

The Wandering Quilt: The Quilt Journeys Mystery Series

Dawn D. Bennett-Alexander

Renée T. H. Patterson

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In the folksy mystery novel The Wandering Quilt, a quilt that's touched by the supernatural inspires a woman's awakening.

An exquisite, handmade southern quilt rattles a woman and her family in Dawn D. Bennett-Alexander and Renée T. H. Patterson's cozy mystery novel *The Wandering Quilt*.

Camille, an avid thrifter, professor, and collector, finds a quilt while on vacation. She's enthusiastic about how it ties her renovated guest room together. But then Camille discovers that the quilt unravels its own stitches, even after being repaired.

During a joyous Christmas family reunion, as several women admire the quilt's intricate scalloped edges and colors, the quilt opens the same seam again. Camille's family members are swift to share her concern over what's happening; Camille's perception that something is "weird" here is validated with speed. Thus, Camille decides to consult a pair of mediums in search of understanding.

The book's extensive, warm, family-centric cast is underdeveloped, though. Most are addressed with straightforward descriptions that cover a handful of their traits—details that are repeated later on, as when Camille's mother Naomi's calming, reassuring presence is reiterated. People's conversations brim with exclamations and sound unnatural, and the mediums' assessment of the situation comes so fast that it strains credulity: with breezy knowledge about the spirit world, they encourage Camille to seek out a spirit's identity.

Though the novel's supernatural elements are entertaining, it becomes more didactic when it comes to quilting itself. It is full of details about the craft, including about how quilts are constructed and about traditions among women crafters. There are musings on how such objects hold the stories of their makers and recipients. And the book's efforts to embody a seasonal ambiance make some passages too generic, as with discussions on togetherness and slow-moving coverage of household happenings.

Further, Camille is rendered a bystander in her own tale. Her sleuthing is indirect and uninspired: others give her information in large bursts of conversation, and she absorbs it. She listens to a speech from the shopkeeper who sold her the quilt; she is party to abrupt revelations with dark undercurrents too. When she and her family members decide to visit Mississippi to pursue a lead, some energy is generated, but this is also undone by connected musings on cotton picking and some historical explanations of slavery, the Great Migration, and Jim Crow laws, all covered in the course of a car ride because of Camille's children's naïve questions. The long-delayed answers to what's behind the mystery of the quilt are finally proffered, but via an extensive back-and-forth that dampens their ability to satisfy expectant audiences.

In the folksy mystery novel *The Wandering Quilt*, a quilt that's touched by the supernatural inspires a woman to

engage in oral history and learn about past racial injustice.

KAREN RIGBY (May 1, 2023)

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