflower-blue trousers [...] She stared at him; as he stared back, he spotted that not only her nails yet her palms have been an analogous colour as her pants. (325)She raised her arm. A flare of blue-green ran down it: underneath the surface have been spikes of emerald lighting, forearm, arms all aflame, and, the place her center must Mortal Love have been, a trembling green-black shadow like branching neurons, a tree. (338)The repetition of the colour blue is important, since it creates a hyperlink among all of the different instances in Mortal Love a character’s physique components are defined as blue. by means of my casual count, it happens 12 occasions in the course of the text, and almost always within the context of the supernatural. Thus, Juda Trent turns into an emblem of all that’s exceptional within the novel. The revelation of her precise nature comes as no surprise, however it does come as a achievement of the reader’s expectations. merely via the top of the radical does he observe simply how the entire elements, mundane and fantastic, holiday down. He can glance again at the entirety of the paintings and orient himself.

## Mortal Love

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