

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

ROMANCE

## Awakening to Awareness

**Stella McMillan**

B.J. Bree

978-1-4477-0579-6

The fourth installment of an innovative series of six books by Stella McMillan, *Awakening to Awareness* is the first book of an anticipated second trilogy titled *Era/Error of Discernment*. In this gripping story of rebirth, the author escorts the reader into the recesses of a traumatized woman's mind, as she lingers between life and death due to severe injuries sustained in a car accident in September 1999. From the Australian Gold Coast Hospital where this resilient heroine is a patient, Paula rewinds into the past and consults with her spiritual guide Gerard.

Rather than stepping back into the Victorian period and exploring a previous incarnation, which took place in the first trilogy, this exciting protagonist relives her life in Las Vegas a mere ten years earlier. McMillan's novel, an escapade involving money, entrapment, and undercover operations, is a dramatic contrast to the Victorian experiences that preceded it in this absorbing series and borders on dark and dangerous. Ultra-sophisticated, clandestine interactions between Paula and Lachlan, a fascinating man who evokes a feeling of *déjà vu* for Paula, entertain under the neon lights of a metropolis where established rules are routinely broken.

Interspersed with fast-paced, big-city action, are moments of contemplation and healing. In the following excerpt Paula rests in a surreal realm: "She did not know whether or not her body would respond to her commands, if she decided to move from the bed. As no medical staff appeared to be in the vicinity, so that she could ask advice, she settled herself more comfortably on the pillows and gazed out at the gardens that were bathed in sunlight. Above them, the blue of the azure sky formed a stunning backdrop to the colourful rose gardens."

Yet a moment later she experiences a bizarre disorientation and confusion. She knows she's on the Gold Coast in Australia, but has lost her sense of time: "She remembered the dreadful rolling motion as the vehicle, in which she was travelling, flipped over and over. However, everything else was eluding her at present and she was troubled by her inability to recall subsequent events ... And, why was she here all alone, she wondered."

The novel's primary flaw is the awkwardness of its visual presentation, including excessive spacing and a cover cluttered by the strange placement of the book's title and author's name. First impressions matter.

The theme of McMillan's work is reminiscent of the esoteric writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, a theologian and mystic who described visions of the afterlife and its intermediary, transitional phases. In *Awakening to Awareness*, McMillan makes his work relevant to a contemporary audience, a feat she accomplishes with finesse.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (July 27, 2011)

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