



Castles on the Sand

E.M. Tippetts

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"A fast-paced blend of high-stakes drama and average teenage concerns (sex, appearance, friends), capped with a welcome message of hope." ~Kirkus Reviews

If there's one thing Madison Lukas understands, it's pain. The pain she feels when her mother ignores her completely. The pain her best friend endures as her parents starve her as punishment. The pain of a dangerous boy whose mother has to be carried away by law enforcement on a regular basis.

She gets it. She feels the pain of others as if it were her own.

But when a mysterious man claiming to be her long lost brother appears with promises of relieving her suffering, trusting him could reveal more truths than Madison is ready for. Because the truth can hurt, too.

Castles on the Sand Details

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From Reader Review Castles on the Sand for online ebook

Belldandy says

I liked so much of this book, the way the writing flows, the 'must find out what happens next!' feeling, the portrayal of Madison as a teen trying to deal with all of the normal problems of being a teenager with a few more thrown in for good measure and her handling it, not always perfectly but in an honest kind of way. There are other things I didn't like, but at this moment I'm leaning more towards the like side.

Madison lives in the sleepy seaside town of Pelican Bluff, has a complicated best friend, a mother so engaged in her own world Madison has to be the responsible one, boys who maybe like her, and a long lost brother she didn't know she had has found her. Madison learns to try and see beyond the surface of people and ideas she's made assumptions about, including herself.

There is some weirdness in the book, mainly Mormonism, where it pops up, people are involved or talk about it, but it doesn't really add enough to the plot to be warranted the attention it is given. Also, pretty much all the parents and most of the adults over 25 are uncaring and irresponsible. Even my favorite adult character by the end of the book had a moment where I wanted to scream at him for his cold attitude.

I think the author really nailed the confusion of being a teenager, trying to figure out what choices to make in a world that is not as clear cut as we would like it to be. The characterization is what really made the book special for me.

*I received a free copy of this book though a Goodreads giveaway, I have not received any financial compensation for this review.

MissyGirl says

Very well-paced story about a small town with some very interesting characters! Not everything is as it seems here and that's what I loved about it. The more you read, the more is revealed about each person, with plenty of surprises and life lessons along the way. Not a huge amount of romance and Madison can be quite frustrating at times, but once I put myself in her shoes it all made more sense. :) I am absolutely looking forward to reading the next book!

Copy provided by the author in exchange for an honest review.

Jaclyn says

This book was a different style than my usual romantic read. As a reader, you enjoy getting to see the development of characters; even destruction in some cases. Such is the case of Madison Lukas, who has a distracted mother, long-lost brother, frantic best friend, and relatively no love life. Then when one tiny thing changes, it seems everything does. Pelican Bluffs then turns into a town of secrets! Everyone has something they're hiding, and somehow there is a little piece of those secrets standing in Madison's way!

I have to admit, the book blurb really doesn't do this book any justice. It doesn't give you any clue that Madison is a heroine worthy of epic proportions. She's generous and loyal, unfailingly devoted to those that she cares about. She is the kind of person we want to be, and yet she is plagued by all the self-doubts any young person faces. I loved her!

There is a love story involved here, so don't fear that her heart isn't one of the biggest aspects of the plot. There were so many times that I wanted to scream at her, "No, don't pick him!" I would catch myself wanting to throw the book down because she was gonna do something I knew she would regret. I wanted to say, "Be the smart girl, for once!" There is always that guy that can make you do something, and you hope it won't hurt as bad as you know it will. Ah, such is life though.

So, please, pick up this book! I know you will love it if you give it a chance, and be sure to catch it's continuation Love in Darkness when it comes out!

Victoria says

This book is a hard one for me to rate. I liked the story and I read it in just two days, but there were a lot of things that I struggled with and didn't like so it was kind of a back and forth for me.

