Clarion Review

Mystery

Ghosts: A Folly Beach Mystery
Bill Noel
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Three Stars (out of Five)

In this entertaining mystery, a ghost from Chris Landrum's past resurfaces, and it is just the first of many surprises that follow.

This installment of Bill Noel's Folly Beach Mystery series centers around Chris, who moved from Kentucky to Folly Beach, an island off Charleston, South Carolina, after retiring from his job at a health insurance company. His life now revolves around a photo gallery he owns with his friend, Charles, which they opened after receiving a $500,000 inheritance from a local wealthy woman whose life they had once saved. The gallery operates on a relaxed schedule, giving them a lot of free time to spend with friends at Cal's, the local pub, and with their girlfriends.

Chris hasn't heard from his ex-wife, Joan, in the decades since they divorced after a twenty-year marriage, but his quiet life is upended with one phone call from her. He learns her husband, Daniel, has been killed in a car accident, and she suspects he was murdered. Local police are not so sure, and neither is Chris. Even when they were married, Joan had a tendency to exaggerate and jump to worst-case assumptions. But Chris agrees to help, and as they work together, he also begins to wonder if she contacted him to rekindle their relationship.

Joan is not the only "ghost from the past" in Folly Beach. The spirit of Frank Fontana, the town drunk and a World War II veteran killed more than fifty years earlier while attempting to save two teens caught in a local fire, is rumored to be hovering in the area, still angry that no one else tried to save the girls. As Chris investigates Daniel's possible murder, Charles tries to solve a string of thefts at Cal's, where he has recently been hired as a detective. Charles's girlfriend, Heather, who has psychic powers, spurs speculation about Frank's involvement in these local crimes.

The story is told from Chris's first-person perspective, enabling readers to strongly

identify with him. However, only surface issues are addressed: Chris's internal thoughts about deeper questions are barely touched upon, such as what went wrong in Chris's marriage to Joan and his pattern of somewhat distant relationships with girlfriends who are twenty years younger than him. Instead, the tone is light throughout, with a focus on humorous banter between friends. As a result, there is little suspense or intrigue surrounding the mysteries, and some of the crime elements are oversimplified. Still, detailed descriptions of the characters' interactions create vivid images and their amusing personalities are evident, especially their quirks.

Chris and his friends are fun to spend time with, and their likability will hold readers' interest until both crimes are solved—discoveries that also further reveal that the characters are good-natured.

Maria Siano