

Interview with Katherine Jackson from The Handfasting

Hi, Katherine, it's nice to have you with us, today. Tell us a little about yourself. That accent of yours tells me that you are from the South.

It's good to be here. You're correct. I have spent most of my life in the South. I grew up in Hamilton, Virginia. It's a small town near Richmond, and the Jacksons have lived there for generations. Actually, I still call Hamilton home and my family – my parents, brother, sister, aunt, and several cousins - still live there. I suppose that I'm related to half of the town! That's what it's like in small Southern towns, and even though it's nineteen seventy-eight, not a lot has changed.

But you live in New York City?

That's right. I attended the University of Virginia and, then went to medical school at Emory University, in Atlanta. After residency, I took a position as an ER doctor at a hospital in New York. I share an apartment with Becky and Sarah, my two best friends from college.

A pretty girl like you – you surely must have a boyfriend.

I do. His name is Steven, Dr. Steven Richardson. He has a PhD in art history from Oxford, and he is a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Did you meet in New York?

No, we met a little over ten years ago. It was the summer after I completed high school. I spent that summer traveling around in Europe, mostly in England and Scotland. Steven was there, doing the same thing. We traveled together quite a bit, hiking from town to town, visiting castles, churches, ruins. During that time, we fell in love. One night – we were in Scotland at the time – we went to the ruins of an old abbey church and were handfasted.

Handfasted? What is that?

Handfasting is an old Celtic engagement ceremony. We agreed to marry. The only problem was that Steven was spending the next year in Italy, studying art. I had four years of college ahead of me, then medical school. It was just impossible.

What did you do?

We were in the church. Off to one side, a rose bush was growing beside the ruins of the altar. Stephen reached out and caressed one of the yellow flowers. Then he turned to me. – I remember this so clearly - "I'll find you," he told me. "In ten years, when we have finished school, when we are able to marry, I'll find you. Until then, whenever you see a yellow rose, remember me. Remember I love you."

I thought about his promise almost every day for the next decade. Last August, on my birthday, Becky and Sarah had taken me out to celebrate. When we arrived at home, there was a vase of yellow roses. I knew they were from Steven.

So you got back together.

I met him for dinner a couple of days later. I was so nervous! I mean, I had not seen him for ten years, I wasn't even certain that I would recognize him. Once we began to talk, though, it was as we had been apart for only a couple of days rather than for ten years. We gave ourselves six months – until next week, Valentine's Day - to decide if we still want to marry. That makes sense, doesn't it? Not rushing into it?

That's so sweet! And yes, it does make sense to me. What do the folks at home think?

My mother was concerned at first, but everyone loves Steven, now. I haven't really told people in Hamilton exactly how we met. I told you that things don't change in Hamilton. They treat women as if it were *eighteen* seventy-eight. Some people would call me a tramp if they knew I had traveled around Scotland with Steven. We didn't sleep together, or anything, but I can hear old Mrs. Howard, now. *Mark me! Katherine Jackson will come to no good. Running around England with that man. I'll wager she never spent a single night alone.* In Hamilton once a rumor starts, well, you're marked for life.

They can't be that bad.

Every bit that bad. Once, last fall, Steven and I were at the theater and some television program was filming a segment about the Broadway theater. People in Hamilton saw us, and Steven had his arm around me. Even my mother called to ask what we were doing!

Are you going to marry Steven? Or is there another guy in your life?

Of course I'm going to marry him! There's no other guy... Well, there is one. I'm not interested in him at all, but he tells everyone in Hamilton that he's going to marry me. He has said that for years. His name is Bill Wilson. He is really a jerk. Last week, Steven was in Richmond for a meeting. Bill cornered him at a reception. My dad told me that Bill was drunk and that he started yelling at Steven, telling him that I was his girl and that Steven should keep his hands off of me.

Gosh!

It really sort of frightened me when I heard about it. He can be violent, you know. Once, when we were in high school, he tried to assault me.

You're joking.

Not at all. I broke two of his ribs as I fought with him.

He called me the other day and asked if he could come to New York to visit. He wants to talk, he said. I don't know what he's thinking. I don't know why he would even think that I'm interested in him. I'm meeting him this afternoon after work. I'm afraid of what he might do when I tell him to leave me alone, but, anyway, I suppose that I can put up with him for a couple of hours.

Katherine, I have enjoyed talking with you, today. I hope you and Steven are very happy together.

Thank you so much. I am sure that we will be.