I liked the Characters, they were interesting and complex. They all had a kind of mystery about them. They all had a lot of layers and things going on with them which made me want to keep reading in order to figure them out. I really liked that they didn't just talk incessantly and give out all their secrets at one time. I feel like I was constantly discovering new things about them throughout the story. The story is told from Madison's POV. She is struggling to find herself, her Mother is distant and unlikeable, she is pretty much on her own, she is overly nice to people and gets taken advantage of a lot. The story follows her as she discovers a part of her family she didn't know existed, navigates through high school drama, and finding first love, a sort of coming of age story. I enjoyed being in her head and she seemed to be very realistically written. I didn't really get the first half of the book with Jean-Pierre. He was weird and they never talked and I didn't understand why she kept a relationship with him, she seemed too smart to just play along and not seem to get what he was doing to her. I really liked Alex, he was very intriguing and mysterious and I liked trying to figure out who he was and what caused his behavior. I really liked the setting. I could really picture the small town near the beach where everyone grew up together and knew each other's Business. I sort of pictured a Dawson's Creek kind of backdrop, with the water and the beach and all the teenagers sneaking out and climbing in and out of the windows to talk to each other while their parents were oblivious.

I struggled with John, the long lost brother, who finds her after all these years. His character seemed out of place and disconnected from the rest of the story. I thought he didn't talk like someone who was estranged from his Mother and Sister. I found him to be almost creepy, the way he followed her and was always saying I love you and you're beautiful and trying to always tell her what to do. I just didn't really get the purpose in his character. I thought it was unrealistic how her Mother wouldn't even talk to her about it and then when the brothers finally all came around, how they just accepted the fact that their Mother basically abandoned them and was mean to her daughter and they acted as though nothing had ever happened. I also struggled with all the Mormon references and what purpose it all served. It was hard to decide if it was a book that was building up Mormonism or tearing it down. The underlying theme seemed to be that God was working in their lives and bringing about change and that He provided a peace and was working all these things together for good, but most of the time the characters were bashing Mormonism, talking about how crazy it all sounded, and portraying all the Mormon characters as weird and cultish. It was hinted throughout that it was a cultish religion and that it was bad to be associated with anyone and anything to do with it. The whole Mormon part of the story seemed to constantly contradict itself. I understand it was probably trying to show

the stereotypes around it and what the opinions on it are versus the reality of the people who follow it, but it came across as confusing and kind of unnecessary to the plot. John's Mother left and wanted nothing to do with it, but in the end it never explored why. Alex was investigating and trying to decide if he liked it or believed it, but it never explored what he thought and most of the time he just cracked jokes about the people who were witnessing to him. Madison was extremely skeptical of it all and would say she didn't understand what they were talking about or what certain references meant and it would never get explained to her or to the reader. The brother was estranged from the Mother in part due to his beliefs, but even he didn't really explore that side of it at all or explained anything much to Madison. I am a Christian, not Mormon, and I didn't understand a lot of what they would talk about either. The characters kept referring to it just as a religion and would discuss their beliefs in a very textbook, factual way but it was devoid of feeling and they all seemed detached as though even the so called devout believers in the story didn't have much conviction about their own beliefs.

I thought it was strange that the whole town had grown up with Alex and he had never spoken, but within a couple of chapters he is talking not just to Madison, but pretty much everyone. I thought that came a little too quickly and easily. Overall I liked the pacing and the story moved along. I will probably read the next one because I want to read what happens to Alex and Madison and it is in Alex's POV which I think will be interesting. This book was good and it was worth the .99 I paid for it on Amazon, but I think it could have been better, just my opinion.

E.M. Tippetts says

This book is now out and can be found on:

Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/Castles-on-the-...>

Barnes & Noble: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/castl...>

After January 10, 2013, it will be available at the following links and in iBookstore as an ebook:

Kobo: <http://www.kobobooks.com/ebook/Castle...>

Smashwords: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view...>

If you are a book blogger/reviewer, I'm always happy to give out free review copies. My email is: emilymtippetts@gmail.com

Sarah Oxford says

This book was kindly provided to me in exchange for an honest and unbiased review

I liked this book more than I expected. I don't know why I wasn't expecting much, I think I may just be grumpy because I have a cold. Anyway, I liked it. It didn't blow me away but it was a pleasant surprise in that the characters and plot were not your average copycat NA and it covered some tough topics without being overdramatic.

