Clarion Review

Fantasy

Enlightened
A.D. Spencer
CreateSpace
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Georgian high-schooler Baylie Storm must contend with typical teenage drama—falling for her best friend, Tyler Caldwell, trying to stay on the good side of her overprotective parents—when a sudden injury results in an otherworldly experience. Baylie soon realizes her injury has given her the ability to contact the dead. She has to come to terms with messages from the departed, a mystery from the past, and sinister occurrences that suggest her beloved Tyler is in danger. It is up to Baylie and her parents to put the rest of the puzzle pieces together before someone else dies.

Teen girls tired of the passive Bella from the Twilight series will be thrilled that Baylie is an active sleuth who ends up saving Tyler. The mystery and romance unfold at equal speed, with neither one overshadowing the other. While Baylie and Tyler share swoony kisses and caresses, they mutually promise to abstain from sex.

In contrast to Bella's distant parents, Baylie's are aware, protective, and involved in her life. Even though she and Tyler struggle not to anger her parents with their burgeoning romance, Baylie turns to her father's paranormal investigation service for help when the supernatural tension increases. There is mutual respect between Baylie and her parents, as well as between Tyler and his single mother. Although Baylie and Tyler sometimes come across as unbelievably obedient to their parents, the emotional turmoil is always realistic.

While Baylie, Tyler, and their parents are fascinating and well-rounded, it takes far too long in the story for Baylie to get injured so that the paranormal part of the plot can begin. Once the supernatural elements occur, they are accepted with alacrity. Oddly, Baylie's dad has covertly run a paranormal investigation company for years, but the outfit is not even really hinted at until it becomes necessary to the plot.

Several other major plot contrivances irritate because they likewise seem so coincidental

and convenient. For example, the florist shop at which Baylie works just happens to deliver to a key character with a common last name; the odds of finding such a person in a large city like Savannah are unbelievably low. Additionally, Spencer's dialog suffers from blow-by-blow reporting, redundancy, and occasional faulty wording.

While these factors may rub some readers the wrong way, anyone seeking a blend of love and a ghost story will be enlightened by this sprightly debut.

Jill Allen