



Burning Bright

Helen Dunmore

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Nadine, a sixteen-year-old runaway new to London, is set up in a decaying Georgian house by her Finnish lover, Kai. Slowly, she begins to suspect that Kai's plans for her have little to do with love.

'Be careful,' warns Enid, the elderly sitting tenant in the house, who knows all about survival and secrets. And when Nadine discovers Kai's true intentions, Enid's warning takes on a terrible and prophetic quality.

Burning Bright Details

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From Reader Review Burning Bright for online ebook

Moonyeen Blakey says

Dunmore explores the corruption on innocence in this sensitively written novel. As always the reader is engaged by her poetic style and her skill in unfolding both plot and character.

Sixteen year old Nadine is being groomed for life as a high class call girl. Already Tony has a senior politician interested in her. Lulled by wealth, and a sense of security she's never before encountered, Nadine imagines herself in love with Kai, Tony's Finnish partner, but her naivete is destined to be cruelly betrayed. Only elderly Enid, the 'sitting tenant' in the apartment block, recognizes the truth of what is going on, but Enid has her own secret and dramatic history which involves a lesbian affair and a murder...

This is an unusual book well worth reading.

sisterimapoet says

I'm so pleased I found Helen Dunmore. Every one of her novels drags me in and holds me tightly throughout. She achieves a great balance of good writing and involving plots, which many authors struggle to achieve.

This one was pleasingly dark, shifting through time to draw gentle parallels between different characters. A tight little cast, all drawn clearly and distinctly.

Helene Harrison says

Review - *Burning Bright* was dark and tackled some very controversial issues, but it dealt with them sensitively. However, I think that the novel could have benefited from some more emotional involvement and depth than was present. The characters are all quite forgettable and it is the storyline which pulls the novel along rather than the characters.

Genre? - Drama / Romance

Characters? - Enid / Kai / Nadine

Setting? - London (England) & Finland

Series? - N/A

Recommend? - No

Rating - 12/20

Val says

Enid is an elderly sitting tenant in a dilapidated house with 'potential for development'. Owners and squatters come and go, but Enid stays put. The latest owners are Tony and Kai, who get rid of the squatters and do up part of the house, and then Kai moves in with his much younger girlfriend, Nadine.

This is mainly Nadine's story and Tony and Kai's plans for her, which involve a prominent politician, Paul. It is not as sad a story as it might be for the scenario, Nadine is naive at times, but not really a victim of the older men's exploitation. Both Enid and Nadine have unexpected strengths of character which enable them to cope with their situations.

I realised I had read this book before when I was part way through it; I remembered Nadine and Kai, but had forgotten about Enid, Paul, Jenny and her baby, and all the early part of the book. The book is more memorable than that might suggest, as Nadine is by far the most interesting character.

One other positive outcome of reading the book for the second time is that I used some of my garden fruit to make a delicious Summer Pudding. It was 5* amazing, but the book was not quite.

Libby says

Helen Dunmore is one of my mum's favourite novelists (the other being Barbara Trapido) and she raised me accordingly, with a steady diet of Dunmore's books for children. I wasn't allowed to read her books for adults though, and I kind of slowly forgot I had ever wanted to. When she passed away earlier this month, my mum texted me asking if she could lend me her favourites of Dunmore's work - *Burning Bright* being the first of those.

Mostly, I really enjoyed it. Although the plot is arguably complex and dramatic, the way Dunmore writes makes it feel quite slow-paced. There's beautiful descriptions of things and a generally wonderful use of language. You can tell she's a poet too. Sometimes I wanted something more to come - a break from the calm prose - but it's a style she writes well in, so reading it is no hardship.

Amelia says

Ugh. I'm really not sure how to go about rating/reviewing *Burning Bright*. I bought it at The Secret Bookshop based on Helen Dunmore and Helen Dunmore alone, my copy being the Cosmopolitan edition which has absolutely no description of the story whatsoever. Reading it was going in blind and it turned out to be one of those cases in which a book's writing is technically skilful but you just don't like the story.

Burning Bright reminded me of *An Education* (the film - I haven't read the book - yet) in a lot of ways, albeit a seedier tale. Dunmore is a brilliant writer, as ever, but I would never have knowingly chosen to read a book about a sixteen year old girl being groomed for prostitution. It's just too grim for my tastes.

Linh Pham says

With the melancholy but excitement and passion, story of the girl Nadine dragged me to the edge of all kind of feeling. I, from a naive little girl, suddenly became a sultry, attractive and adventurous woman. Following her every single moves and decisions, I learned that even though a woman in her grows strongly and

sometimes overwhelming, it is still under the control of babyish feeling. She shows vulnerability throughout the whole story. She is obsessed with the feeling of being left out in her family. However, she doesn't stop thinking about her parents and her sister whenever she is disappointed, terrified or elated. It seems that the past with her family attaches to her and strings her so tightly that it become almost whole parts of her.