Madison was such a sweetheart. I mean she was completely lovely, she was nice to everyone and always helped other people but didn't see what a great person she was. She didn't do it for praise and in fact took a lot of kick back from it. She was taken advantage of by everyone but she was very strong actually. It wasn't that she didn't know how she was being treated, but that she could see through it. You could tell why everyone loved her, she was so selfless and not at all self righteous.

Reading Madison's story was lovely, particularly getting close to her brother and starting to trust why other people told her how great she was. I found the romance realistically awkward too and so sweet at the end, so very sweet. The plot played out a nice steady pace and I really didn't want to put it down. It wasn't all obvious either.

I was a little concerned when I gathered there'd be a religious element to the book. Ok so I was christened and educated Church of England, so the whole thing isn't unfamiliar, it's just not part of my belief systems as an adult so I get wary. I'm pleased to report that although it was there I actually found it a nice background to the family dynamic and not at all preachy. There was a definite theme actually of how religion can be a good force and a bad force within a family. I liked how it was handled and how the themes of abuse and mental health were handled sensitively but seriously.

To sum up, this was a pleasantly surprising maturely written book. I warmed to the characters and care for them to the point where I'm anxious to know things will go well for them. So job well done. I'm only going for 4 stars because I just wasn't blown away. The authors books would automatically go on the 'to be read' shelf but I wouldn't drop what I'm doing to read it straight away.

Sarah says

(Source: I received a digital copy of this book for free from the author on a read-to-review basis. Thanks so much to the lovely Emily Mah Tippetts!)

16-year-old Madison lives with her mom in a small town called Pelican Bluffs. Everybody knows everybody in Pelican Bluffs – it's that kind of place, so you can guess how shocked Madison is when a Mormon man called John turns up at her door claiming to be her brother. What's worse is that she knows it's true just by looking at him; he even looks like her mother.

Amazingly enough there are other more pressing matters going on in Madison's life though. Her best friend seems to suddenly have it in for her, and three different boys all seem to want something from her.

I absolutely loved this book. I nearly died when the bulb in my bedside lamp went out and I couldn't carry on reading!

Madison is an average 16-year-old, and she'd never claim otherwise, it's her friend Kailie who's the pretty one. The appearance of a brother that she never knew about takes a lot of time to get used to, and Madison does take her time coming to terms with this, and doesn't commit herself to feelings that she doesn't have. Madison's main concerns surround her best friend and the people she goes to school with. So many times people ask her why she is friends with Kailie, as Kailie seems to be purposely trying to hurt Madison. Kailie's actions lead to Madison getting physically attacked, but Madison knows Kailie well enough to know that Kailie does these things because she is having a meltdown, and not because she really wants to hurt Madison. Regardless of her reasons though, Madison proves time and time again that she is an amazing friend to Kailie, a better friend than she really deserves.

Madison has problems at home too though. Her Mom barely speaks to her, and the arrival of her brother

John just causes more tension at home. Madison's Mom spends all of her time making pottery so Madison doesn't see a lot of her, but now instead of being cold when Madison sees her she is angry, but again Madison has the maturity to realise that her mother isn't just mad at her; she's hurting inside too.

As if Madison hasn't got enough going on, all of a sudden boys are interested in her. First there's Jean Pierre, Chess wiz and super popular, who wants to sleep with her, but isn't interested in having a girlfriend, or even acknowledging that she exists in public. Then there's Carson, a Mormon boy that her mother really doesn't approve of. He's good looking and a really nice guy, but there's just no spark, no matter how much Madison wants her to be. The third boy is Alex. He's been voluntarily mute for years, and spends most of his time flicking his lighter on and off and looking threatening. Everyone refers to him as a 'psycho', and Madison walks the other way when she sees him at night. But there's more to Alex than people realise, and for some reason Madison feels the need to help him with his problems.

