

Making a connection

Laura Solomon's latest is a good summer read, though it doesn't always ring true, says Helen Watson White.

THIS WAS a nice one or two-day holiday read, but will I remember *Hilary and David*?

I think I will, because Hilary is a well-realised young solo mother in Nelson with two children from different fathers, making a go of the complicated life which that implies and would imply, even if one son did not have ADHD and the other Down syndrome.

What develops between Hilary and David via Facebook and email is described as an "unlikely friendship", but seems quite a natural connection because of the ready flow of words.

What didn't ring true, however, was the fact that 81-year-old David, a widower living alone in London, is so encouraged by the friendship that he overcomes his agoraphobia, adding not just one but two or three much younger women in his vicinity to his circle of active friends. One paints him nude (several times, in different poses), another takes him riding (him on a pony, herself on a bounding stallion), another who falls in his lap (albeit asexually) is his son's attractive ex-girlfriend.

It sounds good and it is quite funny, but there are further anomalies. On page two of the narrative, novelist David declares he never talks about work in progress, yet we learn all about the novel he is two-thirds of the way through writing, and the next one, and finally another that emerges complete like Venus from the sea. That's plausible perhaps: he's inconsistent, and this is

evidence that the e-friendship warms up his creative machine.

The publishing theme, however, is inconsistent too. David's current novel is supposed to be his sixth, but he says he never gets reviewed and has to shop his "tomes" around small publishing houses, as the big ones won't touch him. Yet throughout he's talking about "my publisher" as if he has a relationship with a particular one. Moreover, Solomon (who herself has a number of books to her name, some of them prizewinners like this one) has the publisher say of David's manuscript: "I would like it done by November, so I can have it on the shelves by Christmas", and "you could have been a lot more successful by now if you had of been [sic] willing to promote yourself". In the second example she may be trying to write satire, but in the first, she shows either she or her characters don't live in the real world.

Does it matter? I repeat, the pages turn easily in this quick holiday read, which is the more memorable for having a bit of sand down the spine.

HILARY AND
DAVID
By Laura Solomon



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