

Book Review: The Ghostwriter
By Julie Clark

This didn't turn out the way I thought it would.

The premise behind Julie Clark's latest novel "The Ghostwriter" is a dysfunctional family. And I mean *major* dysfunction.

Olivia Dumont is a successful and well-paid ghostwriter. That is until she is sued for slander, and loses, costing her a \$500,000 payout. And her reputation. Job offers have disappeared.

Until she's offered a job ghostwriting author Vincent Taylor's next novel. But there's a catch.

A huge one.

Fifty years ago (1975), Vincent's older brother Danny and younger sister Poppy were murdered inside the family's home. The murders have never been solved, though many still believe Vincent, who became a hugely successful horror writer, was responsible.

Olivia, it turns out, is really Olivia Taylor, Vincent's estranged daughter. They haven't spoken in decades. Vincent is dying. He has Lewy body dementia, can't read or write well, is losing his memory, and hallucinates. And the book he wants Olivia to ghostwrite is really a memoir of what happened to Danny and Poppy.

Now, if that's not convoluted enough, consider that interspersed with the present narrative, written first person in Olivia's voice, are backstory chapters labeled Vincent or Poppy, both written first person from the months leading up to and including the night of the murders.

BUT how are we able to hear/read a first-person account of something that happened fifty years ago from a dead person? I found it hard to wrap my brain around that. Not to mention that

it seemed every time someone said, “Here’s what really happened,” it wasn’t what really happened.

It also seems everyone is living a lie. Vincent, for certain, but also Olivia. She’s now 44-years old and has been hiding her identity/relationship to the Taylor family for decades. Also hiding it from her boyfriend, which winds up blowing up in her face. Granted, the murders took place back in 1975. It was a different time. But still, can’t people talk honestly with each other?

The writing is solid, but the pacing is extremely slow. And the ending (which I won’t spoil here) is not only strange but doesn’t firmly answer important questions. After working my way through 328 pages, that was disappointing.

Three out of five stars for “The Ghostwriter.” Just a little too messy for me.