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General

Trespassing Time: Ghost Stories From the Prairie
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A high school student passing through the cemetery on her way to class; a foster kid and a dilapidated old airplane; an engaged couple sifting through antiques in an attic; a pioneer woman's night on the homestead without her husband. These varied situations are explored by a quartet of Kansas authors as they combine two subjects: the otherworldly and the nation's heartland.

Comprising sixteen short stories (each author contributes four), the book covers a wide spectrum of ghostly occurrences from the terrifying "Forgotten, But Not Gone" and "One Night on Whistling Woman Creek," to refreshingly lighter fare ("Déjà Vu" and "Fireball Faye"). The book's title is from Madl's story about a historian with expertise on the Santa Fe Trail who discovers a centuries-old secret involving the legendary Seven Cities of Gold and the explorer Coronado. The elements of the artificial barrier denoting time and the act of trespass also tie the stories together.

The authors, all women who have previously published a variety of work, currently live in the same Midwest area. Garretson, a former public librarian who compiled and edited the volume, is the founder of Ravenstone Press, developed eight years ago to help publish more stories about Kansas, the Great Plains, and the prairie area. Some of these tales are based on kernels of local folklore; others are purely fictional ghost stories.

Each author has her own style, which is apparent in the dissimilarity of stories that deal with a common theme. All the characters—from McGathy's Chloe, who pockets an old charm

bracelet from the cemetery discovered after a hard rain (“Forgotten, But Not Gone”), to Baldwin’s foster kid Wayne, who connects with a dead 1920s barnstorming pilot (“Whisper on the Wind”), to Garretson’s museum employee Geneva, who, with shades of “The Portrait of Dorian Gray,” comes across a similar framed portrait (“Dance With Me”)—draw the reader in to these shivery tales.

Madl weaves a good yarn of pioneer woman Martie Wilson and her recurrent nightmares in “One Night at Whistling Woman Creek.” Martie’s husband Jake returns home one morning to find the livestock and dogs gone and something not right with his wife. “She was whistling, a tuneless sound. She smiled at him again. He could see now that it was not her old smile, but a simpleton’s expression. An unnatural vacant light glimmered in her eyes.” She “was only a shade of his Martie, of the pretty vital girl he’d married.” They move to town, where he finds work at the livery stable. “Martie became known for her excellent apple pies, her serenely vacant smile, and her tuneless whistle.”

Fans of this genre should enjoy this varied collection. There’s a little something in it for everyone’s taste—for those who like their ghost stories scary, and those who don’t.

Robin Farrell Edmunds