

Sometimes the best stories are the simplest ones, and Brian Smith's debut novel, *Losing Innocence*, would definitely fall within this category.

Smith traces the relationship between two individuals, who before having met one another, were caught up in horrendous marriages. Mia is the mother of two teenage boys, Vince and Jesse and she has recently divorced her husband Jeff, who had physically and emotionally abused her. Lance is the father of a teen age daughter, Tori, and he likewise has just divorced his spouse due to infidelity and substance abuse. Lance was also the product of an abusive relationship with his father during his childhood and teenage years.

Mia and Lance meet, after the latter's daughter, who is very concerned about her father's erratic behavior, arranges a meeting through an Internet dating site. Mia and Lance fall in love and eventually marry. However, Mia, who shares joint custody of her sons with her husband Jeff, is constantly being badgered by her ex-husband, who is trying to have her relinquish full parental control of the children to him. In addition, there is suspicion that Jeff is physically abusing his son Vince. That is the bare bones of the narrative.

But the story is much more, wherein the author powerfully and painfully explores the emotional, physical and verbal abuse that tear families apart and sometimes can lead to tragic endings. Moreover, it is a subject worthy of writing about, when you consider that in the USA domestic violence accounts for the single largest cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44.

Unfortunately, main stream publishing houses very often shy away from the subject matter, as it is still considered taboo to write about this disturbing topic.

The novel is also an attestation of how adversity can be overcome when one develops self-esteem, individuality and a regaining of trust in others. Although, *Losing Innocence* is replete with human suffering, there is still room for love and that unquenched thirst for survival.

Smith is not the most polished writer and readers will not find high literature style here, as evidenced by the sometimes cartoonish and mundane dialogue. Nonetheless, he does know how to write a page- turning novel and once started it becomes very difficult to put down. It is quite easy to be swept along with the story, even though reading about ugly family relations is always emotionally a challenge and can be heavy slogging at times.

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