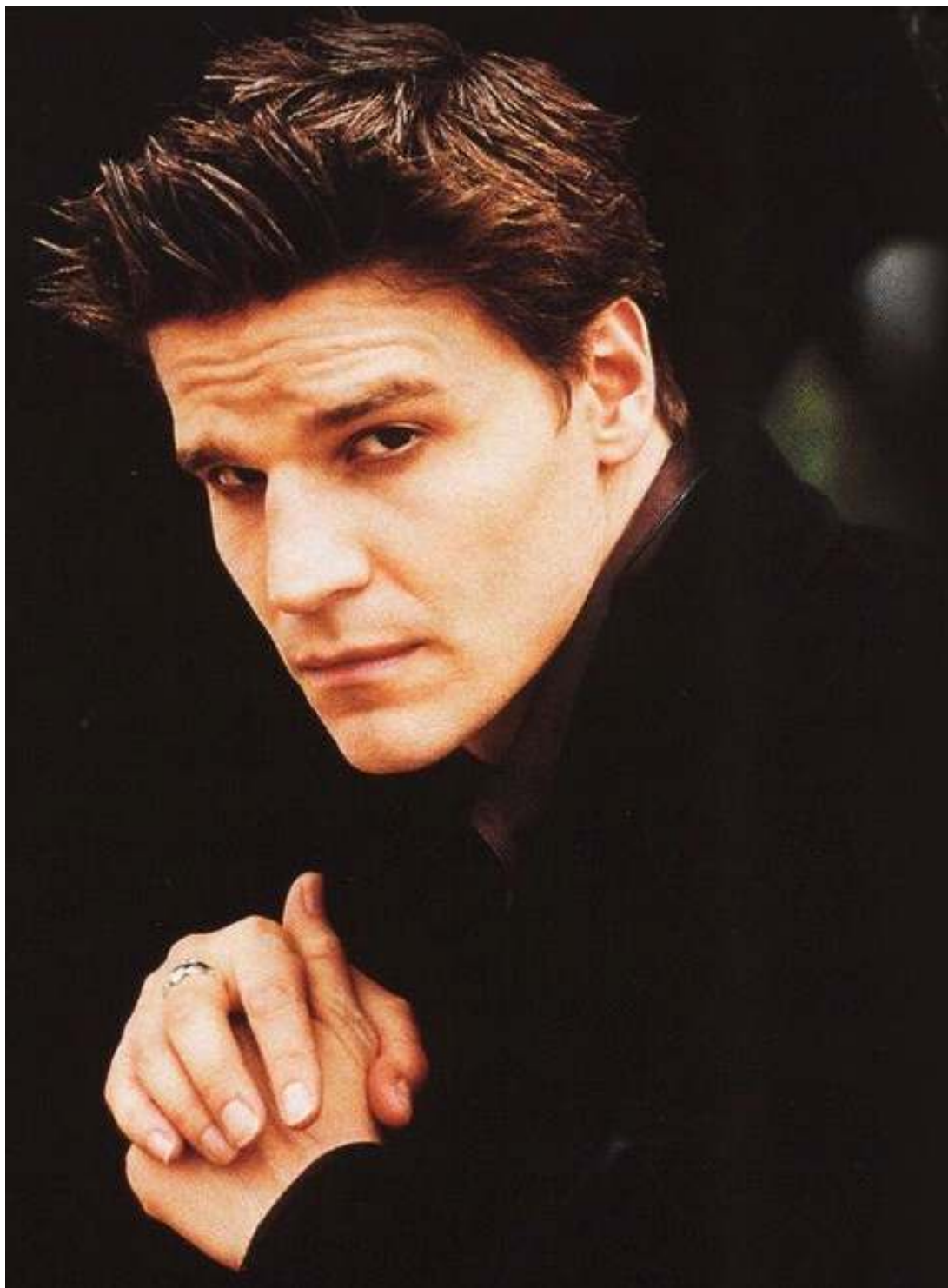


The Dark and Brooding Hero – *love him or want to slap him silly?* By Lynne Marshall © November 2010



You've all read at least one of these guys in a book, right? Many of them have fangs, but just as many are billionaires or cowboys or soldiers or, in the case of Medical Romance, doctors. The tormented, brooding hero is filled with angst and passion. He's wounded, secretive, puzzling, a man of few words. The dark prince of smoldering looks. The Sultan of sulkiness.

