

Climbing the Coliseum

Bill Percy

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Through the thrilling story of a psychologist in a small Montana town, Percy broaches complex topics with creativity and sensitivity.

Bill Percy's *Climbing the Coliseum* is witty, insightful, and at times heartbreaking as Ed Northrup, a psychologist always willing to lend a helping hand, finally learns how to help himself as well.

Ed contemplates dating, dieting, and, in despair, even stepping off the edge of the majestic Coliseum, a nearby cliff. But when faced with a series of shocking and troubling events, Ed is forced back into the land of the living. Simply going through the motions of the daily grind, even Ed's friends have started to notice that something is missing in his life. Montana's Monastery Valley is a close-knit community, and Ed is well-liked and respected. Sheriff Ben Stewart thinks dating new arrival Deputy Andrea Pelton will help, but Andi has a secret past and demons of her own. Then, in a flurry of anger, guilt, and hurt, Ed's ex-wife whirls through town, where she abandons her rebellious fourteen-year-old daughter, Grace. Simultaneously, local ranchers Maggie and Vic Sobstak become entrenched in a dangerous plot hatched by a crooked out-of-towner with a hidden agenda, and Ed and Andi end up right in the middle.

Often more character study than mystery, each player is well-drawn, flawed yet likable, and has a distinct voice. Percy, perhaps channeling his own experiences as a psychologist, broaches complex emotions with creativity and sensitivity. Ed refers to his own depression as the "black dog": "He preferred calling it the black dog to 'depression'...It was a rough cowboy phrase Magnus Anderssen had once used to describe a foreman's depression. 'It's a black dog, Ed, gnawing him like a bone.'"

Climbing the Coliseum manages to be both reflective and action-filled as the men and women of Monastery Valley each deal with crises in their own way. Organized into five parts, chapters are headed and divided by a combination of months, dates, and times occurring over the winter and into the cold Montana spring. The time line enhances and orders the strands that weave the story together, allowing Percy to explore a town full of unique characters without overexplaining or being redundant.

An engaging and uplifting tale, *Climbing the Coliseum* will appeal to mystery lovers who enjoy characters with depth. The men and women of Monastery Valley will cause laughter, and maybe a few tears. Percy has promised at least two sequels that will be sure to appease fans of *Climbing the Coliseum*.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (October 27, 2014)

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