River of Heaven: A Novel

You have to know the rest of my story, the part I can’t yet bring myself to say. A story of a boy I knew a long time ago and a brother I loved and then lost.”

Past and present collide in Lee Martin’s highly anticipated novel of a man, his brother, and the dark secret that both connects and divides them. Haunting and beautifully wrought, River of Heaven weaves a story of love and loss, confession and redemption, and the mystery buried with a boy named Dewey Finn.

On an April evening in 1955, Dewey died on the railroad tracks outside Mt. Gilead, Illinois, and the mystery of his death still confounds the people of this small town.

River of Heaven begins some fifty years later and centers on the story of Dewey’s boyhood friend Sam Brady, whose solitary adult life is much formed by what really went on in the days leading up to that evening at the tracks. It’s a story he’d do anything to keep from telling, but when his brother, Cal, returns to Mt. Gilead after decades of self-exile, it threatens to come to the surface.
A Pulitzer Prize finalist for The Bright Forever, Lee Martin masterfully conveys, with a voice that is at once distinct and lyrical, one man’s struggle to come to terms with the outcome of his life. Powerful and captivating, River of Heaven is about the high cost of living a lie, the chains that bind us to our past, and the obligations we have to those we love.

My Personal Review:
I became a big fan of Lee Martin after reading his novel, The Bright Forever. I have anxiously awaited his follow-up work and River of Heaven did not disappoint. Simply put, Martin is a master storyteller. His characters come alive in their imperfection. Throughout this touching story, I felt Sammys joy and his pain. As an avid, but somewhat picky reader, that is rare and truly enjoyable experience. Few writers could tell this solitary mans story without it becoming depressing, but Martin does just that. His simple prose and perfect details tell just what we need to know and nothing more.

River of Heaven is a story youll think about long after you have finished it. Personally, I dont think about the story itself as much as I wonder what Sam, Maddie, Vera and Duncan Hines are up to these days. That, to me, is good storytelling - characters that live on after the book has been finished and shelved or shared. I cannot give this novel, or anything by Lee Martin a high enough recommendation.

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