

## Blood Up North

**Fredrick Soukup**

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In Fredrick Soukup's foreboding novel *Blood Up North*, a hard-scrabbling Minnesota family confronts the backlash of criminality.

Nineteen-year-old Cass's brother, Jack, hides stolen drug money on their grandmother Tilly's property. Then Vick, their estranged, mercurial father, returns with a warning. But Cass, because of their treacherous history, doubts his newfound concern for the family. Violent cousins and her corrupt police officer uncle all home in on Cass, believing that she knows where Jack is hiding. She thinks her relatives don't intend to help: they only want the bounty on Jack for themselves.

Amid the clan's feuding, a brooding, high-stakes thriller unfolds, in which treks through frozen backwoods are heightened by sometimes baroque descriptions, as of "everything slaughtered in the plague of near-winter." These lines tangle with monologues about the past and the lies that Cass must sift through to discern her way out of harm. Meanwhile, the townsfolk's hearsay and convictions about the family's storied history complicate all of the psychological games. Without drawing firm conclusions about inherited bad blood, the provocative story nonetheless reveals a damaged family that is riven by their secrets.

A strong lead who possesses the instincts of a trapper and huntress, Cass is also an isolated caregiver to Tilly, a spitfire who is guided by her faith. Sharp contrasts are drawn between the women's outward harshness and their compassion. Tilly and Cass's taut exchanges are loving, despite their divided opinions on Vick. But Cass knows when to appear acquiescent, and when to tip her hand. The novel is absorbing as Cass gathers details, all of which contribute to the book's surprising, chilling conclusion.

In the precise thriller *Blood Up North*, a family under strain reckons with its cover stories and desire for vengeance.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2022)

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