

The Three Layers of a Moment: The Pioneer Ranch Saga: Book Three

Samar Reine

Carmel-by-the-Sea Publishers

(340pp)

979-898841102-4

Focused on its heroine's empowerment, The Three Layers of a Moment is a lush, satisfying entry into a domestic series.

In Samar Reine's novel *The Three Layers of a Moment*, a woman with deep roots in New Mexico contends with her roles as mother, wife, daughter, veterinarian, and rancher while enmeshed in complex personal relationships, past and present.

Bryce, her husband William, and their two children live on land their families have owned for generations. Despite a fraught relationship, their love abides, as William's grandfather notes in his last hours before he bequeaths half of his land to his son Charles and half to William. Charles responds by lashing out at William, deepening their divide.

Meanwhile, Bryce and William think that water technology from a sheikh in Dubai will save their crops. But days before negotiations begin, William confesses to a one-night stand and loses Bryce's trust. She seeks advice from her mother, Peyton, an artist and ranch matriarch, as well as from her adopted brother, Honovi. Honovi suggests a peyote healing ritual. After the ceremony, Bryce and William travel to Dubai. Subsequent entanglements with the El Saj family further complicate their relationships. And when a man who resembles Bryce's deceased brother and nemesis arrives on the ranch, the complications deepen.

Peyton tells Bryce to be careful about interpreting life events in advance, and that advice centers the novel. Though it's the third book in a series, it functions well as a standalone, focused as it is on Bryce's growing sense of empowerment and her marital bond as it faces internal and external threats. Indeed, Bryce's reflections are emphasized, both in the course of everyday moments like a kiss or brewing coffee and while she's interacting with loved ones—and the sheikh's son.

There are a bevy of characters to track, and while the book's comprehensive, annotated list helps somewhat, it lists characters out of order and is diluted by its inclusion of minor characters. Still, Bryce interacts with almost everyone on a deep level, conversing about personal values, motivations, and histories. With William, Bryce's style changes, focused on intimate contact and arguments. And William's pithy sayings double as reminders to himself: "A true cowboy gives second chances." But instances of mirrored cadence in people's conversations lead to some stilted exchanges, too, and Bryce and William's discussions sometimes sound more like a counselor's assessment than a couple hashing out problems in a natural manner.

The prose is active and lush, both when it comes to describing settings and in detailing characters' actions. Transliterated Arabic terms widen the book's atmosphere, while Indigenous spiritual practices from two lands effectually connect the ranch to Dubai: Bedouin women are seen predicting significant events, Honovi paints the sheikh's wife sight unseen, and ceremonies for healing and finding direction take place. In the novel's last pages, the major characters all experience epiphanies, leading to a tidy conclusion.

About family, identity, and a woman's claim to her own power, *The Three Layers of a Moment* is an engaging domestic novel.

LYNNE JENSEN LAMPE (April 11, 2024)

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