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Spencer's "The miracle tree: A novel" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Spencer, D. (2018). *The miracle tree: A novel*. Marionville, MO: Wilson Creek Publishing. 123 pp. \$2.99. ISBN 9780998951232

The Miracle Tree opens with Laura Bell returning to her childhood home, discarding her city ways, and adjusting to life after her unhappy marriage. Next door, Eli Hawthorne does not feel complete after returning from Afghanistan with a prosthetic foot, despite his apparent capability of running his family's ranch with longtime friend, father-figure, and partner, Garcia. Both Laura and Eli have been wounded, but when they see the "miracle tree" that remains standing after surviving a lightning strike and after all the intervening years since their childhood, it becomes their symbol of hope.

Both Laura and Eli approach healing in a different way. Laura turns to the church she remembers from her childhood. Eli, however, cannot feel he can trust God after his encounter with an IED (improvised explosive device) that sent him home a broken man. But with the help of Goldie, an ancient golden retriever they both love, and kind neighbors and friends, Laura and Eli might just be able to find new life in California ranch country.

The author, Davalynn Spencer, winner of the Will Rogers Gold Medallion for Inspirational Western Fiction, blends equal parts homey and suspense as she focuses on small details about life on the ranch, including adopting new pets and making dinner, as well as threats to ranch life, such as modern day cattle rustlers, neglectful property owners, and fire. Though at times they seem episodic, these vignettes reinforce the idea that both Laura and Eli are simply taking one day at a time, taking small steps toward wholeness. The penultimate scene describes a raging fire that leads to a swift conclusion, and after the relatively easy pace of the rest of the book, this comes as a surprise may leave the reader wishing one could see more episodes in the life of Laura and Eli.

The Miracle Tree would be appropriate for libraries that maintain a contemporary fiction collection, particularly if they are collecting titles that focus on ranch or western life.

Reviewer

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