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Ties That Bind Way Down Deep

Monique Gilmore-Scott
Panache (November 1998)
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Beneath a veneer of too much blow-by-blow football and repetitive introspection lies a novel full of character and vitality, peopled by individuals all looking not to turn into—or be used by—anyone like the women who gave birth to them.

Kaj Richards is a former award winning football star for the Nebraska Cornhuskers whose blown knee prevents him having the career in pro-football he?d counted on to get him and his family out of the “Jer-z” neighborhood where he grew up. He is bitter, too caught up in what might have been, and prone to blaming his lot in life on someone else. The award winning Gilmore-Scott prevents him from being unsympathetic by showing us his struggle to be a better person through his own eyes, by letting us see his own recognition of his flaws—and by giving him an English mastiff named Zeus who obviously adores him.

New veterinarian, Dana Alexander, is much like Kaj, but less bitter and more determined to be the person she set out to be in life both because of and in spite of her upbringing. Gilmore-Scott brings Dana and Kaj together through a chance meeting over a Mont Blanc pen at their mutual bank, then at the bus stop across from the construction site where Kaj works, then finally over Dana’s attempt to save the life of Kaj’s dog, Zeus. Mutual emotion brings Dana easily to Kaj, allows them to start a relationship based primarily on sex, before friendship finally comes to the fore to break the ties that have bound them each to their respective pasts.

Gilmore-Scott uses time shifts neatly and easily, never confusing the reader, whether the scene is “Kaj, 1988” or “Dana, here and now.” There is an occasional problem with shifting verb tenses and confusing sentence structure. Ties That Bind could benefit from another editing, but once you look past the mechanical flaws the story itself and the sentiment that charges it are rich, full and satisfying.

TERESE RAMIN (December 16, 1998)

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