

By the Rivers of Babylon

Mary Glickman

Open Road Media (Feb 7, 2023)

Hardcover \$34.99 (360pp)

978-1-5040-7885-6

A young couple inherits a house on a romantic Southern island in Mary Glickman's stunning literary Southern Gothic novel turned murder mystery *By the Rivers of Babylon*.

Given its "mist over the marsh, trees that look to harbor ghosts from every limb, [and] the flight of blue herons rising like pterodactyls from the sweetgrass," Joe and Abigail see their move to Sweetgrass Island as an exciting but temporary adventure. Bostonian Abigail aggrandizes Southern charm, and Joe has no choice but to follow his imperious, ego-driven, beautiful wife. With rose-colored glasses, Abigail falls in love with Southern culture. And Billy, a notorious local womanizer, falls in love with her. Their improbable yet inevitable affair precipitates a traumatic rift in the town, where long, interconnected community histories accelerate gossip and amplify hostilities.

Halfway through, the book shifts to an Agatha Christie-esque murder mystery, replete with red herrings, double bluffs, and a sheriff among a gathering of suspects who reveals the true killer. It's at first an odd, unpredictable transition, but the immersive atmosphere and established personalities pull the narrative forward, resulting in a delightful, satisfying tale of community and Southern hospitality.

Glickman is an expert in character portraiture. Glances, body language, colloquialisms, and rich backstories work together to construct the numerous individuals that make up the diverse cast. The narrative moves from one character's psyche to the next with seamless ingenuity. Unlikely hero and everyman Joe befriends his entrancing neighbors, who teach him to forgive but not forget. Billy is not particularly handsome, intelligent, or funny, but his charisma and charm oozes from the pages alongside the romantic Southern setting, which is vivified in its own right.

By the Rivers of Babylon is an eloquent, passionate literary mystery novel set in a place that's all "moonlight and magnolia."

AIMEE JODOIN (January / February 2023)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.