

Fling!

Lily Iona Mackenzie

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A spirited mother-daughter road trip to Mexico takes a turn for the humorous when long-dead relatives start showing up.

Fling!, Lily Iona Mackenzie's debut novel, is a romp from Canada to Mexico that includes long-lost relatives, hallucinatory visions, and new love. The book opens as Feather arrives in Calgary to celebrate her mother's birthday. Although eager to get to her party, Bubbles has recently received a notice from the dead-letter office in Mexico City saying that they've found her mother's ashes, lost more than seventy years earlier, and wants Feather to accompany her to Mexico.

And they're off on a road trip that takes one unexpected twist after the other. Bubbles is an exuberant ninety-year-old, hoping for one last romance. Feather, a Bay Area hippie turned college professor, wants to research the use of the goddess in Mexican art and would like some action herself. Neither woman understands why she was abandoned by her mother as a teenager. Soon after they collect the ashes, Bubbles's mother, Heather, appears. Then Heather's parents, Malcolm and Annie, join the party.

Once all four generations—both the living and the dead—are together in Mexico, the story shines. As the implausibility increases, so does the humor. The indigenous people begin worshiping Bubbles as a fertility goddess. Feather falls in love with a community-minded shaman. The stylish Heather, who died in 1926, quickly learns how to use credit cards and goes shopping. The only problem is that it takes over half the book to get there. Earlier chapters set up the road trip and family history, but the characters, although humorously portrayed, are often one-dimensional, and the situations lack the spirited inventiveness of the book's second half.

A dinner celebrating the Day of the Dead shows just how bizarre and satisfying a family reunion can be. Ancestral questions are finally answered, personal idiosyncrasies honored, and romance celebrated. By the book's end, both Feathers and Bubbles have the relationship with their mother that they've sought all their lives. This is family—quirky and beloved.

KAREN ACKLAND (Winter 2016)

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