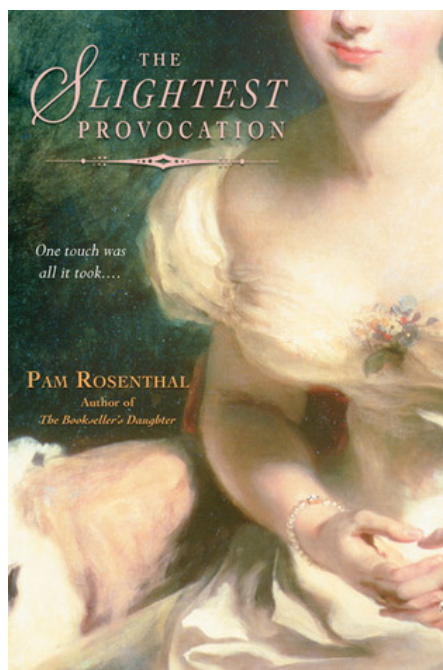




The Slightest Provocation

Pam Rosenthal

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As children of feuding Derbyshire landowners, Mary Penley and Kit Stansell eloped against their families' wishes. Too willful to be bound by their families' prejudices, they became secret friends instead—and then much more than friends. When they eloped, they thought they'd put rivalry and contention behind them. But neither ardor nor marriage could overpower their own restless natures...

Nine years later, Kit is a rising star in the military, while Mary has made her way in a raffish intellectual society of poets and reformers. A chance meeting reignites their passion. But they live for very different values: Kit wants to maintain order in the land, Mary to challenge the repressions of the day.

Their differences are put aside when Kit uncovers a political conspiracy that threatens all of England. Amid danger and disillusionment, Kit and Mary rediscover the bonds that are stronger than time, the selves who have never really parted—and the love that is their destiny...

The Slightest Provocation Details

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From Reader Review The Slightest Provocation for online ebook

M— says

Somewhat atypical, and therefore interesting, but I still didn't find it satisfying. This book considers itself an 'intelligent' romance novel, but it's placed in a somewhat uncomfortable position between Austen and erotica when it would have been better to choose one the other. The intelligence shows in the novel's atypical nature, but the prose and the characters would do well to be quite a bit more clever. The sexuality is frank and slightly edgy, but the best of sensualism takes place in the opening chapters, particularly in the descriptions of food.

The food and wine's taste, texture, and perfume melded perfectly, sliding past her tongue and down her throat. She paused to watch him bring his fork to his lips again; he'd moved closer to the table now and she could see, rather than guess, that he was looking into her eyes.

She felt herself tempted to eat more and more slowly. To flirt with downcast eyelashes from behind a napkin pressed to her lips, as though from behind a painted fan in a box at the opera. And then, almost as an afterthought, to bring another bite to her mouth, sucking sweetness from the apples and raisins, sinking her teeth in to buttery crust, licking up any unctuous morsel of cream that might have stuck to her lips.

At any rate, they'd be here all night.

This book was republished 4 years after its release with a more traditional lurid romance cover. I like the original cover better. The posture of the model, the smile, the cut of the dress all paired so very well with the title flowing in dainty pink script. You just know the model is poised to skewer whoever was stupid enough to annoy her, and will do so in the most cutting, cold, and strictly polite fashion possible. This cover impression is what lead me to make considerable effort to track the book down. This cover impression, sadly, is the best part this novel.

Quotes pulled from ISBN 0451219473, p.27.

Abby says

Mary Penley and Lord Christopher "Kit" Stansell eloped despite feuding families and class divisions. Soon after, recriminations, misunderstandings and miscommunications drive the lovers apart. Years later, Kit Lady Mary are back in their home town, and while it's clear the passion is still there, they're on opposite sides of a deep political divide, one that threatens the safety of the nation as well as any future they might hope to rebuild.

Why I Picked It Up:

Rosenthal's characters struggle with very real issues and I especially loved Mary and Kit's story. Recognizing that each has grown up and matured, how they work to get to know the new person they've become as well as deal with the wounds inflicted by each other in the past is brilliantly done. Rosenthal's use of history is top notch, too. Not an anachronism to be found and the reader learns more about other parts of British history that get glossed over in most other Regency novels.

Who Would Like It:

Lauren S, who would like the story of Mary and Kit, and I bet she'd like the steamy parts, too! I wouldn't hesitate to put this book in anyone's hand who's nervous of romance novels. This is a good first romance.

