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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ MYSTERY

Haverford House

Katherine Winfield
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This compelling and unconventional mystery is about good and evil spirits in a town full of complicated characters.

Haverford House, by Katherine Winfield, is a captivating supernatural mystery that focuses on the lives of Libby, a schoolteacher, and Josh, a lawyer, who move from Baltimore to Corsica, a remote town on the eastern shore of Maryland. The couple buys a historic home that was formerly owned by the Haverford family and has been vacant for many years, or so they thought.

Soon after moving in, Libby discovers that the house is haunted by the ghost of Elizabeth, a former resident. With the help of Tassie, the town clairvoyant, Libby begins to communicate with Elizabeth, who asks for Libby's help.

Because she is not teaching during the summer, Libby has a lot of free time on her hands. She spends most of it alone while Josh is working, so she embarks upon a quest to decipher Elizabeth's cryptic message. Libby suspects that Elizabeth's pleas are related to the death of another Haverford House resident, Cecilia, who committed suicide in the house years earlier under suspicious circumstances. Cecilia was married to John Reynolds at the time of her death.

Complicating matters is the fact that John is now a client at Josh's law firm. Libby's crime-solving hobby causes tension with her husband, as her "investigation" could potentially cause friction between Josh and John, who is in the middle of a political campaign.

Winfield masterfully reveals how the complicated lives of the people in Corsica are intertwined. In the first half of the narrative, she paints a rich picture of the characters' personalities. She also establishes a strong sense of setting, especially as it involves the atmosphere of the house. Winfield draws readers in with her use of details to describe what Libby, in particular, is seeing and feeling.

The town of Corsica is a main character, too. It is full of distinct and quirky people, with no one exactly who he or she appears to be. All are hiding a few secrets, including Josh and Libby. And although it has a friendly, small-town feel, Corsica is not immune to dark elements. In the second half of the novel, Winfield deftly shifts from a character-driven story to a plot-driven, action-filled mystery.

Winfield explores themes about the nature of good and evil, of right and wrong. With unusual but appealing characters, she keeps readers deeply engaged throughout her eccentric, compelling novel.
MARIA SIANO (August 6, 2013)

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