

The Bottom of the Sky

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The corrupting influence of big money is just one dark force at work in this story of an abused brother and sister and their futile attempts to rise above their pasts.

Levi Monroe and his sister Lam have known beatings and worse at the hands of their father. Lam was sexually abused on a regular basis and has become a magnet for rape and seduction. Their mother, Virginia, put them through another kind of hell with her cancer and inability to deal with her husbands behavior. Poverty has dealt yet another blow, overlaying Levis troubled mind with humiliation. He seeks to rise above and leave behind everything hes ever known, abandoning his family and hometown of Roundup, Montana, in search of prosperity and respect. When he becomes the youngest broker at the Billings branch of Bookman Stuart, he discovers that his background clings to him like a shadow, predisposing those with moneyed roots to look down on him-men such as Gary Crawford, who recommends against his hire and becomes his adversary.

This is a well-told story of decay and doom. The prose is polished and smooth and the characters introspective. The timeline, however, can be confusing, with some events tied to decades in which they did not occur. But both the Montana background and the details of the financial industry are exhaustive and reflective of the authors birthplace and his career in the brokerage industry.

The overwhelming aura of tragedy and the futility of the characters struggles make this story a painful if gripping read. Levis integrity in the face of Crawfords' corruption, and his "hunches" that allow him to sense stock market behavior and preserve his clients assets, only seem to bring him more trouble. The infidelity to his childhood sweetheart Angela, and his inability to leave the office behind as he works himself right out of their marriage, contribute to the gloom. Levis successes-in fact, all of the characters successes-go for naught in the end as the patterns of the past refuse to die.

MARLENE SATTER (July / August 2009)

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