I love how normal Madison is, and at the same time how mature she is to see through peoples facades and get to the real issues. I loved the storyline in this book and how well it flowed, and whilst putting it down was difficult, getting back into it was a joy. There were several events that I didn't see coming, and I loved the story of how things worked out for Madison and her friends and family in the end.

Overall; I loved this book and will definitely be reading the author's other works! If you like young adult fiction, and like a bit of light romance, you'll love this book.

9 out of 10.

Rachmi says

Madison is a sixteen year old girl who is popular by association. Her best friend is one of the richest people in Pelican Bluffs. She never thought that she is beautiful hence doesn't believe when someone say it and never realize guys like her. She is kind, nice and doesn't like hurting people's feelings. Sounds familiar? It's because she is like any other teenage girl characters in YA books. But wait....she acts differently from most of them. She is abused and bullied by her mom, her best friend, her school friends and her sort of boyfriend. Yet somehow she didn't realize it and didn't do anything about it. From the beginning of the story I want to yell her to stay away from Kalie, her best friend and Jean-Pierre, her sort of boyfriend. And at some point I want to slap her and make her to do something.

But I do feel sorry for her. Her mom abuses her in a different way. She (rarely) didn't hurt her physically, she also didn't call her names. But she ignores her in a worst kind of attitude. She shut her down in the name of art, work and freedom. Kailie as her best friend kind of use her. She keeps her for her benefit. Become her designated driver, mad at her to unreasonable reason, good at mind games and she often falls for it. And Jean-Pierre never acknowledge her at their school and told her that he don't want to have a girlfriend. But keeps come to her room to make out.

When I decided reading this book, I thought it will be like any other dysfunctional family stories I've read. Yet, EM Tippetts surprised me both in bad and good feelings. Then I realize, even with the bad feelings I feel, it's a good thing because it means she know how to write her story well enough for me to feel it.

This story tells me that abusive and bullying can come from many types, different from I used to read. Madison annoyed me to not stand up for herself but I also pity her. I'm angry at her for allow herself to be

bullied by Kalie and Jean-Pierre but I also feel sad for what happen to her. She is different and confusing me yet she is brave in her own way.

As my third book from EM Tippetts , I can tell that she has patterns telling her story but it doesn't mean her stories are boring. It makes her books different from other authors and I can see her originality. Similar to Someone Else's Fairytale this book is slow-paced but in a good way. She gives her characters time to know each other and me, as a reader, know them too, understand and also feel them. Therefore, there isn't insta-love for the main characters. Her characters need time to build a relationship and falling in love slowly, just like what I love because to me it seems more realistic. Another pattern I found is in some part, I kind of hard to follow Madison's thought sometimes. This also happens with Chloe Vanderholt from Someone Else's Fairytale series. I need more attention to the characters because she creates her stories in many layers. This book is not only about dysfunctional family but also about abusive, bullying, friendship, trust, love and even religion.

Joanna says

****I recieved a copy of this book from the author for an honest review****

Overall I thought that this book was good. It had been on my TBR for awhile so I was excited when I got it to read & review. It was different from what I had expected after reading the synopsis. I thought that the author did a wonderful job writing about abuse, neglect, mental issues, suicide and a variety of other tough subjects.

Madison is the main character of the book. She is a sweet, 16 year old girl with a big heart. While I did like her, there were times that I just wanted to shake her awake because she was being too nice. Especially with her best friend. Whenever I read about their interactions, all I could think of was the old saying "with friends like that, who needs enemies". Still, where most people would have given up on their friend, Madison always stuck by her.

Alex is the quiet, weird loser that hangs out with the wrong crowd. He's super hot, but also super creepy. He never talked to anyone. As we learn that's his way of coping with a very difficult family life. No one can hurt him if they can't get in. I really liked Alex a lot too. He was a well-developed character with a heart of gold, just like Madison.