Ana T. says

This is the story of Mary Penley and Kit Stansell. The daughter of a brewer and the (illegitimate) son of a duchess whose parents hated each other, they fell in love and decided to elope together but their marriage didn't last long with both committing adultery. When the story opens they have been estranged for a number of years and meeting in Paris they decide that the best thing is to start divorce proceedings. They both travel to England and they meet again at the village where they grew up. Mary is visiting her family and Kit investigating a political conspiracy. They soon find that they can't keep their hands off each other...

My main problem with the story was Rosenthal's writing style. There were many points of view, many flashbacks and that made me feel very distant from the characters and if I can't care about them I have a hard time wanting to know about them. That's the reason why I felt that maybe I should have left it DNF. Most people seem to have loved it and felt that this was a rich story but my lack of interest in it just made it a chore to reach the end. I couldn't see why Kit and Mary were so in love, or why they couldn't stop meeting when they seemed to have very different ways of thinking. Maybe I should tackle it some other time when I can concentrate more... or maybe I should go read something else...

Grade: 2/5

Susan (the other Susan) says

Loved it! A husband and wife whose youthful romance fizzled out, reunite as mature adults and find that passion can improve with age. SPOILER-Y QUESTION: Is Pam Rosenthal the first author of a sexy historical romance to take on the Great Taboo that is normal among men entering middle age but virtually unheard-of in romance novels? Or have I missed one? (There is a frustrated love scene in which he, um, has difficulty performing, believe it or not, like an actual human male. Not to worry; as in real life, the episode causes him some embarrassment but they get past it and have plenty of erotic sex scenes.) Kudos for the courage to introduce a dose of reality and demonstrate that a couple's sexual chemistry doesn't rely on perfection.

Sharon says

Just couldn't get interested in this book. Never finished reading it.

Molly says

This is certainly romance for readers who usually prefer literary fiction. Romance addicts however will I think find that all of Rosenthal's contributions, this not least, both fulfill and transcend their genre. With her you get to have your cake, to eat it, and to burn off all the calories with a course of moderately intense intellectual and aesthetic exercise.

Although all that readers usually need from this form is amply supplied - wrenching conflicts and swoony fusions, a hero and heroine made for each other but held apart by credible psychological, social and circumstantial obstacles, peril, longing, erotic discovery, the ecstatic HEA -- Rosenthal's work also exhibits some features typical of literary novels but infrequently found in genre romance. Her (approximately) "Regency" historical romances are unusual in the genre for their (relatively) unvarnished depiction of the period and its inequalities, violence and physical hardships. Themes are developed in a symbolic dimension, though not so substantially as to distract from the dominant obligations to storytelling. Her secondary but richly drawn labouring class characters affectingly limn the reality of ordinary lives that cannot be fully presented without fatally overshadowing the core romance.

In an interview, Rosenthal once said:

The men's coats, the tight pants, the boots. Georgian architecture. Adam rooms. Wedgewood. I think of all that poise and balance as coiled-up energy waiting to burst forth as the industrial revolution and the nineteenth century British Empire....There are ways in which I don't like the Regency at all, for its snobbery and political reaction. Which is also a good reason to write about a period -- a love-hate relationship can be an extremely productive and interesting one.

The Slightest Provocation involves the lovers in the Pentrich uprising, an early 19th century rural revolt, allowing Rosenthal to layer atop the standard generic use of the era as fantasy scenery a critique of its real social relations from an openly progressive point of view. "A wonderful, challenging, envelope-pushing, smart and astonishing book", according to one of the leading Romance Review weblogs, the novel discovered the potential for serious social critique in what is often seen as the most escapist of popular fiction forms, the wish-fulfilling love story, developing an extended analogy between the political dilemma of liberty vs. security as it was felt in the period (echoed in ours) and the delicate tensions and interdependence of freedom and responsibility, self-will and restraint, in the erotic and emotional experience of the lovers. A writer of BDSM erotica as well (under the pseudonym Molly Weatherfield), Rosenthal is an adept at plumbing the wells of political and psychological import in the sensual battles she depicts with celebrated skill. It's common to call books "sexy and smart" but in this case, the reader will really find it both, almost a treatise on the seductive arts delivered by luxurious illustration.

