



The Flood

Michael McDowell

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Elinor Dammert was rescued from her room in the flood-isolated hotel. What strange mission brought her there? How did she survive her isolation? Why was she in the Alabama town of Perdido that Easter morning in 1919?

These questions would never be answered because larger and even more terrifying ones would be asked. She soon would become a strange presence in the wealthy Caskey family and their town. Horrors, virtually unspeakable and nearly indescribable, follow.

The Flood Details

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Author : Michael McDowell

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From Reader Review The Flood for online ebook

Anthony Vacca says

A charming comedy of Southern manners starring a family of wealthy mill owners is interrupted by the arrival of a town-swallowing flood and an amphibious woman with ambition for aristocracy. As the first entry in McDowell's Blackwater, *The Flood* takes the melodramatics of the family saga (i.e. those unassailable passions and their inevitable betrayals that span generations and keep soap operas on air for decades) and enlivens all the impropriety with a whimsical flair for horror. A breezy delight to read with some wry commentary on gender dynamics.

? Irena ? says

Most of us tend to pick a side in a book we are reading. It is almost impossible to do that here. If there weren't one incident with a boy and a whirlpool, it would be easy. The only thing that made me lean towards one is how obnoxiously annoying the other one was throughout the book.

Elinor Dammert just appeared in a flooded hotel room to be 'rescued' by Oscar Caskey and Bray Sugarwhite. From the first moment you know there is something strange about her. She conveniently lost her other suitcase with her documents and diplomas (if there ever was one). Over the course of the story Elinor proceeds to show just how different she actually is. The best thing is that there are no explanations and yet you don't feel you are left in the dark. For the first book in the series it seems enough to know that the river, water in general, is very important to her.

As for the characters in this book, they aren't very deep, but I got the feeling that they aren't supposed to be. At least, not in this first book. Nothing is lost, the story holds your attention quite well even with the characters that seem to have only one or two pronounced traits (Elinor seems cunning and cold, Mary Love is constantly annoyed, Sister and Oscar are spineless each in their own way and so on). None of it ruins this story. They are still wonderfully alive in my mind.

At first I found Mary Love, the matriarch of the Casky family, amusing but she started getting on my nerves later on.

A flooded small town, a mysterious woman, unexplained behaviour, even death, these all create this deliciously creepy atmosphere. The writing is superb. You could almost feel the stink of rotten and wet wood after the flood. And you will almost start sweating during the heat wave. That atmosphere more than anything else, more than the characters, is the linchpin of the story.

The Flood is the first book in *Blackwater* series and it ends with a cliffhanger. I usually hate them, but whether it is because of the writing or something else, it works in this book. As a starting point for a series, it manages to grab one's attention really well.

Kate says

Jonathan Janz says

When I used to think of amazing Southern Gothic writers, some names that always popped into my head were Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, Harry Crews, and Erskine Caldwell.

After reading THE ELEMENTALS and THE FLOOD (BLACKWATER #1), I now think of Michael McDowell too. That I group him with the above writers should tell you everything about how much I love his work and respect him as a storyteller.

So...yeah. Five stars. McDowell is incredible.

Noel says

I can forgive a book a slow plot if the characters are great. But in this book, the plot was slow, and the characters were rather dull. This feels like just a prologue to the series really, which is fine, but I felt like it should have either been about half the length, or should have had more going on in the middle. All of the hints of creepiness from the beginning were lost for most of the book. And those creepy bits were great, so I was pretty disappointed when they were gone.

I'm not sure if I'll continue on. Part of me wants to, because I think that when things start happening that the series will be pretty good, but I'm not sure the next installment will be any better.

Layton says

This is my fifth Review Month review.

Does anyone else remember that great romp of a soap opera, Dark Shadows from the 60s and early 70s?

I've always loved that show, even though I wasn't exactly around when it originally aired. Every episode had deliciously cheesy dialogue and I think the series had some great storylines, with the best of course being Barnabas's first shows.

I'm currently reading the fourth book in this series, and the whole time I've read the series I've felt like this was almost a southern version of that series with watered down supernatural elements (pun intended), and a more serious story.

The series takes place in Perdido, Alabama, a town ruled by the rich families who own the lumber mills that

operate along the two rivers that branch off from the town. Here is a map of Perdido that I found online while reading the first book that helped me visualize its makeup a little better.

It was tricky finding this particular, **fictional** map, because there is actually a real town in Alabama named Perdido.

If you look to the left of the map, alongside the Perdido River are five houses. The three to the farthest left belong to the richest family of all, The Caskeys, who our story is based around.

This first book in the series starts after a flood covers all of Perdido in 1919, causing all the townspeople to move to higher ground. Some men take boats out into this partially covered town to make sure everyone got out, and that no one remains in the upper stories of the buildings.

Oscar Caskey, son of the family matriarch Mary Love, is out searching with the family handyman/gardener/chauffeur, Bray Sugarwhite.

The two men are passing the second story of the Osceola Hotel, when Bray spots a woman sitting inside on one of the beds. This woman comes with Oscar and Bray back to higher ground.

