

Book Review

One Perfect Afternoon

Jane Dawkins

If anyone's looking for a steamy read for steamy days of August, pick up local writer Jane Dawkins' bodice-ripper "One Perfect Afternoon" and take it to hammock at Fort Zach or simply install yourself under a fan with a pitcher of something cold.

Dawkins knows all the rules of the genre: that it should be sexy but not pornographic, that sexual episodes should happen with believable regularity, that the main man should be handsome but sensitive, the heroine beautiful and spirited. She knows that girls who love horses also like sex and that "country matters" go better in the country. She's updated the genre to include feminist aspirations and gives her heroine, Davina, an enthusiastic ability to take the initiative: "She removed the sheet that covered him and replaced it with languorous kisses across his broad, beautiful chest." As well, she gives the recipient of the kisses a manly sensitivity: "Rupert quivered with motion." In short, it's all good fun. The plot gallops along like a coach and four, we know Davina is going to get everything she wants, bad Sir Henry Broadlea is ousted and good Rupert, his younger brother, is set to inherit the estate.

Money always underpins romance in novels set in Regency England, and Jane Austen, while never providing overtly sexual moments, always lets you know exactly how much money everyone has, or expects to have. You can't be permanently poor to be romantically successful but you can have the attractive appearance of poverty. Rupert and Davina, when they first meet, are disguised respectively as groom and governess, thereby hiding their class from each other and so being "allowed" to make love in the hay. There's a Lawrentian raunchiness about stables, hay, the smell of horses, the groom in his dirty breeches, the clothes taken off to dry before the fire.

In fact, they both manage to get wet satisfactorily often, going riding in the rain, finding empty cottages in which to light fires and -yes-take off their wet clothes. Davina's complicated hair falls down at just the right moment too, and her bodice is ripped several times-not by courtly Rupert but by lecherous, careless Sir Henry. The class thing is settled by the end, so that nobody has to be either a groom or a governess in reality.

Grand houses are to be had all across the south of England; Davina's father's is in Hampshire, home of Jane Austen herself, the Broadlea estate in Somerset. Anyone who comes from the north is bound to be in manufacturing and not attractive at all, and wicked Henry ends up with a plain bride from the north whose father has left all his money in her name, thus thwarting him in the areas of both sex and money although as his plain-spoken new wife points out, he is not much good in the sack either. So the old rules are quietly subverted here by a feminist consciousness, and suddenly we can have our cake and eat it too. The inherent masochism of the bodice-ripping romance is

gone, and in its place is a tough, amused feminine feistiness about sex. Who's ripping what, now?

Jane Dawkins has also written a couple of quieter books based on Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" in which Elizabeth Darcy, newly-married to Mr. D., writes to her sister Jane about life at Pemberley during the first year of her marriage. Her 19th-century prose is convincing, her entry into Elizabeth's mind impressive; but this is always a risky venture, to set oneself beside one of the prose stylists and wits of all time. I felt that she was enjoying herself more in the rambunctious "One Perfect Afternoon" -whose cover, by the way, presents two Key Westers in considerable dishabille, clothes from "Consigning Adults" slipping off their perfect shoulders and manly chest.....

Rosalind Brackenbury
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Book Review: Romance at Heart.com

One Perfect Afternoon

Rose Brungard

There is a sadness about the young woman the parties, balls, and afternoon teas of the season cannot ever dispel. Lady Davina Woodburn feels totally uprooted, and adrift among her Aunt Leverton's society friends. She hides it well though. She has beauty, poise, intelligence, and an education that surpasses most of the belles of the ton, and as such, should get along quite swimmingly. She is a diamond of the first water, a prize of great value, but she is not at all happy to be in these circumstances. She left behind her beloved Eddie, the beautiful Hampshire countryside, and the father that she adores, and for what? To flounder around in a jaded society where she is expected to find a husband is not her idea of a grand time. She finds little of interest in London, and the events of the season. She only finds them filled with a multitude of jaded matriarchs trying to pass their daughters off to wealthy husbands, which is not at all to her liking. Why she cannot go home to those who really care for her is a true thorn in her side. Davina feels no need to be here, and in spite of her aunt's warm welcome, homesickness reigns.