Rane says

Mary Penley and Kit Stansell were the children of ever-feuding families; both grew up not as enemies but as friends, lovers and then man and wife. After a world-whirl elopement, Kit and Mary enjoyed life with each other, but just as quickly the harsh realities of the world torn their marriage apart. Nine years later, Kit is well-respected military man and Mary has become well known in the intellectual society. When fate (and a hand) push the wayward couple together again in order to stop a conspiracy, both not only discover the truth, but rediscover each other.

The Slightest Provocation is a multi-layered book with many POVs running along side the major part of the story. Which sometimes made it confusing but also shows a hidden depth of each character involved. Pam Rosenthal's style of writing is poetic at times with a ho-hum pace, her thought process of writing can be lost within the character's dialogue and monologue. With its nonlinear memories or flashbacks, present

tense, past tense and snippets within the dialogue itself. It was a bother for me as I kept losing track of whom was saying what and in what time (ex: Mary remembering her childhood, then going back to present tense with snippets of what she said as a child weaved in) Rosenthal created it this way to give the reader fragments of both Mary and Kit's past together.

Mary and Kit's dialogue were usually about the past, family and each other, other characters thoughts are also showed as they see events unfolding around them. This made it a sort of parallel to Mary and Kit's past as they help a couple in love and also bring back a runaway couple from making a mistake of a rushed into marriage.

From the start of the book your shown that Mary and Kit were very flawed, when they were first married they were a couple playing house, but when reality came knocking it ruined their relationship.

Kit's foolish flaw was trying to be one of the men of the ton (as many men of the time were), so bowing down to peer pressure, cheated on Mary and even got a mistress. Mary in a fit of rage and hurt, had sex with Kit's best friend and later was caught by him and then legally separated. In the nine years they were apart neither was faithful to each other and took lovers and had affairs. When they both have sex with each other after not seeing each other in nine years it had me rolling my eyes thinking this was really unbelievable! What I did find believable was the argument after they hopped into shack with each other.

This event was meant to fool the reader into thinking there would be no way in hell Mary and Kit would ever get back together, but through the book your shown both still hold a deep hope they would someday find a way back to each other. Through their memories and interactions with each other, both grew up from the starry eyed teenagers to adults who could handle the responsible that comes with marriage. Not without saying both didn't act much like adults at times, with their bickering as they threw insults after insults into each other faces. Which was the distrust and past pains creeping up on them time and again.

Classified as erotic romance, what did surprise me, that although highly sensual, it was pretty tame compare to other books that only say "romance".

The sex scenes between Kit and Mary was hot but at times didn't fit whom they were, or coming across as illusion to keep the truth at bay. They needed to really talk, but the only common ground they found was in bed. They do face their demons, but it wasn't as soon as I have liked. The sex scenes do touch base with a few major issues in marriage, one was age and not being as young as one use to and even impotence. I found this truthful without being distasteful.

There were two drivers throughout the book, romance and suspense. Neither really let one lead and the other follow. Suspense would be in the driver seat more times then not, with romance taking a back seat. I found this a downer and wanted more of Mary and Kit trying to repair their marriage. The conspiracy that shadowed the book was almost a refection of times now, with the state of people after war, recession and the fear of the unknown. A part of history and how the higher ups played the working class like puppets in order to have their way and most of all have control. (The After word is very insightful about this part of history)

Overall: this was a very hard book for me to review falling in the "in-between". I found my likes and dislikes even out . It was a tug of war throughout, but ending up a very satisfying read nonetheless.

It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but you'll walk away after reading this with a lot of food for thought.

Wollstonecraftthomegirl says

I have that tingly great book feeling. As I write this I can't help but smile and sigh, I'm positively preening with post-read satisfaction. Pam Rosenthal really is something. This should be read by everyone who has any

affection for historical romance.

So, let's start with hero and heroine. And you can't really talk about their characters without explaining their love story because it's affected their development. They're the children of neighbouring landlords. They came of age together. They explored their sexuality together and in the throes of heady, optimistic, adolescent love they elope to Gretna. And for a year or so, it's great. Fantastic sex and lives without any real direction, save for the satisfaction of one another. But Rosenthal is nothing if not an adult romance writer and far from living HEA they end up hurting one another as they try and work out the muddle of being young and in love. They both cheat on the other and so begins a ten year separation in which their lives are largely shaped, particularly in the case of Kit by trying to hurt the other, best the other, or conceive of ways of getting one another back.

Kit turns into a government man, a soldier in the Napoleonic Wars, then a spy of sorts and then a Home Office official in the repressive post-War government. He thinks himself on the side of right. Mary has gone the other way, and thrown her lot in with some radical thinkers.

