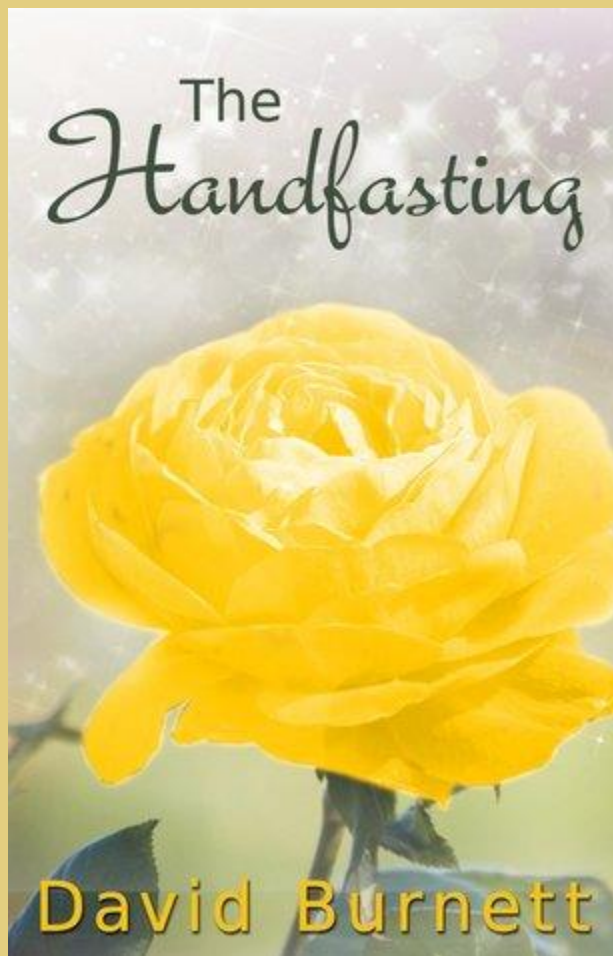


TVBT: THE HANDFASTING by David Burnett
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Instant Love by David Burnett

I've just completed Katherine Lowry's fantastic book, *The Last MacKlenna*. Set primarily on a horse farm in Lexington, Kentucky, the story revolves around Meredith Montgomery, owner of a winery in Napa Valley, and Elliot Fraser, who raises thoroughbred horses. They meet at a B&B in Scotland two days before Christmas, are immediately attracted to each other, and quickly fall in love. It's a common pattern: boy meets girl; they fall in love; they fall into bed, and shortly-by Boxing Day in this case-they are on the path to happily ever after (although Meredith actually takes a bit longer to completely trust the handsome Scotsman).

In addition to being an author (*The Handfasting* and *The Reunion*) I review books for the Kindle Book Review. Many of the books I receive are Romance novels, and, as I have reviewed books over the past year, I have found that the almost "instant love" that I observed in *The Last MacKlenna* is really the norm.

In *Dunham* by Mariah Jovan, another excellent book that I recently reviewed, Celia and Elliott, privateers who prey on British ships during the American Revolution, meet in a bar on a Caribbean island. A few weeks later, following a battle with the British navy, they find their ships together in calm waters. Elliot sneaks aboard her ship, through the window of her cabin, and into her heart. Four days later, as the winds again begin to blow, they are in love.

In a third book, *Until I Met You* by Annette Evans, a girl and boy in their late teens meet, sleep together and decide to wed in the space of a week – and the girl's parents are happy about the proposed marriage! While not all Romances follow this pattern – mine don't follow it in all respects - I could cite many that do.

This instant attraction certainly moves the action along, and it leaves plenty of time to develop other elements of the plot, but is it realistic? Is love instantaneous? Is it simple chemistry? Do Cupid's arrows pierce our hearts and cause us to swoon?

When I am not writing or reading, I am a psychology professor. (Yes, I stay busy.) When my classes discuss the topic of interpersonal attraction, one explanation I offer is reinforcement theory, a theory which suggests that love is learned. You get to know another person, spend time with him, perhaps date him, and you learn that the two of you are similar. You learn that you enjoy the same activities, that you think in similar ways, that you have similar goals in life. And you fall in love.

Learning takes time! Falling in love takes time!

Isn't this your experience? It has certainly been mine. I might have been attracted by her blond hair and blue eyes (sorry, brunettes), but love? Even with the girl I married, falling in love took more than the long weekend in a snow storm at the top of a mountain!

If the image of love that we find in books is so unrealistic, why do authors continue to present it?

Why do readers continue to buy into it?

We buy into it because we want it to be true.

We want it to be true, first, because no one really wants to delay gratification.

If you have ever spent time with children, you know that they want immediate gratification. They care nothing about rules. They care nothing for the laws of physics, the constraints imposed by reality. They want what they want, when they want it, and they want it NOW. A child may want a particular kind of candy sold only in a shop on a side street in London, eight hours away by air, but the child wants it now!

Our lives, today, are on fast-forward. We never want to wait. We use email or we text; we do not post letters. We pull into the drive-through at Starbucks; we do not wait in line. We Google for

information rather than through a book. We click for movies on demand rather than drive to a theater. We want instant information, instant service, instant contact. We also want instant love. We want it to be true, second, because life would be less painful if it were true. We do not enjoy the “process” of falling in love.

Who really enjoys dating? Wondering if he will call; wondering if she will answer. Trying to decipher the other person’s feelings. We panic when he flirts with another girl, when she smiles at another boy. Adults who find themselves alone after many years consider dating, and their stomachs turn. Would it not be preferable simply to lock eyes with someone across the room, and to live happily ever after?

We would so like for love to be immediate. It would be convenient; it would fit our lifestyles so well. It would be so pleasant if love could be found as rapidly as we brew coffee in a Keurig, if we could fast forward through the emotional ups and downs, if eHarmony could guarantee a perfect match on the first try, if Cupid aimed his arrows at the boy and the girl, the man and the woman, at the same moment in time.

Some people criticize stories with instant love as examples of simple escapism. They argue that we need to confront the world as it truly is rather than wallowing in sentimentalism.

On the other hand, books exist, at least in part, to take us away from the routine activities of our lives, from “the squalor of the real world,” as they sing in *Evita*. Books enable us to imagine doing things we could never do, being people we could never be, having adventures that could never happen, visiting times and places in which we do not live. We experience other people’s lives and see the world through their eyes. We are able, through the people in our books, to experience life, love, and adventure as we feel that they “should” be, as we wish they were.

We know that the easy, fall-in-love-in-two-days stories are unrealistic. But we don’t care. When we pick up a Romance, we willingly suspend our disbelief in such things, we lose ourselves in the story, and we experience, for a short time, life as we would like it to be.

And this is good.

It’s Valentine’s Day. Choose a Romance, and lose yourself in the story. Escape for a while! Imagine yourself as one lead, your spouse or your steady as the other.

And fall in love. Or fall in love again.

Tasty Read Book Reviews February 14, 2014