

“Dancing at the Colony” by Cheryl Blaydon

Artist Cheryl Blaydon’s fifth novel, “Dancing at the Colony,” follows the twists and turns of planning for a wedding to be held at the venerable Colony Hotel, a real place in Kennebunkport. The twists, it turns out, are mostly in the fictional past, and the turns turn on the central relationship between Hazel Mowry and her granddaughter Ellis, the bride-to-be.

Amid considerable fussing, debating, bantering, eating, gossiping, researching gowns, making guest lists and handling all the lovable but pesky folk associated with the upcoming wedding, the story is framed around the parallels between Hazel’s youth and Ellis’s choices, among which is a backfired first marriage. Hazel imparts a good deal of grandmotherly wisdom to calm Ellis’s uncertainties about this second marriage, to Ellis’s undying gratitude. Between wondering what her grandmother’s youth was like and lusting after her fiancé, Artie, we hear quite a bit about Ellis’s thought processes. But the story’s main focus is Hazel, especially her memories stirred by the Colony.

Most chapters find their way either wholly or partly into detailed reveries of the past taking place inside Hazel’s head. Her dear husband, John, has been departed for not too long. But more to the importance of her emotional life are long-ago relationships with two people: her dear friend Sloane, who died decades before, and a lover romantically named Eduardo, for whom — Hazel discovers in her all-consuming reveries — she still carries quite a bright torch. (Ellis figures this out.)

Toward the end of the book in a conversation with a friend, Hazel expresses what may be the core of the story:

“Did you ever feel like you were disappearing, you know, getting so old no one notices you anymore?”

“Isn’t that just loneliness talking?”

“Probably, but being at the Colony made me remember the young woman I’d been and the dreams I had, and now, I’m just empty.”

The wistfulness and directness seem to go to the heart of what Hazel’s memories have been driving at through the whole story. The friend replies good-naturedly, “Maybe you should get a dog,” dispersing the wistfulness and returning to the lightness of mood consistently generated by the book’s figure-skating prose. “Dancing at the Colony” is a depiction of how memories of lost youth filter into even the most commonplace present moments.

Cheryl Blaydon, of East Boothbay, is a [landscape painter](#) and also the author of “Beyond the Ledge,” “The Heart of Stone,” “The Memory Keepers” and “Island Odyssey,” all published by [North Country Press](#).

Off Radar takes note of poetry and books with Maine connections the first and third Thursdays of each month. Dana Wilde is a member of the National Book Critics Circle. Contact him at universe@dwildepress.net.