

## Southern Sass and Killer Cravings

**Kate Young**

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In Kate Young's cozy mystery, energetic Marygene, a soon-to-be divorcée, returns to her family's diner to save her sister, Jena Lynn, who's been accused of murder after a customer dropped dead. *Southern Sass and Killer Cravings* is an enchanting portrait of savvy women who join forces to uncover a town's secrets.

Together with her friend and coworker Betsy and a reporter named Calhoun, Marygene sets out to unravel the truth about the victim, Joseph Ledbetter. This includes his dark legacy and the tangled roots of his death. Danger in the present overlays with Marygene's own painful memories of surviving domestic violence. Both strands shuttle toward a confrontation that leaves Marygene with refreshed resolve.

Supernatural hijinks arrive in the form of Marygene's dead mother, who offers prickly comments that don't always help and who makes an eleventh-hour intervention that pushes the book's limits. It's not clear why Marygene's mother is privy to some information, nor why she's staying in limbo to watch over her daughter. Her presence adds levity to an otherwise grim plot that centers on longstanding fury for unhealed wrongs. Other questions that the plot leaves open—such as why Marygene can piece together information the police haven't—recede in light of the outstanding setting and cast.

The Georgia island's talkative residents embody the best and worst of small-town living. This fact makes it simultaneously easier and harder for Marygene to play the role of a self-made sleuth without raising too much suspicion. People's trust in her and their penchant for divulging what they know allows for rich scenes that underscore just how much everyone is family. For all the havoc that murder creates in the community, there's always a sense that wrongs will be righted.

This first in a new series is an adventure with surprising bite.

KAREN RIGBY (May/June 2019)

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