I love the way the author tells the story. It is multi - narrative. Sometimes it's Nadine's narration. On the next chapter it turns to Enid's story. The brilliant narration technique drives me to deep thoughts. It somewhat forces me to dig deeper into the characters' psychology.

However, the ending is pretty disappointed for me, personally. I expect to know more about the escape of Nadine. How terrified she is? What does she think? Her lively and vigil observance? I do wish that my book lost a few pages in the end.

Overall, it is a fair book to read in a cloudy afternoon when you suddenly have the aspire of adventure and discovery of humans' deep end.

Tim Atkinson says

Dark, yes, and with moments of heart-thumping tension so great it makes you skip through prose you know demands attention just because you want to find out what is happening. And then there's the ending. Without giving anything away, I think I can say that it's just a tad disappointing. The book as a whole gets five stars though: worth reading for Dunmore's restrained English poeticism even when nothing much is happening - and there's plenty happening at all stages of the narrative. But the ending I'm afraid strikes me as though Dunmore simply couldn't think of anything better: one star, making the whole rating 4! But still worth reading.

Susan says

I read this because I loved the Lie. I didn't find the writing as accomplished in this one, although it was still good. I wasn't keen on the way she switched point of view mid-chapter and sometimes mid-paragraph. I also found it confusing when she switched from first to third person and back again. It seemed a strange technique for an otherwise non-experimental novel. The plot was great, and kept me hooked, except that it seemed a bit implausible to me that Kai and Tony would have bought a house with a sitting tenant, given their line of business. I'm going to stick to her later novels as I think this author has come a long way since she wrote this.

janetandjohn says

Although this gave me a bad taste in the mouth all the way through due to the subject matter (older lover grooming teenager to become a high class prostitute whilst raking in money for himself) it was a clever well written tale.

Vi Walker says

Helen Dunmore is anything but a formulaic writer. Just when you think you've worked out the back story to a character you find out that it's entirely different. This tale is, in some respects, a series of love stories but it also has a very haunting and eerie quality to it. There is often a faint undercurrent of sinisterness that makes you fearful for your favourite characters without there being any direct reason for feeling this way. A book that will stay in my mind for a long time.

David says

This was my sixth Helen Dunmore novel and "Burning Bright" is one of her best. I had to keep reminding myself that this book was published twenty two years ago. Paul Parrett is a war baby (as I was) and is therefore in his late forties. He is single, a successful politician and a minister. But the story is not about him. It is about Nina who says she is nineteen but is actually three years younger.

She has left her family and moved in with her much, much older boyfriend not aware of what he does and what she is in for. This is very tasteful kind of grooming although I'm not sure if that word was in existence then. Fortunately this is not a grubby story. There are a couple of situations that don't quite add up given Nina's age, but overall this is a superbly told book full of incident and drama.

There is one possible untold relationship that suddenly dawned on me on page 168, but the author never ever gives a hint of what this might be. You just have to decide yourself.

Jayne Charles says

This is the fourth Helen Dunmore I've read and I'm still waiting for one that lives up to the excellent 'The Siege'. To give this one its due, it has a more dramatic plot than many of her others if you boil it down to its essence, but there is the usual literary padding that separates the main events and makes it much less nail biting than it might have been in the hands of a different author.

Point of view is handled in an unconventional manner – changing from one character to another within a single section. At one point a character seems to hi-jack the narrative, moving from third person to first person without a section break, 'she' suddenly becoming 'I'. That's the sort of thing that would have an amateur author sent back to school but if you're Helen Dunmore you can do as you please!

I found so many questions floating around my head as I was reading it. Where was the house situated? (the blurb suggests London, but it seemed not). Was Nadine really 16? Her thought processes and analysis of events felt like those of a much older person. And was the Finnish character only Finnish in order to exercise the author's undeniable knowledge of that country?

I'm always surprised, but perhaps shouldn't be, that older characters are often the best in books. So it was with this one. Enid the sitting tenant with experimental tastes and an interesting past, was one of the two major plus points of the book for me. The other was the way I was never sure which direction the story was heading, a fact that kept me reading through the less eventful sections.

Julia Povall says

A sinister book with tones of a criminal underworld. A few redeeming characters but a rather fragmented plot which went around in circles. Despite there being a number of crisis in the story, it lacked any coherence or resolution.

Nick Davies says

As much as I thought this was well-written, with an interesting subject, and language which brought up strong impressions of scene and atmosphere.. I was left slightly frustrated in the end.

The story concerns parallel strands - a young woman used by her older 'businessman' of a boyfriend, the lives of said boyfriend and his business associates, and the reminiscences of an old woman living in the same house (who strikes up a friendship with the young woman). As beautifully written as it was, I just found the story felt like several well-woven pieces that failed really to satisfactorily join with others, and which were frayed at the ends. Several times the narrative built to a threatening point, but then didn't really resolve with the drama and clarity I'd expected, leaving me feeling slightly short-changed.

Nevertheless, the excellent writing, the (mainly) involving storyline, and the undeniable quality of the author's ability.. I do rate this quite highly and would recommend it.
