



The Floor of the Sky

Pamela Carter Joern

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In the Nebraska Sandhills, nothing is more sacred than the bond of family and land—and nothing is more capable of causing deep wounds. In Pamela Carter Joern's riveting novel *The Floor of the Sky*, Toby Jenkins, an aging widow, is on the verge of losing her family's ranch when her granddaughter Lila—a city girl, sixteen and pregnant—shows up for the summer. While facing painful decisions about her future, Lila uncovers festering secrets about her grandmother's past—discoveries that spur Toby to reconsider the ambiguous ties she holds to her embittered sister Gertie, her loyal ranch hand George, her not-so-sympathetic daughter Nola Jean, and ultimately, herself. Propelled by stark realism in breakneck prose, *The Floor of the Sky* reveals the inner worlds of characters isolated by geography and habit. Set against the sweeping changes in rural America—from the onslaught of corporate agribusiness to the pressures exerted by superstores on small towns—Joern's compelling story bears witness to the fortitude and hard-won wisdom of people whose lives have been forged by devotion to the land.

The Floor of the Sky Details

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Holly says

Toby Jenkins, now 72, has been living all her life in the same ornate Sears, Roebuck farmhouse in the Nebraska Sandhills her father bought for her mother back in 1920. For now, Toby aims to stay there with her cranky self-righteous sister, Gertie, despite the local weasel banker's pressure to sell. Toby is widowed, resolute and land-scarred; a string of family deaths, tragedies and abandonments have left Toby and Gertie with no one to pass the place on to. Then Toby's 16-year-old pregnant granddaughter, Lila, arrives from Minneapolis. At first the unloved, metal-studded Lila, the child of Toby's adoptive daughter, a bitter airline stewardess, is surly and ungrateful, but eventually her curiosity about country rituals and her grandmother's life leads her to the family cemetery and to archives harboring long-buried family secrets. Playwright Joern's characters are as stern as the land, and the world of her debut novel is sturdy and memorable.

Shaymetz says

A very different read, one that is told in many different voices. Some of it by the main character, some of it by her granddaughter and some of it by other characters. It's about this grandma who kinda has a hard time in her life right now, her sister just moved in with her, her health isn't the best she has come to realize and she may be losing her land. And on top of all of this, she finds out that her pregnant granddaughter is coming to live with her. Which is the second part of the book, it tells about the granddaughter who used to come and stay all the time but once she grew up, she stopped coming. It talks about finding herself and realizing just what it's going to be like to be a mother.

Rjchaussee says

I thought the book was very well written and the characters generally believable.
Having lived in a rural setting, I can appreciate the love of the land
The author developed the characters in a way that you could see the opposing sides of their personalities at once seeming hard but then tender and loving.
I especially liked the way the author described the relationship between
Toby and her pregnant granddaughter.
So many family secrets and old resentments tend to tear this family apart.

Sharon says

This was a thought provoking story of Midwestern life on a ranch in western Nebraska. The story spans three generations of well developed characters and their relationships. It is told through the point of view of different characters, and I was grateful for the headings. The main characters are 16 year old Lila, who is sent to live with her grandmother on the ranch for the summer. She is pregnant and needs to come to some decisions. It takes an honest approach to life and leaves no lose ends. It would be a great book for a book club to discuss.

Denise Spooner says

I enjoy books about the midwest, having been born in Iowa. This book, part of a series of books whose stories are set in the Midwest--the Flyover Series from the University of Nebraska Press, is the story of a teenager, Lila, pregnant, who travels from Minnesota to the Sandhills of Nebraska to spend her pregnancy with her grandmother, a woman estranged from her own daughter, Lila's mother. Set on a ranch, adjacent to a small town that has been home to Lila's ancestors for some time, the book does a fine job capturing the sense of small town life in the Midwest, the financial struggle to survive, the deep connections between the people who live, places where everyone knows everyone else's business. The ranch community includes Lila's grandmother, Toby; Toby's sister, Gertie; Toby's brother, John; a ranch hand, George; and assorted other family members and neighbors. There is much coming to terms with the past in this story, most of which centers around the complex, fraught relationships family members have with each other as well as people who have died and/or moved on, such as Lila's mother. While some of the characters are well drawn, others are less so, such as Gertie, who is a sort stock sour, disappointed, angry, evangelical Christian who carries a martyr's burdens, at least in her own eyes. In fact, no one does anything surprising in this book. Lila confronts her need to be nurtured; Toby wrestles with financial problems and her perceived failings as a mother and sister, as well as lost love . . . you pretty much know how the characters will fare before the book ends, but not the devices that will be employed to bring the end about. If you are looking for insight into what life in the Midwest or Great Plains states is like, outside major cities, this book provides a good sense of that. But the characters and the dynamic of the story are not particular to the Midwest. Lila is the catalyst by way of which others come to grips with their lives . . . or not, depending on the character. Thus, I'd say this is an average read.

Jill Nieters says

I love a good book about country living, love of your land, and a family. The simple life.

Susan says

I loved this book. Pam's writing is as elegantly spare as the landscape of the book's Nebraska landscape. Every word counts - nothing is wasted.

Donna Jo Atwood says

I won't retell the plot here, except to say that it is a multigenerational story, played out in the Sandhill of Nebraska. Joern has the midwestern characters just right, from the dialogue to the values. She has been compared to Willa Cather, and I can see that comparison, but she has a more modern approach to storytelling. Give this book a try if you are interested in a solid, non-sensational book.

Desirae says

Taking place in the boonies of rural Nebraska, Toby and Gertie hold down the Alhambra on their father's ranch with their ranch hands George and John. The Floor of the Sky tells a widow's story about love let lost and painful decisions.

