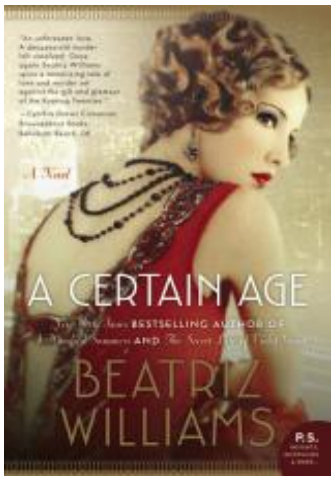
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

A Certain Age

by Beatriz Williams



About the Book

The bestselling author of A HUNDRED SUMMERS brings the Roaring Twenties brilliantly to life in this enchanting and compulsively readable tale of intrigue, romance and scandal in New York Society, brimming with lush atmosphere, striking characters and irresistible charm.

As the freedom of the Jazz Age transforms New York City, the iridescent Mrs. Theresa Marshall of Fifth Avenue and Southampton, Long Island, has done the unthinkable: she?s fallen in love with her young paramour, Captain Octavian Rofrano, a handsome aviator and hero of the Great War. An intense and deeply honorable man, Octavian is devoted to the beautiful socialite of a certain age and wants to marry her. While times are changing and she does adore the Boy, divorce for a woman of Theresa?s wealth and social standing is out of the question, and there is no need; she has an understanding with Sylvo, her generous and well-respected philanderer husband.

But their relationship subtly shifts when her bachelor brother, Ox, decides to tie the knot with the sweet younger daughter of a newly wealthy inventor. Engaging a longstanding family tradition, Theresa enlists the Boy to act as her brother?s cavalier, presenting the family?s diamond rose ring to Ox?s intended, Miss Sophie Fortescue --- and to check into the background of the little-known Fortescue family. When Octavian meets Sophie, he falls under the spell of the pretty ingénue, even as he uncovers a shocking family secret. As the love triangle of Theresa, Octavian and Sophie progresses, it transforms into a saga of divided loyalties, dangerous revelations and surprising twists that will lead to a shocking transgression...and eventually force Theresa to make a bittersweet choice.

Full of the glamour, wit and delicious twists that are the hallmarks of Beatriz Williams? fiction and alternating between Sophie?s spirited voice and Theresa?s vibrant timbre, A CERTAIN AGE is a beguiling reinterpretation of Richard Strauss? comic opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, set against the sweeping decadence of Gatsby?s New York.

Discussion Guide

1. By the tone of the first few pages, did you get the sense that A CERTAIN AGE was set during the period between World War I and World War II? Why or why not? How does the author set the stage for the era when describing the Roaring Twenties in New York City?

2. Soon after she?s married to the most eligible bachelor in New York, Theresa discovers he keeps a mistress and has done so for most of their courtship. Still, she puts up with his philandering, bears him three children, and takes a lover of her own, until he asks for a divorce. It?s clear she wonders if that was the ?right? choice. Given what you know about Theresa?s character at the beginning of the novel, do you think she followed the best path? How about at the end of the novel?

3. At the beginning of the novel, Boyo is beautiful and alluring because he can't have what he most wants: Theresa. Theresa loves Boyo but knows she?s not who Boyo thinks she is --- she?s twice his age and (at that point) married to a man with a mistress. Isn?t the point of an affair to get close to a feeling you can?t quite possess? Is it possible for an affair to work if both parties have nothing to lose?

4. Theresa and her husband have an open relationship. He keeps a mistress, and she?s allowed to do what she pleases as long as she?s discreet. Judging from the rest of the book, it seems that such sexual indiscretions are commonplace and accepted in certain circles. Why might affairs have been more permissible during the 1920s than they are today? Is monogamy part of the natural order of things, or should flings be allowed once in a while if neither party sees the harm in it?

5. Julie Schuyler is a feisty character. At one point, she says to Sophie: ?It never does any good to sit around the house, waiting for your man to arrive. *That?s* the old rules.? A perfect example of subverting the gender roles of the times. These days, neither sex really waits around for each other or returns phone calls or texts when they should. Do you see this as freedom or inconsiderate behavior? Does it help the romance cause or hinder it?

6. A CERTAIN AGE is set in the 1920s in the era of speakeasies and bootlegging. Which scenes did you gravitate towards most: the underground parties full of flappers, smoke, and jazz of Julie Schuyler?s taste, or the upper-crust soirees decorated with crinoline, lace and fancy cocktails? Do you get a sense that the author preferred writing about one over the other?

7. Many of the scenes between Boyo and Theresa, and Sophie and Octavian/Mr. Rofrano are romantic, but each for a different reason. Which scenes do you think are more convincing? What qualities make up the perfect romantic scene?

8. Timing is everything in A CERTAIN AGE --- Theresa and Boyo?s first meeting, Sophie?s introduction to Octavian just as she?s planning to marry Jay, Theresa?s brother, the phone call Sophie makes to Octavian when Theresa just happens to be over. Williams wields time and chance to propel the plot to its shocking conclusion. Do you think she succeeds? Why or why not?

9. Sophie and Theresa are alter egos of a sort. Do you identify with one over the other? Who were you rooting for to win Octavian?s heart? Did your opinion of him change throughout the course of the novel?

10. Williams sprinkles reportages of a trial involving Octavian, Theresa and Sophie?s father throughout the book. What do Patty Cake?s articles add to the plot and each character?s development? Do they seem jarring, or does the truth of their contents add necessary tension to the narrative?

11. When Sophie announces her change of plans regarding her marriage to Jay, were you rooting for her or Theresa? At that point in the novel, what did you think might happen next? Were you surprised by what happened at the end of the scene?

12. As Sophie denounces her plan to get married, she looks around the room at the rich women and thinks, ?Not one of these women has earned a single penny in her life, has she? Her clothes, her apartment, her house in the country, her jewels, her shoes, the bottle of milk in her icebox: all of them have been paid for by the industry of some other person. She is beautifully, uselessly, benevolently beholden. Left to herself, she couldn?t possibly sustain this luxury. She couldn?t even sustain necessity.? Is there anything wrong, per se, with these marriages of convenience? If given the choice, would you rather be terribly broke and in love, or filthy rich and beholden?

13. What a suspenseful ending! Did you piece any of the mystery together before the truth was revealed? What clues gave the ending away?

14. Theresa makes two choices at the end of the novel. Does it fit her character, and what does it say about the way she?s evolved? Would you have made the same choice if you were in her shoes? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Beatriz Williams is the *New York Times, USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of HUSBANDS & LOVERS, THE SUMMER WIVES, THE SECRET LIFE OF VIOLET GRANT, A HUNDRED SUMMERS, the *Wicked City* series, and several other works of historical fiction, including five novels in collaboration with fellow bestselling authors Karen White and Lauren Willig.

A graduate of Stanford University with an MBA in Finance from Columbia University, Beatriz worked as a communications and corporate strategy consultant in New York and London before her first novel was published in 2012. Beatriz?s books have won numerous awards, have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and appear regularly in bestseller lists around the world. Her essays have appeared in magazines such as *Real Simple* and *Southern Living*, among others, and she regularly reviews fiction for the *New York Times Book Review*.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Beatriz now lives in southeastern Connecticut with her husband and four mostly grown children.

A Certain Age

by Beatriz Williams

Publication Date: January 3, 2017
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Paperback: 352 pages
Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0062404962
ISBN-13: 9780062404961