They come back together and continue to combust in bed but reconciling their competing belief systems and forgiving one another for their youthful transgressions is a difficult and fascinating journey. PR weaves in the historical background beautifully (there's an afterword which explains the fact behind the fiction she's created) and with her masterful grasp of language and scene setting she brings these two back together. It's just brilliant to read.

And, as ever, there's a whole cast of secondary characters who are all engaging and interesting in their own ways and who get their own romances. They also serve to shed light on the main romance which is important in this genre.

This is a proper, grown up, expertly written novel and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Jackie says

Rosenthal is one of my new favorite historical romance authors. She seems to get low marks, star-wise, here on Goodreads for being too difficult -- too many flashbacks, point of view switches, too much historical background, etc. But this is what draws me to her books, as well as her depiction of flawed but deeply human characters. THE SLIGHTEST PROVOCATION is the portrait of an estranged couple, and the reasons for their estrangement, as well as the ties that still bind them together, are depicted with nuance and believability. A book for intellectually-inclined romance readers...

Jamie says

One of the surprising, great books that I hoped to find. It's almost Regency-era Hepburn and Tracy, where love is shown by breaking things and storming, and the more hotheaded the tempers the truer and deeper the love. Kudos to Rosenthal for writing so quickly to the heart of the matter, where it's not overblown drama, or spoiled, impetuous children, but two reasonable adults who know very well that the fact they're antagonists means they're made for each other. It's a difficult dynamic to pull off, and I think it's more difficult in books than in movies.

More evidence too that if you romance me, do it with agrarian politics. I'm liking these stories where the marriage is already in place and it's just a matter of growing older and wiser. The reveal in the epilogue is sweet, simple, perfect.

Cristina says

Much about nothing... Extremely disappointing. Very boring plot and dialogues.

Sarah Beth says

I found a signed copy of this at Goodwill, and since I'm sucker for historical fiction, and particularly historically based romance stories, I snatched it right up. This story is about an estranged husband and wife who reunite after years apart and reconcile their differences. While it could have been a great story, I was really disappointed in this book.

The narrative style of this book was vague and rather odd. There were ongoing indeterminate pronouns being used and the POV would randomly switch to a very minor character who was then never mentioned again. For example, the preface to this book is told from Kit's mother's point of view, and she never really appears again following that scene.

I also felt like the sex scenes were too graphic - Rosenthal even goes so far as to describe the smell of well-used sheets and the feel of you-know-what hair pressed against Mary's lips. Way too much for me. Really disgusting, honestly. I almost stopped reading this book several times, and as I write this review, I'm still not sure why I didn't just go ahead and do so.

Despite the lovely cover image and the signed copy I have, I can't say much else positive about this book.

Becky says

I didnt like this book as well as "The Edge of Impropriety" but it was good. I would have given it a 3.5 given the choice of half stars..

I just didnt connect with the characters as well as I did in other book.

Sex scene were not as good. I like the character of Peggy(?) the maid the 2 stupid cousins just grated.

The only chapters I had trouble with in each book was the into. Sometimes I just dont connect to how its written.

I read alot of books (runs the spectrum from Romance to Mystery to SciFi) and this one was just OK. I do want to read Rosenthal's new book. I always give authors a couple of chances if I like the first book and dont like the next. Since I love "The Edge of Impropriety" , I will read the next one.

Kate says

Due to a hand injury, I cannot write all of the marvelous things I could say about this book. It seriously had me on the edge of my seat for the entire journey! The hero and heroine are haunted by their younger selves (who among us is not?) and sizzle with a sexual energy that leaps out at you from the pages.

I will honestly say I cannot wait to read another Rosenthal.. and may be making a trip to the bookstore to shorten that wait significantly.

Franzeska says

I love stories about women disguised as men.

What I want from them are to see all of the fun the woman gets up to in her disguise and how it frees her from her usual role. Instead, I got a romance where the heroine falls in love and immediately loses interest in her fuckbuddy. (Oh please! The choice to have a fuckbuddy was half of what made her interesting!)

I also want to see the male love interest grappling with his identity. Instead, he finds out instantly. This author, like most who attempt and botch the trope, is terrified of the specter of male bisexuality.

As soon as it turned into alpha male/shrinking violet and completely ruined the central trope, I put the book down and have never gone back.