She is a country girl at heart, can outstride any of the young bucks that vie for her hand, and is a better judge of horse-flesh than most of them. She enjoys the wild freedom of her country life, raising and training hounds, caring for her livestock, riding the Hunt, and she is not afraid to attend the births of the animals under her care, or patch up a wound in either man or animal. Nineteen-year old Davina feels quite out of place in London, quite out of place in the ton. She has an intimate knowledge of animals and clean country living, and finds great comfort in her mundane everyday life there. She prefers the peace of that life, and high London society, in all their decadent and gaudy splendor,

cannot hope to compare. She wishes to be back where she feels she belongs, happily back in the country, and definitely not on the London marriage mart. She would not be here if not for her aunt pushing her father into "letting her have a proper Season," and finding her a husband. Well, she has no use for one, especially if she would be stuck in London, away from her beloved Hampshire, and Eddie....

The odor of dirt and filth in London is so different from the clean earthy smells of the open and luxurious Somerset countryside. The dinginess within the city can't compare to the sunny open countryside, and even the parks are cramped, packed, and far less desirable. Rupert Broadlea, second son of the Earl of Enningham is not happy about being here. His elder brother, Henry, asked for his presence to inquire about the health of the family estate, but Rupert is not fooled. The only reason that Henry cares is to ascertain his allowance will not be cut by any shortfalls in profits. On that score, Henry doesn't have to worry, the estates are doing quite well, and Rupert knows of what he speaks. He also recognizes this as another attempt to draw him into his brother's decadent city life, but it will not succeed. Rupert is happiest in the country, the Society life too jaded and crass for him by far. He would much rather take a trip to the mews, he needs to check to see that the new horses have settled in well.

The sight that greets him when he gets there is startling. One of the grays is down, and a wisp of a girl is struggling frantically to get him on his feet. Desperation is etched in her face, her plain gown soiled from her frantic efforts. She is pulling and tugging on Romulus' halter, muttering about poison, and begging the grooms to aid her. The name slipped from his mouth as he introduced himself, but it was better that way. The girl was beautiful, and Rupert has never seen her equal. She is special. Intelligent, and quick witted, she knows horses and their ailments, she saves the life of Romulus, and for that he is grateful. At least if he has to be stuck in the city for a fortnight or so, the afternoons to which he could now look forward might offer some respite. Why he used the name Andrew Lomax, he would never know, but he didn't want her to defer to him because of his rank. His misconception is that she is the children's governess, an assumption that she left stand. Well, that was before he found out she is to be engaged to his brother. That particular jab hurts worst of all. How she could play with his affections like this is quite plain. He is a second son, not worth the time nor the trouble. She is society's darling, the top of the season's crop. The dalliance seems to mean nothing, but the news he hears leads him to hope...

In a tale sparkling with the glitter of the Bon Ton, Jane Dawkins writes of how two soul mates find each other. In Regency England, in an era of decadent indulgence, the pair of country loving aristocrats are uncomfortably forced into society. Davina and Rupert are ripped apart by misunderstanding and jealousy, and the unfortunate incidents at Henry's ball. The question soon becomes one of what will happen, and when, and will these two be forever separate, or will they again find happiness in each other's arms? From the gem-studded parlors and ballrooms of the Regency Bon Ton, to the quiet country-sides of Hampshire and Somerset, Jane tells of the wonderful and yet unlikely meeting, its consequences and rewards.

One Perfect Afternoon is a wonderfully told story that will touch your heart, and will find favor with the readers and lovers of Regency Romance. Jane has again, brought style and grace into the telling, along with vivid scenery and lush costuming. Rich in character, you cannot help reliving in your mind the love and joy in One Perfect

Afternoon. Join the memorable story of the trials and joys as Davina and Rupert struggle to overcome past hurts, to live, love, and find happiness amid the green sun-drenched hills of the English countryside. After all, they have something to remember, One Perfect Afternoon...Watch for this coming this month from iUniverse.com. It is one Regency Romance you won't want to miss. Don't forget to look for it at Barnes and Noble and also at Amazon.com as well as your favourite bookstore.

Yours in good reading,
Rose!