

The Eagle and the Heiress

Stephen Barnes

Nixon Barnes (Mar 24, 2016)

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This fast-paced, exhilarating read combines international intrigue and romance in an exciting way.

Stephen Barnes's *The Eagle and the Heiress* is a suspenseful tale in which Chile's dark past serves as a backdrop to current events. An American geologist, struggling with the tragic death of his fiancée, is between jobs when he's offered work in South America. He unexpectedly finds more than that in this work of historical fiction.

Nick Johnson is introduced into a world of secrets and deception when he saves Isabela Luksaval, the CEO of the country's largest business enterprise, from an assassination attempt at their first meeting. He sustains injuries and ends up staying in her family villa while he recovers.

Isabela is serving at her father's behest; he is semi-retired and living in England. Though not inexperienced in the business world, she's facing backlash from some unexpected arenas. As Nick tries to determine his place in both Luksaval Enterprises and in his own world, the couple seem to make a connection.

The main characters and the intimate details of their personal backstories are first developed in their own individual alternating chapters, and in such disparate locales as California, Santiago, and London, until their paths ultimately collide. This method helps to clarify and strengthen character mindsets prior to their initial meetings.

The setting, nearly twenty years in the past, is established via subtle nods to cultural touchstones of the era, such as what was playing on television, or via an offhand comment about the cloning of Dolly the sheep. Chile's recent political history is recalled as well, with the text filling in gaps and answering questions that the plot brings to the surface, so that even those who might be unfamiliar with the history will understand what has happened and how the past is affecting present day situations.

Characters are authentic and very well drawn. One is never really certain where the allegiances of Colin, Nick's so-called boss, lie, especially when Nick is asked to hide the fact that he is fluent in Spanish. While Ema is spoiled, self-absorbed, and aggravating to her older sister, she also cares for "Izzy" and her appearances usually serve as lighter moments. Their father, Marco, is portrayed as a man troubled by his past and under the spell of a woman who may or may not have his best interests at heart. There are numerous interesting characters—though not too many to cause confusion—and it's not easy to discern what their actual motivations are, which keeps the reader guessing up until almost the very end.

The writing is crisp and tight; pertinent information is woven in subtly, as with "Much of Ema's frivolous nature, Isabela rationalized, was owing to their nine-year age difference. *Was I ever that way at nineteen?* Isabela sometimes asked herself. The answer was always an emphatic *no!*" Differences between speakers are revealed not only in what they say in realistic dialogue, but in how it's spoken. When long-time Luksaval family friend Alonso Carrasco talks to Nick, "the resonance of his baritone voice seemed to linger even after he had finished speaking."

The Eagle and the Heiress is a fast-paced, exhilarating read, combining intrigue and romance. Those who enjoy

international stories of human drama involving history and politics will find this book an excellent addition to their reading repertoire.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (May 10, 2016)

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