ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Collecting Sins
Steven Sobel
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The confusion of adolescence rolls through Sobel's Collecting Sins like night fog on the beach. Fifteen-year-old Ben—no longer boy, not yet man—is struck with the potential in life for greatness, while at the same time is confronted by the foibles of "the human condition"—a collision of forces that predestines him to commit unspeakable sins even during acts of heroism. He emerges as a solitary and isolated figure, even as his own friends disappear into the mist of the times: the maw of Vietnam, the banal emptiness of Hippie philosophy and the sensory indulgences of the early seventies. Even tragedy becomes mediocrity as Ben's first love affair with a dying girl is transfigured in the gray light of reality. Lost within himself, Ben is unaware of how much he (and the reader) experience in this adventure that dramatically begins in the catacomb storm drains of a California city; as two boys, with a charming interpretation of Catholicism, set out on a quest to gather sins for the confessional.

The writing is evocative, the subplots are refreshing and the narrative never stalls, creating a story with an unrelenting grip. Even though this is a full novel, Sobel works in the polished, condensed pace of a short story writer —showing little of the rough edges evident in most first-works. A contemporary of his own fictional characters, Sobel is, by trade, a corporate lawyer with graduate degrees in law and business from the University of Southern California. This is his first piece of published fiction, reflecting the labor of several years of work wedged between career and family obligations. Collecting Sins also marks the first fiction for Santa Monica Press, a refreshing and timeless addition to its usual line of trendy how-to books.

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