



Untying the Knot

Linda Gillard

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Marrying a war hero was a big mistake. So was divorcing him.

A wife is meant to stand by her man, especially an army wife. But Fay didn't. She walked away - from Magnus, a traumatised war veteran and from the home he was restoring: Tullibardine Tower, a ruined 16th-century castle on a Perthshire hillside.

Now their daughter Emily is getting married. But she's marrying someone she shouldn't.

And so is Magnus..

Untying the Knot Details

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From Reader Review Untying the Knot for online ebook

Ron says

Yes, this is a love story, maybe a romance. And I'm a bloke not supposed to like such a genre. Normally, I don't, but this is not a normal romance. For a start, the "couple" were married already ... and then divorced. Secondly, they are much older than the "normal" love duo - for heaven's sake, their daughter is getting married! And then it turns out Fay has slept with her daughter's fiancé! Oh, and she hates where her [ex?] husband lives, a restored Scottish folly. And we mustn't forget that Magnus [her ex-husband] is an old soldier with PTSD and a temper!

So, this is an unusual love story and the mess they get themselves into seems for a while insurmountable. But the main characters are well drawn, the setting is credible and we, the readers, do actually want to know what happens to them. I did enjoy reading this.

Lindsay says

'We set each other free, free to prove we could live without each other.'

Untying the Knot is a beautiful, character-driven novel, depicting the devastating consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder, resulting from a life spent in war zones, making bombs safe. Magnus has been severely affected by his former role, traumatised by flashbacks and scarred by horrendous memories, and his now ex-wife Fay has borne the brunt of his erratic behaviour until one day she could take no more, and she finally left him and moved on.

Magnus now has a new partner, Nina, who lives with him in the home that he previously shared with Fay. Tullibardine 'Tully' Tower, a place that takes on such an important role in the novel that it is like a character in itself, a formidable old 16th-century ruin, that Magnus insisted on taking on, restoring, against all protests from Fay that it was too much. Daughter Emily remained with her father, and has a new love, Rick, and there is talk of marriage.

This is another beautifully written, emotional novel with depth in terms of characterisation and plot. I will be honest and admit I have genuinely loved and enjoyed reading every book that I have read by this author, but this one is probably my favourite. I am keen to read it again. It was one of the very first books I read on my Kindle and it was certainly a fine one to be with! I was gripped by this story and felt drawn into the characters' lives.

I loved the way the characters were revealed in the opening chapter and thought this was very cleverly written. Linda Gillard has done her research on the topics incorporated into the story here, and has handled them sensitively but always with realism.

The idea of memory is strong in this novel. For Magnus, memories are rife with 'demons.' Fay meanwhile deals with the memories of others, creating textiles for people, 'picture-histories':

'I spend my working life preserving other people's memories, trying to capture them in a form of textile 'still life', but I spent much of my marriage watching the man I loved being tortured - all but destroyed - by the demons of memory.'

Another strong emotion felt by Fay is fear: 'I was scared...Scared of how much I loved Magnus; how much my body wanted him; how much he wanted me; how I might fail him; how he might fail me;...I was scared of how ill Magnus was and how ill he'd always be...'

I enjoyed discovering aspects of the old tower and the history of the place which were described within the book.

There was also surprise and humour alongside the sadness and the more serious elements of the storyline.

This author seems to grasp how to write convincingly about love and emotion, the highs and lows, the intense passion and the deep pain, none more intense than that shared between Magnus and Fay here.

They are rounded characters who are flawed, scarred, confused, vulnerable and therefore so very human, so believable, and so compelling for the reader. They may be able to live without each other, but have they ever stopped loving each other?

The ending is thrilling and brilliant!

I think the cover of this one is beautiful.

A marvellous read.

Heidi says

I err towards understatement here by saying it was a good day when I discovered this author. This is my third novel of Ms. Gillard's and like the other two, it is a gem. This title gave me more angst than the preceding two, but my 'discomfort'/apprehension was counterbalanced by the tale's humanity and humor. This novel was powerful, splendid, enriching, edifying, and yes, pleasurable (when I was not experiencing the angst)...and so much more. Off to read another of hers!!

Antoinette says

An amazing, gut-wrenching, heart-wrenching, well written book. That's all I can say except don't be fooled by the brevity of this review... It's just that much of a punch to the soul.