Toby and Gertie are determined to do anything she can to save her father's ranch that is being lost to taxes. When her teenaged granddaughter, Lila, shows up on her doorstep, pregnant, Toby has more problems than she bargained for.

Lila pries around a bit and finds out shocking facts about her grandmothers' past. Lila reunited with her long-ago, inseparable cousin, Clay and is introduced to his married girlfriend. She finds herself wanting to know more about her family's past and as to why they are who they've become.

Lila and Toby share many deep conversations and reveal a lot about each other. Lila, being pregnant, is told a story about Toby's first biological child, and what happened to him after one dreadful happening. She found out about why Rosemary (Lila's great-grandmother) and David (Toby's first love) have the same death date. Even though there are many wrong doings and horrible pasts, this family is strong and is there when anything happens.

Lila grows to be very fond of Toby and as does Toby towards Lila. They learn to deal with life and what it throws at you. The Floor to the Sky is a fascinating tale that teaches "There is more then meets the eye."

Beverly Crows says

Quick Easy read. The characters are very well written and believable. I was drawn to this book because it was about a farm and family. In the end all the characters could be anyone in any situation, it is not a 'farmy' type book at all.

Candice says

This was recommended by a friend, and I'm glad she brought it to my attention. It's the kind of book I like. Family secrets and the consequences of keeping those secrets. The characters were believable and, for the most part, likeable. I saw the book compared to books by Kent Haruf, and I would agree that many people who liked Plainsong and Eventide might like this as well.

Mary says

Toby is just about to lose her family ranch in Nebraska to back taxes when her pregnant teen granddaughter Lila arrives from Minnesota to spend the summer. Both women face painful decisions they must make in the near future, and those they've made in the past. As the summer moves forward, Lila discovers some family secrets which could help or hinder her decision making.

This was a beautiful, evocative story of modern midwestern America. The characters' connection to the land is heartfelt, in fact, the land itself is so deeply part of the story, it almost becomes a character. The characters' relationships with each other are authentic and accessible to the reader. I would recommend this to anyone

who is interested in human relationships, particularly those concerning the modern American rancher and farmer.

Hope says

Hope Geiger
The Floor of the Sky
By: Pamela Carter Joern

In *The Floor of the Sky*, nothing could be more interesting than the Nebraska life. The secrets that are revealed in the family history show that not everything is boring in Nebraska. Guilt and jealousy are resurfaced as a new family member arrives, and they must decide on where the past shall lay.

When Lila discovers she is pregnant, her mother decides to send her to her grandmother's house, nestled in the sand hills. At first, Lila is wary about the move, and doesn't seem to want to get along with her grandmother, Toby. Toby is hardened by the years and sticks to keeping Lila healthy while she is pregnant, but has a hard time communicating with her. When Lila finds a new interest in Rosemary, her great-grandmother, she starts uncovering secrets that nobody thought to even mention.

Joern portrays the family turmoil perfectly, and knows just when to attack it, leaving the reader hungry to know more information about the scandal. She connects each character to the family and shows the importance of each relationship. Drama and mystery are the most compelling traits of this book, and Joern knows how to keep suspense in full swing.

The main drama of this story is centered around the death of two people close to the family, whose deaths occurred strangely on the same day. Toby was leaving with her boyfriend, David, whom she had grown very close to in high school. She was leaving home to live with him before he left for the war. Her father, Luther, was a very cold man and he didn't agree with Toby's decision so he was infuriated when he found out about her plan. Rosemary accompanied him when they drove to stop the couple, but nobody knew just how mad Luther really was. He leaned out of his vehicle and shot David in the face, causing the young couple's car to careen into theirs. The accident resulted in the death of David and Rosemary, and the crippling of Luther. And to make matters worse, Toby was also pregnant with David's baby.

Joern shows Toby's longing and her struggle to maintain a life in the house that she despised because of her father, and the loss of her first love. Toby's life and hardships become of great importance in this story, especially in helping Lila through her own journey.

Lila represents the other part of this book. Her self discovery and growth is apparent throughout her time in Nebraska. She began to relate to Toby's experiences, and that's what made their relationship blossom. When Toby revealed the secret about her own baby and how Luther made her give him up for adoption, the readers finally began to get a sense of their bond that had grown stronger. It also put Toby's personality in perspective, and gave an understanding as to why she had thoughts about death.

While the drama is very relevant in most parts of this book, there are some periods that can be confusing. Near the beginning it is hard to keep up with the many different characters that are introduced. It also may seem to be unrealistic that so many people die that are related to this family. The drama is intense but it can sometimes seem to not go together since the secrets tend to be major ones that aren't always connected to the

next. I also didn't like the ending because it seemed that Lila's letter to her baby should have been more thought out, and that the ending shouldn't have been so abrupt.

Overall, I would recommend this book to people who like to read about family drama, and hardships, but not to those who like resolutions in their endings.

Kara says

I give this book 5 out of 5 stars. It was very suspenseful and a great page turner. I recommend this book to anyone. Toby, 72, lived all her life in the same ornate farmhouse in Nebraska her father bought in 1920. For now, Toby aims to stay there despite the local banker's pressure to sell. Toby is widowed; a long line of family deaths, tragedies and abandonment have left her with no one to pass the farm on to. Then her 16-year-old pregnant granddaughter, Lila, arrives. At first, Lila, the only child of Toby's adopted daughter, is ungrateful, but eventually her curiosity about country rituals and her grandmother's life leads her to the family cemetery and to uncovering long-buried family secrets.

Liz says

Read this book in high school. I remember really liking it.
