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**A** *Light on Altered Land* is a love story between two women from different worlds. Kathryn is from a realm where privileges of wealth, beauty, and heterosexual partnership raise questions of compatibility among Ellie's friends. Ellie is an easily recognized lesbian in the lesbian family world: a solid soft butch, a middle class intellectual in the University world, happily ensconced in her family of lesbians who have been there for her through softball practice, potluck gatherings, changing relationships, work turmoil, and deep partnership loss. What the two have in common is that they have found themselves at the same point in their lives (after a quarter century of partnership): alone in their retirement years, with little thought of finding love, let alone one that is inspired and filled with desire.

They meet by chance in the local Starbucks when Kathryn ventures in for an appointment with her realtor and Ellie sits in her diurnal position: reading the paper drinking a dirty chai tea. Sharing a table, Ellie finds herself telling Kathryn the intimate story of losing her beloved to breast cancer. Something sparks between them during the deep honesty of the conversation and a love-light shines. The chemistry is tempered by the insight, knowledge, and experience each mature woman brings to the union. For Kathryn, a clinical nurse practitioner with a specialty in psychiatric nursing, communication is key: both compassionate communication and check-ins become a part of the ongoing conversation, along with her preference for alternative medicine and spiritual guidance.

For Ellie, a retired English teacher who has been through an exacting nightmare as primary caregiver for her partner – having to watch her beloved go through breast cancer treatments, inescapable pain, and striving to live life while dying has left Ellie traumatized – the decision to come back into 'the cycle of life' becomes paramount. She vows to turn her life around and become aware, or what she calls having "conscious being" in the world.

In the Author's notes, Bohan lets us in on her intentions in the writing of the novel. Among them is the desire to write about people whom she would welcome into her life; she writes, "I

wanted to spend time with characters I would be honored to have as friends” (279). The characters are thoughtful, aware, and smart: intentionally offering compassion and listening as a means of treating one’s self and other with an ideal respect and allowance of being one’s self in a world where tempers flare, grief is deep, and prejudice blasts into social settings.

Bohan’s second intention in writing the book is also artfully realized. Bohan brings the treatment of ageing lesbians skillfully into the story line with a loving hand. Special attention in the erotic scenes include luminous, authentic moments of ageing-acceptance and lesbian desire, both in the descriptions of pillowed middles and cellulite dimples, as well as in the familiar terrain of lesbian sexual expression.

Kathryn and Ellie are white women in their seventies and late sixties, respectively, bringing the culture of second wave lesbian feminists into the forefront. When Ellie’s groups of old softball friends gather around the kitchen table telling Kathryn about *The Lesbian Nation*, the thrall of nostalgia permeates the room. “As three old friends cleared the table and cleaned up, they described the culture of the Seventies and Eighties—the women’s music, the coffeehouses and concerts, the lesbian magazine and novels, the women’s bookstores, the fine art of a rising Amazon Nation” (83).

*A Light on Altered Land* includes this ode to the second wave lesbian feminists, written with some wistfulness about what has been lost and plenty of resistance to the new land that these women have found themselves in: where now the shared recreational places lesbian feminist women get together en masse are places like cruise ships and Club Med. Ellie’s friend from the lesbian softball team says it best: “There’s nothing like being surrounded by two thousand dykes” (83).

The stories of resistance include our transgender sisters. Ellie describes to Kathryn a painful time during her teaching years when she addressed one of her students, Roberta, as he rather than she. Roberta reported Ellie to the college authorities. In the auspicious light that follows the theme of the book, Ellie expresses angst at being called out for bias. Bohan presents us with the conflicts that exist between some lesbian feminists and our

transgender sisters and lets the conflicts and wounds out into the light as a means to heal rather than harm. When Ellie asks Kathryn to describe three things that are important to her this intention is illustrated. Kathryn describes how letting air get to our wounds is a part of the healing process – another example of the shining light theme.

*A Light on Altered Land* is not just an ode to places lost from the Seventies and Eighties, it is also a place where women can launch into a new terra firma, in this case that launch is a road trip. The jumping off point begun by entering the light in each other's eyes. Kathryn jumps into the relationship with a passion matching a twenty-something; she doesn't have to look long to recognize that she wants to jump into the fire, "Didn't she look forward to hearing Ellie's voice and seeing those coal-black eyes harboring diamonds?" (44).

It makes sense that when Ellie tells Kathryn she is leaving in two weeks to an annual visit by car to her niece in California, Kathryn asks to come along. Kathryn and Ellie share their stories to each other on the road trip, developing along the way their growing bond of compassion. The drive takes the relationship to another level and the lovemaking that ensues is scintillating, satisfying, and sharp.

For those who love Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt*, and the movie *Carol* that followed, with Blanchett and Rooney, *A Light on Altered Land* offers up the same tenderness and lesbian desire. For those of us who may think we are too old, too spent, or two markedly redefined in our separate selves to revisit passion and lust ever again, this story offers up a different ending. Along with being a sexy love story, *A Light on Altered Land* is a fun adventure with twists and turns and familiar lesbian humor. It is also the tenderhearted expression of love that flickers through the novel with gusto and brilliance that is most captivating; a little like seeing a sunny sky of dazzling light winking between leaves outside the open window on a delicious country road trip.

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