ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

THRILLER

Stillwell: A Haunting on Long Island
Michael Phillip Cash
CreateSpace
978-1-4841-9609-0
Four Stars (out of Five)

Thriller meets love story in a novel where characterization shines.

Paul's wife, Allison, dies after a short battle with brain cancer. *Stillwell: A Haunting on Long Island* chronicles the week after Allison's funeral, when Paul experiences dreams that are too real, sees ghostly apparitions, and gets drawn into a historical love story.

Along with waking up with scratches from a hairy demon he sees only in his nightmares, Paul is trying to care for his now motherless three children. He goes back to work as a real-estate agent and is asked by a friend to sell his parents' ancestral home, Stillwell—a house known for ghosts all its own.

This is the second book for Michael Phillip Cash, who writes with a simple yet engaging style. He easily draws readers into the story by creating three-dimensional characters who are easy to care about. Readers want to help Paul get his twin teenage children to stop arguing and to eat, and to comfort the older-than-her-years baby of the family, Stella.

Cash also manages to capture different stages of grief through Paul and his children. Paul can't let go because of his love for his wife; Jesse wants to know his mom is safe; little Stella Luna wants to hear real-life stories to remember her mother by; and Veronica says, "I'm glad Mom is gone. It was too hard to watch her…She didn't even know us in the end. Is it wrong to feel relieved?" Readers will find the hard truths of suffering acutely portrayed.

The formatting of *Stillwell* is fairly standard: an easy-to-read font and a page layout slightly narrower than the average novel. The organization of the book, however, is unique: instead of chapters, the narrative is sectioned by days, from Saturday to Saturday. The cover is both enticing to the reader and relevant to the novel; it features a scene of a man walking on a moonlit night, a hazy vision around a well in the foreground, and the title in distressed block letters. There are some errors evident in the text: typos such as “form” instead of “from,” and misuse of “its” instead of “it’s.”

Cash is a Long Island native who writes of the region he knows with an honest hand, and he crafts fictional streets and buildings with expertise. With strong characters and a twist unexpected in a thriller, this book is an enjoyable beach read.

Beth VanHouten