



## Haunting Investigation: A Chesterton Holte Mystery

**Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**

Smoke & Shadow Books

(357pp)

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*This is a promising beginning to a well-written, character-driven series.*

Prolific writer Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, best known for her series of vampire novels, takes a new and intriguing turn in *Haunting Investigation*, a paranormal mystery set in 1924 Philadelphia. Poppy Thornton, a young and ambitious journalist struggling to break out of the gender constrictions of her time, is assisted by ghostly visitor Chesterton Holte as she investigates the murder of an acquaintance and hopes that her dedication will gain her career recognition.

When family friend Madison Moncrief is killed in what first appears a suicide, the lack of available male crime reporters gives Poppy the opportunity she'd always dreamed of—a gritty, meaningful story to report on, rather than the fluffy society drivel she's normally assigned. Though the assignment itself is unexpected, even more unexpected is the sudden appearance of the decidedly dead Chesterton Holte, who appears to her in his ghostly form with an offer to help in any way he can, as a way to try to make up for what he feels is his own culpability in the death of Poppy's father. The unlikely pair join forces—while Poppy carefully questions social acquaintances, Holte makes inquiries among his fellow ghostly comrades—and their combined efforts soon reveal deeper mysteries and possible crimes, with some ties a bit too close to home for Poppy's comfort.

Yarbro weaves an inventive tale, with plenty of intrigue, originality, and well-developed characters to carry the story along at a comfortable pace. The time period is captured well throughout, and Poppy is gutsy and determined, even as she bristles at the social expectations of appropriate behavior and roles for women. When told her plucky attitude could get a potential husband into the Senate, she responds, "I'd rather get myself into the Senate." Poppy's friendship with her ghostly cohort, Holte, is filled with affectionate banter and mutual respect. Holte, perhaps because of his lack of actual corporeality, proves to be the one man Poppy feels comfortable leaning on once in a while, and the evolution of their friendship is sure to play out inventively in future installments of the series.

The mystery at the heart of *Haunting Investigation* begins with a possible suicide and branches out to include more than a few murders, disappearances, corporate intrigue, and possible infidelities. Regrettably, the story ends abruptly without tying up the carefully woven threads, leaving the hope that the mysteries will be resolved in the next part of the series. Even so, it's a promising beginning to a well-written, character-driven series and sure to be worth the patience needed waiting for the next installment.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (November 19, 2015)

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