I loved the ending and felt that it was well-deserved by both Madison & Alex.

Zandalee says

I would like to start off by saying that the author does a wonderful job with descriptives and doesn't bore by overusing them. E.M. Tippetts manages to transport the reader into the scene fabulously.

The story went at a slow pace which allowed me to really immerse myself in this world and get to know each and every character really well. All of her characters had depth to them which I thought was absolutely

fantastic.

Madison is a sixteen year old girl who is quite naive and sadly, a bit of a pushover. She lets people walk all over her and that was frustrating to read. She is such a sweet girl and she can't seem to grasp the reality that she is an all-around amazing person who deserves better. Her best friend Kailie is one of the main problems that I hoped she would kick to the curb. I kind of really hated her. She uses and abuses Madison. I sort of felt bad for Kailie when I saw how she was treated by her parents. Even though it's not an excuse, I understand why she then treated Madison badly.

I was glad to see that Madison had support. From her brother to random schoolmates, others loved and cared enough to stick up for her and basically fight her battles for her.

Madison catches three different boys' eyes. It was easy for me to choose my favorite right from the get-go. I liked that there wasn't really insta-love with any of them. In fact there was barely any like. She struggles with her feeling with one of the boys. I loved this section because it felt really believable for me. The one that she ends up with was of course the one I wanted for her. There's an interesting dynamic between the two characters. I enjoyed seeing their relationship develop. Their relationship was written the way I wish more couples were written in YA/NA novels.

Mormonism and religion in general is a huge part of this book. Maybe it's just because I'm open-minded or what not but it didn't really bother me. I didn't feel overwhelmed by the information. If anything, I enjoyed the knowledge.

This next bit is a quote that I found really cute and made me smile because Maddison finally realizes that she is amazing and beautiful. I'm calling it a spoiler just in case readers want to be surprised by the guy she chooses in the end.

(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

I've had this book on my TBR list for a while and am so happy I finally had the chance to read it. I am now officially a fan of E.M. Tippetts. Her writing is beautifully done and she sets herself apart from other authors with her style. I look forward to reading her work in the future.

*An eCopy of this book was provided by the author for an honest review

Derna says

***I received an ARC copy of this book in exchange for an honest review ***

Castles on the Sands is Madison Lukas's story. I liked Madison she was genuinely a nice person, and saw the good in everyone, but at the same time I found her to be a little naïve, a bit of a pushover, and she had low self esteem which was understandable when you see the relationships or lack of one she has with her mother. Her mother was just mean, and I did feel sorry for her.

The storyline was certainly not predictable; It deals with some serious problems such as abuse, neglect, bullying, and mental health. Emily Mah Tippetts covers all theses in a sensitive way. There is also a religious aspect of the story, and I was concerned that it was going to be overpowering, but I have to say it wasn't it

was played out objectively and wasn't too preachy. By the end of the book, I had a greater knowledge of Mormonism.

This book has some interesting secondary characters. I had big issues with Madison best friend Kailie, and I really disliked her. She was awful to her so many times, and I couldn't understand why Madison continued to be her friend. I understand that she had a horrible home life, but that didn't excuse her actions.

Jean Pierre, Carson and Alex all three very different characters whom all liked Madison in very different ways. It was interesting to see the dynamics of their friendship play out. I knew which one I liked, and I was pleased that she picked him. I loved Siraj, too funny; he made me laugh so many times loved his dry sense of humor.

Overall I would say this was an interesting read based on the synopsis I really didn't know what to expect when I first started reading it. I did think it was a little slow to start with, and it took a while for me to get into, but that being said I did like it. It made me, smile, laugh, the romance side was sweet, but I did get frustrated often mainly due to Kailie.

I'm looking forward to reading Love In Darkness that next one in the series.

Castles On The Sands gets 3 stars from me

Hugholine says

I received a copy of the second book in this series in exchange for an honest review, and the author kindly included the first book as well. Although she said that reading the first wasn't necessary before reading the second, I disagree. I started reading the second book and I felt lost and confused. I put it down, read this, and I now feel much more prepared. In other words, I suggest you read this first.