Holly says

To forty-something divorcee Fay McGillivray, people said it would get better, and in some senses, it has. Divorcing Magnus, her army veteran husband, allowed her to move full-time into their Glasgow apartment and focus on her art. Now showing and selling her textile pieces on a regular basis, Fay couldn't be a more successful artist. But going on six years from their split and other men later, why does she still feel so incomplete? With Nina, Magnus' girlfriend, living with him at Tullibardine Tower, he seems to have moved on. That their daughter Emily, whom Fay hasn't lived with since the divorce, is getting married only complicates things further, particularly when it looks like Magnus will follow suit. How did Fay's big life-

changing decision go from best to worst and what will she do about it?

I was stoked when I read the announcement on Linda Gillard's facebook that *Untying the Knot* would be released as an ebook in September. It hadn't been long since I knew the book even existed and to know that it would be available so soon was a happy surprise. I've come to expect much from a Linda Gillard novel – thoughtful, lyrical writing, carefully constructed characters and well-crafted storytelling – as well as a more experienced, older-than-the-norm female protagonist, a heart-pounding romance and an authentic portrayal of mental illness. I also happen to love her titles, which beg to be analyzed. I'm happy to report that *Untying the Knot* is no exception on either account.

Beyond the vivid and harrowing picture painted of post traumatic stress disorder, I found the divorce premise refreshing. A relationship can't get much more complex than exs with a wealth of history and memories between them. The knot and stitching analogies add meaning to Fay and Magnus' relationship that would otherwise be missing. A passage from the unforgettable opening pages:

If I make a mistake in my work or if I change my mind, I can unpick. Undo what I've done. I can make good my errors and no one is the wiser. If they looked, even through a magnifying glass, all observers would see would be the tiny holes where my needle had travelled. I can erase even that evidence by scratching carefully at the weave of the linen with my needle, until the holes are no longer visible.

But life isn't like that.

Mistakes once made are rarely reversible. The holes they leave in the fabric of life aren't tiny and they can't be scratched away. You have to live with them as best you can. Work round them. That's why you have to come to terms with memory. You can't obliterate the past or eradicate it from the mind, even when, for our own good, memory enfolds us in a blanket of forgetfulness. There are always traces left, marks where time gripped us and left its telltale fingerprint.

What a clear and striking image. These analogies are subtle and unobtrusively made yet powerful in the way they drive home meaning. Such thought-provoking prose is a joy to read. I would spend more time savoring them if not for the way each short chapter concludes with a carefully dropped piece of enlightening information about the characters or the plot that would make it almost impossible not to read on, and faster at that. While I expected a more detailed, logistical resolution between Fay and Magnus *Untying the Knot* was still a rewarding read full of hard-won relationships. It also happens to have one of my favorite things: a flawless love letter. Sigh. I will be reading that again.

Gloria Antypowich says

Fay and Magnus Gillivray, in spite of and because of all their flaws and humanness totally captured me. Magnus Gillivray, who spent the years of his productive life working with an Explosives Ordinance Disposal team, came back from the Falklands War with PTSD.

Fay had spent their entire married life wondering if the man she loved would return home alive from his periodic deployments but she stood by her man.

This story has so much depth to it; a love that survives all; mental illness, even divorce.

There are many turns and twists in this plot that I lost myself in the complexity of this book; I also appreciated the realistic glimpse Gillard gave into the effects of PTSD. She made it very real but did not let it totally overtake the story line. For me this was a "solid" piece of work and I would recommend it to anyone who enjoys a read with well-developed characters, true love, a soul searching story line and a glimpse into the destructive world of PTSD, a mental illness that overcomes a person when they have experienced too much and cannot let it go.

For many years now I have thought about the people who fight for our freedom and come home mentally and physically wounded. We hear about PTSD--thank you Linda Gillard for giving us a peak into that tragic world. I will definitely be reading more of Gillard's books.

Penny Brookins says

Well written, engaging, romantic, and intriguing.

Well told!!! Written in a thought out rounding of characters. Very intricate in details and history, love Scottish tales of romance.