Think Edward Cullen in *Twilight*, (though he's a bit too pale and definitely too young for my taste) or Angel originally from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Mr. Darcy ala Colin Firth, Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry, Batman, Spiderman, or Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

As the brooder must brood, the heroine, in turn, must prod. Though she's kept safely on the sidelines – for the brooding hero never lets people get close – the baffled heroine is determined to find out what trauma created this mysteriously haunting man, to break through his fatal flaw, and open his heart.

Drama is the key in these books. One event has changed a seemingly normal guy into a moody and distant man, and you'll find all kinds of reasons for this event in Harlequin books, and romantic literature in general. You see, just like the heroine, we readers are drawn to this dark brooder, this man engulfed by pain, a man the heroine believes longs for love and acceptance, like every other person on the earth...if only he'd reach out for it...

I tackled one such lost soul in *The Boss and Nurse Albright*. He'd lost everything he loved in a train wreck. He had a reason to brood, but Claire Albright didn't know his past. All she knew was the guy was a super pain to work with! She decided to let him sulk all he wanted, "As far as I'm concerned, he can hang upside down in his office and spit at people," she said, "—as long as he leaves me alone and lets me do my job." Of course he didn't leave her alone, and The Midcoast Medical Clinic went through major changes, as did Jason Rogers, once Claire arrived on scene.

One of my all time favorite heroes of this type is Colin Byrne in Susan Elizabeth Phillips' novel *Ain't She Sweet?* Literally dark and handsome, in a brooding and rugged way, he has revenge on his mind, and Sugar Beth Carey is the object of his wicked plan. When Sugar Beth, the former beauty queen, now fifteen years older and three marriages later, arrives on his doorstep, his bitter memories of how she wrongly accused him of something that ruined his life and reputation, retribution is the only thing on his mind. Having received acclaim as a writer, admiration and respect from the town's people, is Colin happy? Hell no, he's brooding! I imagined Daniel Day Lewis as Colin when I read that book. He deserved his comeuppance, but so did Sugar Beth! As they say, they *deserved* each other.

The question is how long is the reader willing to put up with this sulking, standoffish personality? How long can the man's mopey good looks sustain the readers' interest in a novel before they want to throw it against the wall, throttle him, and yell GET OVER IT ALREADY!?! How far into the book is the reader willing to go before the heroine

scratches his prickly, overprotected surface and discovers the vulnerable and devoted hero beneath?

The answer, as always when it comes to tastes in reading, is subjective. What drives one reader to despair ignites another's fire. The plethora of brooding heroes in literature, especially in Historical fiction, suggests the appetite for this archetype will continue to darken the pages of books for as long as stories are written.

Thought I'd like to share a sprinkling of close to sixty comments that I received when I blogged about this topic at the eHarlequin Community, Medical Romance authors' blog in November 2010.

NAS: As long as I, as the reader know why he is moody and brooding then I guess I'm in the story. If the heroine is out of the picture and she anguishes about his mood, that's all the better for me in the story. And when the hero is about to confess but stops I'm like...go tell her! No, no, stop, let her anguish more!

AMY: It's all in the execution. At the hands of a master you're willing to read 'til the bitter end. Other times it can just be plain irritating. 😞

MAGGIE: bring on your dark and brooding hero, because I love him, but only if he has very good reasons to brood, and also make sure that you don't wait too long for me, and the heroine, to sit down with this man and find out why he is like he is.

SHARON: if I can believe the reasons why they can't/don't/won't open up and talk to each other, if the reasons are compelling enough, then I'm happy to go with the story and suffer with them!

LAURA: I grew up reading Phyllis Whitney who was the master at writing dark, brooding heroes with lots of secrets. So I have to admit, I love them and love reading them. I don't know that I've ever said, enough already.

VIRGINIA: A skilled author can make a hero's pain and his transformation believable, and that's what makes the difference. I love a brooding, hurting hero with a real reason for his pain who is transformed by a good woman's love. I'm sighing just thinking about it.

In closing, I see the overall consensus for putting up with brooding heroes in literature seems to suggest that it's all in the execution. That's about as subjective as it gets when it comes to defining how long a reader is willing to cut the Sultan of sulk some slack. Sigh.

Lynne Marshall ©2010

www.lynnemarshall.com

Lynne's November release, *The Christmas Baby Bump*, features a brooding heroine, and is currently available under Medical Romance at www.eharlequin.com