Clarion Review

Romance

Invoking Happenstance
MyraLee Nowell
FriesenPress
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Three Stars (out of Five)

MyraLee Nowell makes her debut with a romance novel that offers several unexpected twists. *Invoking Happenstance* is the story of Myla, an American heiress who has lost her family and longs for an intimate connection that her husband, Dimetre, does not provide. With long-buried family secrets on her mind and well-hidden psychic abilities, Myla travels to the far reaches of Alaska, seeking a soul mate and uncovering many surprising truths along the way.

Myla tells her own tale, relating a privileged childhood with "nannies, bodyguards and servants" to entertain her every whim. Details like Myla's private jet and the many verandas upon which she sips champagne, show that she enjoys her wealth as an adult as well. Her husband relishes her riches a little too much, and Myla is on the cusp of divorcing him when they embark on their trip.

Nowell achieves a palpable sense of tension in the first few scenes, as Myla and friends find their plane in peril. The dialogue is urgent and realistic, with everyone talking in the short bursts necessitated by an emergency. She keeps it simple and believable: "Where's the runway? Help me, Myla!"

This realism is sustained in most of the book's dialogue, although much of the narrative is more embellished. Nowell uses many clichés, such as, "I pinched myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming." Myla is given to sweeping, dramatic statements like this one: "Once again, I would find myself alone in the world." Such melodramatic moments distract from the action of the story.

The story itself is equally dramatic, involving mistaken identities, the pursuit of true love, and treasures bestowed from beyond the grave. Even when Nowell sends Myla to the remote Alaskan lodge of the homey "Maw" and "Paw" Tucker, it is not the humble getaway it seems at first glance. The lodge may have a bear rug in the living room and a mule tied outside,

but that is where the rough-hewn edges end. Opulence is everywhere, from the torch-lit hidden passageways to the priceless Greek sculptures and the hand-painted ceiling featuring a mural of Zeus at Mount Olympus.

The Alaskan wilderness provides the backdrop to scenes where Myla alternately flirts with a handsome stranger and confronts her husband with his many infidelities. Her travel journal provides an informative window onto the pristine landscape, but sometimes it reads like an excerpt from a guidebook. Myla notes, for example, that “Jackson Hole is due south of the National Elk Refuge,” rather than concentrating on her firsthand experience.

When Myla returns to her own story, the reader is once again swept up in her starry-eyed thoughts and intense life decisions. Will she discover what happened to her lost twin brother? Will she be reunited with the love of her life? These mysteries keep the surprises coming throughout this most romantic of romance novels.

Sheila M. Trask