LindyLouMac says

I have been a fan of Linda Gillard since I first discovered her writing in 2007 and I have enjoyed each and every one of them. For me the most exciting thing about starting her latest novel is the not knowing exactly what you are going to be getting within the pages. So far with each new title she has changed tack somewhat in her writing style and I suspect this is why she does not conveniently fit a publishers mould.

Untying the Knot, met all my expectations, except for the cover which I somehow feel does not do justice to the story. There was for me no connection with this and the story, but I knew little about it when I started reading. Unlike many readers I try to avoid reading too much information about a novel until after I have read it, which is why I dislike spoilers in reviews. If you like to learn more about the background of a novel before you read it, Linda has written a fabulous piece about Untying the Knot which does not contain spoilers but may help you decide if this is one for you. I certainly hope it is as by Linda's own admission it has been the hardest of her novels to write and I think she has tackled the difficult subjects raised with great compassion.

The protagonists are Fay and Magnus a divorced couple that seem unable to move on with their lives, due to their 'indissoluble bond'. Magnus returned from the Falklands War with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Fay was not the strong army wife that she feels she should have been. Now five years after their divorce with regrets behind them, they are both still making dreadful decisions about their lives. Linking them together still is their daughter Emily and the fact that Fay is friendly with her ex mother in law Jessie. The emotion and humour within the story is perfectly balanced as the narrative of Fay and Magnus's love unfolds. Fay is now working artistically with textiles and Magnus is restoring Tullibardine Tower which was once their home together and features strongly. You may not like their behaviour at times, particularly one situation they get themselves into, but these are realistic characters and sadly for people with their histories, entirely credible.

Why did I enjoy this so much? Well I think besides it being another well written story from a favourite

author with a great plot and a fabulous ending, it felt real. You cannot fail to relate to at least some of the issues raised within the pages, well worth reading.

I would love to know what you think of Linda Gillard's writing, or if you have not read any of her novels I urge you to do so. My recommendation would be to read them in order of publication, as I felt that with each novel her writing just kept getting better. Can she keep up the standard well I hope so as I am already looking forward to the next one.

<http://lindyloumacbookreviews.blogspot...>

Angie says

I love this cover. It has all kinds of interpretations once you've read the book, and I've enjoyed contemplating all of them after the fact. Linda Gillard's novels have become comfort reads for me when I'm looking for quietly moving stories with a hefty amount of substance to match the touching moments. I would not categorize any of them as "cozy" reads. There's far too much pain and history in them for that. Rather they are meaningful and full of thoughtful explorations and characters whose feet are a bit more rooted to the ground than you sometimes find in similar novels of a lighter nature. Having read and loved Ms. Gillard's first self-published novel *House of Silence*, I was nothing but excited when I heard she had another coming out just a few short months later. On an only slightly related note, do you ever bemoan the fact that you've never had the chance to run hell bent for leather through a field in a wedding dress? It just never occurred to me on my actual wedding day, and now I'll never know if it's as headlong and romantic as it looks on covers such as this one. Alas.

Fay left her husband. But then he left her first. And so sometime around about the hour of his greatest need, Fay checked out. Unfortunately for the two of them, it turned out to be the hour of her greatest need as well. They neither of them were up for supporting the other through their particular trials. Not anymore at least. And after more than a decade of marriage as an army wife, Fay can barely hold herself together, let alone her husband Magnus who suffers from severe PTSD after being invalidated out of his career in bomb disposal. And so she calls it quits, saying farewell to the guilt, the bewilderment, the talking her husband off a ledge on a regular basis. And she moves into their apartment in Glasgow and starts a career as a textile artist. Their daughter Emily chooses to stay with Magnus in the crumbling tower he purchased with the lofty intention of restoring it to its former glory. And life goes on. Then several years later, Magnus attends one of Fay's exhibits and the whole messy business rears its ugly head. Emily is getting married. So the estranged couple is forced to act polite and attend the requisite functions. Despite her reservations about Emily's choice, Fay believes she's up to the task of playing mother-of-the-bride. What she may not be up to is the task of watching Magnus get married, too. But then Magnus may not be either . . .

