ForeWord Reviews
**Clarion Review**

MYSTERY

**The Claret Murders: A Mark Rollins Adventure**
Tom Collins
I-65 North, Incorporated
978-0-9825898-5-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

As established long ago by the iconic James Bond, solving mysteries is simply much easier when one has a limitless supply of funding and gadgetry. This theory is ably upheld by wealthy, good-natured, and endlessly resourceful amateur sleuth Mark Rollins, whose fourth adventure is detailed in *The Claret Murders*.

Author Tom Collins immediately draws readers into this latest mystery in the first few chapters, exploring events from the past that will play a relevant role and introducing pertinent characters. This approach to including significant bits of backstory is both effective and intriguing without becoming an “info dump” of plot points. By the time Collins moves on to the meat of the story, readers are already hooked.

Mark Rollins, successful entrepreneur and occasional sleuth, is persuaded to help protect stunning lawyer Ann Sims from several potential threats, including a volatile estranged husband, an enigmatic titled Englishman, and a vengeful police officer. As events unfold, Rollins realizes that Ann, who protects secrets of her own, has landed in the center of a mystery revolving around an old Nashville mansion and the contents of a secret room. Rollins and his team of technological and strategic experts employ a variety of modern surveillance and tracking techniques as they endeavor to protect Ann and get to the bottom of the rapidly developing mysteries. Their efforts soon become even more challenging as the devastating flood of 2010 bears down on Nashville and the main players of the novel.

Collins is the author of two nonfiction titles as well as three other novels featuring Mark Rollins. *The Claret Murders* stands well on its own. Collins has achieved a compelling and enjoyable mystery; his narrative style is casual and conversational, and characters are realistic in both description and dialogue. Protagonist Rollins is a particularly likable character, both witty and charming as well as intelligent.

The plot is paced and structured well, and Collins builds plenty of suspense and manages a couple of unexpected twists at the end. Though the novel flows fairly smoothly, there are a

few unfortunate moments when the author steps into the narrative, such as when he inserts a bit of promotion for one of his previous books. There is also an exploration of Rollins's political views in regard to the current presidential administration and the state of immigration, neither of which appear to have much bearing on the story. The intrusion of reality and the author's opinion in this manner comes across as self-indulgent.

With the exception of these minor digressions, *The Claret Murders* is eminently readable and enjoyable. Readers are sure to be engaged early on, and the author's compelling characters and approachable writing style ensure that they will remain interested.

*Jeannine Chartier Hanscom*