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. I've never read a book where many of the main characters were Mormons, but I found it to be interesting and somewhat informative. I never had to deal with anything like the problems Alex and Madison faced, but this book definitely reminded me that being a teenager is hard work.

So yeah, surprising read, and pretty different from other books I've read. I like different.

Alyson Alvigi-quaranta says

I received a book from the author in exchange for an honest review

I think the author did good job with this book in writing about the struggles of being a teenager. The main character, Madison, is a naive 16 year old high schooler that lets everyone walk all over her. Her mom is extremely mean to her and treats her like she's nonexistent. Her best friend is worthless and does things to her that a normal best friend would never do. Throughout the book we did get to see some positive relationships develop between Madison and her long lost brother John, Carson, and Alex. I could have done

without all the religious/Mormon talk though. I am currently reading Love in Darkness (book 2) now, which is in Alex's POV. Review to come...

Sherwood Smith says

I filed this as romance, though it's probably more of a teen problem novel, but my sense of those is that they tend to hammer one with Issues, and this one is carried along by sturdy romance-for-teens tropes. As such, I thoroughly enjoyed it--read it intermittently through an otherwise exasperating day.

I almost didn't read it, when the opening seems to be making fun of Mormons. When I was growing up, it was okay in mainstream culture to crack bigoted jokes at non-white people. Half a century later, it's okay in mainstream culture to crack bigoted jokes at religious people, especially Catholics, fundamentalists, and Mormons. I don't care for any kind of bigoted jokes, especially the ones that imply any body of people are stupid/weird/pervs because of ethnicity, customs, or beliefs.

But very quickly Tippetts established that Madison, the high-school aged first person narrator, isn't determinedly prejudiced so much as ignorant, and further, she is struggling against an emotionally damaging home situation--and an emotionally damaged, and damaging, best friend--while trying to be thoughtful, aware, and a good person.

That's before we meet the various cute guys in her life. In other hands Madison might have been too good to be true, but Madison's inner struggle is viscerally real, and the things that happen to people around her kept the tension high. There is all kinds of emotional trauma, plus mental illness, plus these Mormon teens who are also struggling to make sense of life.

Just before the halfway point I found myself so drawn in that I kept sneaking away to read it. There is enough resolution not to be considered a cliff-hanger, but it is apparent that there is more to the story. Good. I want to find out what happens to them all.

Rebecca Berto says

Wow. Okay, so this book caught me by surprise. It started off as a simmering pot of water, which started boiling way before I'd realised. When I noticed how good the book had become, it had me by the throat and I was already doing all sorts of rude things like walking around with my head in my eReader, narrowly missing walls, people and conversations. I don't mind that I have no pride left, because I just had to finish this book ASAP and it was well worth it.

E.M. Tippetts is a fantastic storyteller. This is the second book I've read by her and I'm thrilled I have.

This book is hard to define. It's probably best described as coming-of-age as it touches on my many issues of finding your identity. Madison, the main character, is a nice girl, and who some people target as easy to run over. Her long-lost brother, John is over-joyed with love when he finds her after losing her as a young child. I must say that I fell in love with the characters, especially Alex who is by far my favourite, in a way I didn't expect to.

From the character [retracted for spoiler reasons] who targets Madison emotionally, physically and socially; to Madison's confusion about how love and relationships work when first entering the world of "boys"; to trying to get her mother to notice/love her; to the defined social circles people expect you not to break, there was so much I fell in love with in CASTLES ON THE SAND.

When I finished this book, though, I felt satisfied in a weird way because this wasn't a straight romance book, or a book about growing up, or about mental issues. It had a bit of all of those, that made me really think about life, and that gave me a little bit more in the pieces that make up this world.

The message I took is: some people can't be saved, and not even they or others can see they're drowning, but you have to give your best shot regardless. Sometimes it's the unexpected person who helps YOU in the end.

Recommended reading and 5 stars.
