

The Chronicles of Elizabeth Highland: Life, Love, Soul . . . Mate

Elizabeth Highland

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A spiritual journey blends with an online romance in a story about letting go of the past and enjoying the present.

Set against the backdrop of a smoldering love affair, *The Chronicles of Elizabeth Highland* fictionalizes a compelling chapter in the author's own spiritual life journey. Elizabeth Highland's innate restlessness and her quest for inner truth propel her forward as she seeks spiritual fulfillment and purpose. She embodies the idea that in life it is important to trust in the universe. She is curious. She is driven. And she wants answers. She wants to know not only where an unexpected online romance with a married man, Tim, is going, but also where her soul is headed.

Rich in dialogue and personal correspondence, the story is told largely via e-mail exchanges between Elizabeth and Tim over the course of about a year. These revelatory conversations truly capture Elizabeth's angst and inner turmoil over the unsettled nature of both her love life and her spiritual life. Jumping from thoughts about traveling to relationship woes to messy closets is common. The dialogue also highlights Tim's stagnation. He speaks of longing to whisper stories "in [her] ear first thing in the morning," but he is slow to actively allow their relationship to flourish.

This fullness of dialogue comes at a price, however. There is a dissatisfying lack of descriptive and colorful phrasing that might have drawn a more complete picture of Elizabeth's experiences. In a moment of anger, Elizabeth describes smoke steaming from her head. This type of vivid imagery is relatively rare and would have served to further enhance the story if used more liberally, especially when describing the first encounter between Elizabeth and Tim. Their meeting could have been an intriguing account of emotions and thoughts at this critical moment, but instead, it is whittled down to the immediate dialogue between them. Despite Elizabeth's self-description as a "completely honest person" with a to-the-point nature, her story would have been more powerful had she conveyed more pictorial detail. However appropriate to the author's personality, the lack of expressive imagery is a disservice to the reader.

The author employs an impressive host of symbols that draw contrasts, aid in creating a sense of closure for things in the past, and suggest perpetual movement. Elizabeth and Tim hold different world views, making the black-and-white color scheme chosen for the front cover so appropriate. A previous boyfriend of Elizabeth's comes to represent a different time in her life, a time she comfortably leaves behind. And, the three-chapter organization of the book mimics Elizabeth's view of life. She describes this time in her life as her third and final chapter, which further fuels her restlessness. Perhaps the most important symbol, however, and indeed a metaphor for her spiritual journey, is her love of world travel. A good deal of the book is dedicated to her travels to Nepal and Bhutan, where she visits Buddhist temples and contemplates her existence.

Crafted as a romance novel, *The Chronicles of Elizabeth Highland* undoubtedly has appeal for those who enjoy fast-paced, dialogue-rich explorations of relationship journeys or learning about the life journey of one person. The story begs for a (soon-to-come) sequel.

LAURA MAHON (February 25, 2014)

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