Linda Gillard's books always make me feel. They make me feel more than I expect to and in very different ways than I think I will. In short, they're more than meets the eye in the very best kind of way, and they surprise you even when you think you have a handle on the author's style. I absolutely loved where *UNTYING THE KNOT* began. Two people in a room with such back story between them it fills the air with so much regret and uncertainty you could choke on it. Then it goes and unfolds so very slowly that you're half in love with Fay and Magnus before you even realize just how exactly and in what particular order the components of their marriage came apart at the seams. But by that time you love them, and you're not willing to condemn either party for what happened. Not until you find out the cold, hard facts. And, of course, even as you're waiting, you hope against hope they'll be able to reconcile, that they'll wake up and realize they're still in love with each other and can somehow live together again. It's a tall order, all those feelings. And Ms. Gillard admirably resists the easy path. And the cold, hard facts. Because though the ancient stones of

Tullibardine Tower are both cold and hard, what lies between Fay and her ex-husband is not. It fairly seethes with life, messy and unfinished. The road to redemption is painful at best, and I felt a bit wrung out by the final pages, almost wishing it had resolved a bit sooner. The ending felt just a bit off. Both slightly overdone *and* anticlimactic at the same time, as if it were trying to atone for making its appearance so late in the game. This may just be my own lack of stamina, because it was the only complaint I had of a novel filled with beautifully thorny relationships, true love, not a little bit of hysterical humor, and that lovely writing I've grown so fond of from Linda. The truth is I will read anything she writes, and that's all there is to it.

Ali says

I was first introduced to Linda Gillard when Linda gave some brilliant talks to groups of bookcrossers of which I was one, a few years ago. I read her novels *A Lifetime Burning* and *Emotional Geology* around this time with enormous enjoyment. I was responsible for introducing these books to my mother and her friend who loved them too, before later reading *Star Gazing* and kindle book *House of Silence*. I have to admit to having had *Untying the Knot* on my kindle for a very long time – since soon after buying it in fact, it is so easy to forget the books waiting to read on a kindle I find. Thankfully Simon's recent review of *House of Silence* reminded me that I still had two of Linda Gillard's books to read.

"Everyone makes mistakes, but I sometimes think I've made more than most. Marrying Magnus was one of them. But the biggest mistake I ever made was divorcing him"

Textile artist Fay divorced from Magnus and living alone in Glasgow, maintains a good relationship with her mother-in-law, but has difficulty with her daughter. Fay's former husband, whose experiences as a soldier in the Falklands, Belfast and the Gulf have left him suffering from PTSD, is a damaged man.

"I've had cause to think about memory and the harm it can do; the way it also heals and consoles. I spend my working life preserving other people's memories trying to capture them in a form of textile "still life", but I spent much of my marriage watching the man I loved being tortured – all but destroyed – by the demons of memory."

Living away from the city in the ancient Tullibardine Tower which he restored from a ruin, Magnus now lives with Nina. When their daughter Emily at only twenty two decides to marry a man who Fay has a very real reason to think is unsuitable, forced to contact her ex-husband, she confides her fears to Magnus. However it isn't only Emily with marriage on her mind, when Magnus surprisingly announces his own engagement, only Fay seems to realise he is almost certainly making a huge mistake. It is Fay, for years living with and understanding Magnus's demons, who knows him best of all. Powerful family secrets are at the heart of this novel, Magnus's mother has her own story to tell, which she has never revealed to her son. As I don't want to spoil the story for future readers, I am stopping there – I hope some of you will be tempted to find out more for yourselves.

Untying the knot is an enormously readable and engaging novel. I have to admit to quickly developing a soft spot for Magnus a brilliantly written character, his vulnerabilities and frailties, portrayed with honesty and understanding. The back story of Magnus's life as a soldier, demonstrating powerfully the dark realities for many soldiers and former soldiers, I can only assume was well researched by the author.

I now must make sure I don't leave it quite so long before reading *The Glass Guardian* – Linda Gillard's most recent novel.

Rosemary says

Magnus is a larger-than-life character, an ex-bomb disposal expert suffering from PTSD, undertaking the

crazy restoration of a ruined Scottish castle. He pretty much drove away his ex-wife Fay, but neither of them can quite cut the knots that bind them.

I enjoyed this, especially the description of PTSD. I know I couldn't live with someone who was unconsciously randomly violent like Magnus, so I admired Fay (and Emily and Nina) for their courage. In other respects I'd have liked more plot - it seemed to be mostly revelations of past events and coming to terms with them. A new genre: the psychological romance.

