Clarion Review

General

Tomahawk Creek
Emma Jack
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Faded gentry, an old mansion, past scandals, current tragedies, and sometimes a romance or two are components often found in the works of modern-day Gothic and mystery writers like Mary Stewart and Barbara Michaels. Frissons of fear are added more to keep the reader guessing than anything else: bumps in the night and assaults or murders committed by unseen assailants ratchet up the scare factor. But in many cases, the supernatural elements presented in Gothic novels are, by book's end, debunked. The horror novel is where all the nasty creatures live until the end—and sometimes beyond. For those who enjoy both genres, the enjoyment must usually come from reading two different books.

Not this time.

Emma Jack (nom de plume of sisters Evelyn and Jean Rohde) has melded the Gothic and horror genres together in *Tomahawk Creek*, the story of a genteel Texas family on its way to being poor. Due to its location near the waterway, the family manse is locally known by the creek's name and not by its "official" name, Holloway Manor. Tomahawk Creek has a storied past that contains bloodshed and tragedy connected to the Ducettes, the manor's current occupants. As in other Gothic novels, the past comes back to loom over the lives of Harlan and Celeste Ducette, their children Henry, Evangeline, and Creighton, and their granddaughters Hyacinth and Lily.

Facing the continued decay of their family home, Hyacinth and Lily both work to contribute to the manor's upkeep. The two young women received a less than warm upbringing from their grandmother after being orphaned in childhood. For most of their lives, they have been ignorant about their parents, chiefly due to Celeste Ducette's refusal to talk about them. Celeste treats her granddaughters like stepchildren, lavishing her motherly attention on Creighton while still mourning the loss of Henry. She leaves the sisters' care to her housekeeper.

A series of unusual events leads Hyacinth and Lily to investigate Holloway Manor for clues to their father's disappearance and their mother's untimely death. Something in the house is lurking in the shadows, surfacing at moments of high emotion to use family members for its own ends. What Hyacinth and Lily uncover takes over their lives—and their minds.

Author Emma Jack accomplishes the difficult task of turning what starts out to be a Gothic novel into a horror novel by book's end. The story is a skillfully woven tapestry of dark family secrets and tragic loss, brightened where needed with brief doses of humor. The transition between Gothic and horror forms is smooth and seamless; the reader will ride this undercurrent until he realizes that a shift has occurred, unnoticed. There are no loose ends here, just a wild ride into darkness facilitated by a writer who knows her genres well.

Tomahawk Creek will certainly appeal to readers of mysteries as well as to horror enthusiasts.

J. G. Stinson