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Foreword Review GENERAL FICTION

Serpent Tide

K.L. Fogg
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Wesley Vandergrift is being suffocated by his mother … and by the fact that he is heir to billions. Vengeful and prone to rage when things are not going her way, wealthy yet over-protective widow Imogene Vandergrift refuses to allow her son to be a normal kid. To stay sane, Wesley breaks the rules behind the back of Max, the estate's butler and Imogene's spy. Wesley fashions a "magician's" key to unlock taboo rooms in the mansion, brings the school's pet bull snake home for the summer, and dares to scale the outside walls to return unseen to his room from forbidden forays with his only friend, Amanda, daughter of the estate's manager.

The author creates a vivid impression of Wesley's not-so-privileged world. The only things that the boy wishes for, besides meeting his idol Jack Mackey, star of *The Snake Stalker* television series, seem out of reach. That is, until Imogene gets Wesley a long-awaited pet and then allows him a one-day trip to a riding ranch. Coupled with Wesley's insatiable curiosity and his need to find food for the illegally kept bull snake, Imogene unwittingly sets into motion events that lead "the billion-dollar boy" on an intriguing, sometimes gut-wrenching adventure of self-discovery. Along the way the reader finds out how a strong-willed veterinarian, Maggie Scott, her parents, and even Jack Mackey play significant roles in changing Wesley's life forever.

The author gave up a prestigious career as a radio reporter and news anchor and producer in Missouri to stay home with her three young children, and began writing as a way to continue to have grand adventures. Her descriptive abilities are well honed; the way she balances neither too much detail nor too little is a skill many writers never achieve. Surroundings are not beaten to death with boring minutiae and characters are fleshed out fully enough that readers will find themselves disliking Max and loathing Imogene for their scheming ways and snooty airs, while cheering for Wesley and relating to the painful adolescent tribulations he suffers at the hands of his peers.

The one problem Fogg has in this story is her blatant use of real-life adventurer/television star Steve Irwin as her inspiration for Jack Mackey. There are too many parallels for it to be coincidence: both are blonde Australian reptile experts who have an international television show, wear trademark khaki shorts, have the same distinctive mannerisms and speech, travel all over the world hunting crocodiles, and have also produced a show about the world's most deadliest snakes.

Despite this lack of imagination regarding the Mackey character, Fogg has fashioned an engrossing, modern-day tale filled with plenty of action, surprises, and plot twists, which will interest pre-teens and early adolescents, including an ending that gives the reader hope that more adventures will soon be forthcoming.

NELLY HEITMAN (August 18, 2009)

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