Anne says

Just finished this one, and must confess that I didn't enjoy it quite as much as Linda's other novels. I'm still not entirely sure what disengaged me - Fay has a clear strong voice, I enjoyed her as unreliable narrator, and Magnus was equally well drawn in his complexity. Emily didn't convince me as much, or the ex-mother in law, and there were times when I had stronger sympathy for Magnus' girlfriend than anyone else. The exploration of PTSD was - although I knew little about it before - excellent, and the unfolding revelations about why Fay left Magnus were well handled. But I must admit the events on the night of the party didn't entirely do it for me, although the description of Fay's emotions was wholly credible. That said, the ending had me turning my Kindle pages a great deal faster, great tension and suspense. I do love the writing - it addresses you very directly, and flows like a letter from a (very literate) friend, and the humour and emotion is well-judged. Apologies for not being as passionate about this one as I have been about the others. For those who haven't read any before, all Linda's books defy genre descriptions and are very different, both from anything else and from each other. But I guess this one just wasn't for me - sorry Linda!

Lynne says

This is the first book I read on my new Kindle - I was eager to read this one after having read Linda's earlier novels. I wasn't disappointed and quickly became engrossed in both the storyline and the characters. So much that I had to stop every now and then because I became so involved with the main characters I found it emotionally exhausting!! I love Fay and how she deals with what life has thrown at her - and felt like slapping Magnus! - as likeable as he is! I think he is now my favourite of Linda's heroes (I was previously inlove with Rory from A Lifetime Burning!) The imagery of the textiles and how the lives of those who touched Fay were somehow recorded in her work...just beautiful! Linda is a very talented author and a firm favourite of mine. I absolutely LOVED this book!

Barbara says

I loved everything about Untying the Knot. Sympathetic characters; a good, solid story; lots of interesting, entertaining plot twists; and a satisfying resolution, not to mention very well-written. This is the second book by Gillard that I've read in the past few months. I'm really glad there are still several more by her available on Kindle. Highly recommended!

Jill says

If you have read other novels by Linda Gillard you know that she is an advocate for the understanding of the kinds of mental illnesses that are not severe enough to prevent a person from living in society, but perhaps for that very reason, add additional stress onto anyone thus afflicted. In this book, which is also and I would say primarily about enduring love, the author tackles the important issue of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and she does a wonderful job.

The main protagonists in this book, Fay and Magnus, have been divorced for five years. Previously, Fay played the role of a faithful army wife, while Magnus was periodically deployed as part of an "Explosive Ordnance Disposal" or EOD team. But Magnus came back from the Falklands War with PTSD, and thereafter suffered from frequent nightmares and even violent episodes during which he thought he was back in the war zone.

Although Fay loved Magnus, she left him when she could no longer cope with the toll his illness was taking on both of them. She started a new life on her own, finding success with the therapeutic craft of textile art. Magnus engaged in his own therapeutic work, restoring the crumbling Tullibardine Tower out in the countryside of Perthshire.

After the divorce, Fay and Magnus only interacted intermittently, and eventually a young woman, Nina, moved in with Magnus in the Tower. But when Emily, the grown daughter of Magnus and Fay, announces her engagement to a young man that Fay had "known" in the Biblical sense, Fay feels she has to tell Magnus, and all the relationships come to a crisis point.

Discussion: The characters in this book aren't too different from those in most of the author's other books, in that the female main protagonist is a bit crabby, and the male is tall, dark, handsome, and quite Scottish. Furthermore, both the male and female protagonists, as in the other books, struggle with issues of creativity and sanity.

This is not to say the writing is formulaic, however. There are many differences in each of the books, the largest of which is the disability affecting one of the main characters, a disability which in turn drives the plot. In this book, that disability is PTSD. I especially appreciated how the author shows what the disease would look like after 25 or 30 years, rather than only portraying the situation immediately after a soldier returns. And though it's central, it's also *not* central, in that it's just something that affects the relationship of the main characters, rather than *An Issue* about which the author wants to browbeat us.

The characters are all endearing, flaws and all, and moreover, one can't help falling for Magnus, with his appealing mix of reputed good looks, sexual prowess, vulnerability and heroism.

This author is funny, smart, sensitive, and has a great feel for romance. Highly recommended!
