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Haunting at Black Water Cove

Norma Lehr
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This children's mystery stars Kathy Wicklow as a sleuthing heroine in the tradition of Nancy Drew, with one key exception. Where Nancy had to rely on old-fashioned legwork and deduction, Kathy is endowed with paranormal abilities. She unravels mysteries with the help of the spirit world.

In this, the fourth of Lehr's "Kathy" novels, the psychic preteen is spending a week at a northern California resort with her mom, Diane, and her dog, Snuggles. The moment the trio checks in, Diane comes down with the chicken pox, leaving Kathy to entertain herself. Kathy meets a local boy, Drew, and the two team up to unravel a decades-old mystery involving Kathy's great-great-uncle, Duncan.

It seems the ghosts of Duncan and his girlfriend, Ruby Faye, have been waiting to contact someone with Kathy's abilities to set the record straight about Duncan's role in Ruby Faye's disappearance nine decades earlier. Immediately upon arriving at the Blue Lakes resort, Kathy begins seeing objects that no one else can, such as a mysterious raft floating on the lake and a flashing "help" message across Drew's computer screen.

To decipher the clues, Kathy enlists the aid of Miss Maryetta, the town's oldest resident and Ruby Faye's sister. As it turns out, Miss Maryetta also is a percipient, or "one who sees," but has been unable through the years to clearly communicate with her dead sister.

This novel has many elements of a good mystery: forbidden love, a spooky ruin, a legendary monster, family intrigue, danger, some ambiguous characters and a persistent sleuth. Lehr sets a pace that's rapid enough to keep young readers turning the pages, yet slow enough to allow for interesting development of the main characters. While Kathy finds herself in some real danger toward the end of the story, nothing happens that is scary enough to keep youngsters awake at night.

Lehr references some of Kathy's adventures in the previous books, which may pique the first-time reader's interest to seek out the others, but as with any good series, this entry stands well on its own. Lehr, however, doesn't tie up all loose ends and leaves readers with the likelihood that Kathy and Miss Maryetta will meet again in another tale.

(March / April 2000)

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