ForeWord Reviews

Song of the Bones
M.K. Preston
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Chantalene Morrell has been asked to help find her friend Thelma Patterson's husband, a ranch hand who hasn't been heard from in thirty years, since shortly after their wedding when Thelma was young. A representative from an oil company has shown up on Thelma's Oklahoma farm property, wanting to pay for leases. The problem is that Billy Ray Patterson's name is still on the property. Everyone expects him to be dead, until he arrives unexpectedly in Chantalene's office, saying he?d heard she?d been looking for him.

Thelma is naturally surprised, but, in a move that stretches the reader's credulity, welcomes him back. But only a few days later she comes to Chantalene insisting that the man is an impostor. Chantalene looks into things, backtracking Billy Ray's trail to a thirty-year-old casino robbery and the mysterious burning death of Billy Ray's brother. More worrisome, someone seems to be stalking Chantalene, entering her house and stealing small objects. Nothing is as it seems, and she soon finds herself caught up in a possible three-way confidence game, with the con men trying to con each other and everyone else they meet.

This is the author's second Chantalene Morrell novel; the first, Perhaps She'll Die, is also set in an Oklahoma town similar to the one where Preston grew up. She holds degrees from University of Central Oklahoma, has taught in public high schools, and worked for the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum. Her second book is an intriguing, engrossing novel with an engaging main character. Chantalene has a past as mysterious as the people she's investigating, with a streak of wanderlust and the occasional ability to see auras and interpret dreams.

Preston diverts some focus to Chantalene's partner, tax attorney Drew Sander, whose complicated personal life deserves its own novel. Although this subplot is very entertaining, it sometimes seems like a distraction from the main story, which tells of the return of people from Thelma's past.

Chapters are also devoted to the perspective of an old mystic who seems to be lost in his own memories, unable to distinguish between the past and the present, almost as if he is a metaphor for the rest of the novel's events. The novel might have been stronger if the author had stuck with a single point of view-Chantalene's. Still, the characters are richly drawn and likable,

the sense of place is strong, and the plot adds layers page after page until the exciting climax.

Mark Terry