The rest of the town are baffled that she has survived for a week in the hotel without eating. Bray is even more baffled when he goes back to retrieve her bags and sees the high-water mark of the flood is somewhere near the ceiling of the room.

Little does Oscar, Bray, or the rest of the Caskey family know what effect this enigmatic and mysterious woman will have on the town of Perdido, or on the family itself.

This lady's name is Elinor Dammert, and she isn't entirely human.

This first book in the series is fantastic, but it doesn't hold up to the next three books. This series just keeps getting better and better, and some members of this family are so complex and well written it really baffles me.

The thing that McDowell does in this book that I hope he was really proud of was he perfectly showed the relations and "rules" of a southern family. He just understood that southern antebellum behavior that makes the south such a wild place.

He also creates an astounding atmosphere. I could practically feel the southern heat on my skin, and the sun bearing down on me. Oh, and the awesome imagery. Every scene in this book is so fleshed out and visceral, I actually felt as if I was standing in the background of some of them.

The strange thing about how he is able to create this atmosphere and imagery is the fact that he takes a very minimalist approach to descriptions. The reader never gets a clear depiction of what the Caskeys look like, nor do we get a rendering of what Perdido itself looks like. **But I never really wanted one, I enjoyed**

having my own idea of what this place looked and felt like.

McDowell is a real forgotten treasure of a writer and after researching him, I have even more respect for him.

This is a man **who graduated from Harvard** and could have written literary, mass-published novels, but who chose to write paperback originals so he could get more work out to his readers.

"I am writing things to be put in the bookstore next month. I think it is a mistake to try to write for the ages."

And at the same time he was also a really interesting man. He collected pictures of corpses and, rumour has it, his coffee table was an empty coffin.

So without any doubt I give 5 black-as-the-flood stars to this wonderful forgotten classic.

Even if it's not as good as its successors, you always have to start somewhere.

You can find my review of McDowell's other book, The Elementals, [here](#) .

Karl says

Michael McDowell (June 1, 1950 – December 27, 1999) was a talented writer who is perhaps best known for his work on the screenplay for the Tim Burton film "Beetlejuice".

His final, unfinished novel "Candles Burning" was completed by novelist Tabitha King and published in 2006.

McDowell wrote fiction at night while supporting himself through teaching and secretarial work. Six early novels with titles like "Venus Restored" and "Blood and Glitter" went unpublished and are still unpublished.

His publishing debut came in 1979 with the publication of "The Amulet", which he had begun writing as a screenplay. From there to around 1987, McDowell would publish over 30 novels, 16 of them under his own name. Some were purely contractual, including a series of light "Nick and Nora" type mysteries written for Ballantine Books called "Jack and Susan", and a novelization of the movie "Clue".

He wrote two novels as Axel Young, four novels as Nathan Aldyne, three novels as Preston Macadam, and one more under the name of Mike McCray as well as seventeen books under his own name. In the forward of the first volume in this book Poppy Z. Bright states there is still one more pseudo name that has not been revealed as of yet, and also states that McDowell wrote over 40 books.

"I do feel that the universe is a joke," McDowell said. "And that we are the butt of that joke. And horror is

one of the best ways of saying that, of saying that there are things out there and forces and vibrations that are simply malevolent.”

This is Southern Gothic smoothly written with style and we follow the rise and deterioration of family and fortune.

This set (originally published in 1983) consists of the six books in the series.

Book 1: The Flood

Book 2: The Levee

Book 3: The House

Book 4: The War

Book 5: The Torture

Book 6: The Rain

All beautifully illustrated and in a slipcase, this signed and numbered is set 199 of 250.

Jeffrey Keeten says

”The town rotted beneath a wide sheet of stinking, still black water, which only now was beginning to recede. The pediments and gables and chimneys of houses that had not been broken up and washed away jutted up through the black shining surface of the flood, stone and brick and wooden emblems of distress. But no assistance came to their silent summonses, and driftwood and unidentifiable detritus and scraps of clothing and household furnishings swept against them and were caught and formed reeking nests around those upraised fingers.”

Elinor Dammert arrives with the flood.

No one is sure how she survived the flood in that room in the Hotel Osceola. Bray Sugarwhite, the black man accompanying Oscar Caskey in a boat when they liberate Elinor through the window of that hotel room, might have said it best. *”He stared at the back of the young woman who had had no business at all being found where she was found.”*

The waterline on the wall paper in that room is higher than what she could have survived.

Maybe she has gills and webbed feet.

That is a knee slapper of a thought.

The arrival of a new woman, a teacher, is an exhilarating occurrence in a town where, *”the most exciting thing to do in Perdido is sit on the bank of the river and count the dead possums floating by!”*

She moves in with Oscar’s Uncle James, who needs someone to help him with his daughter Grace after his wife Genevieve went on an extended holiday to Nashville and never came back. She likes to drink and have

a good time. James *"despite the possession of that wife and daughter---had the reputation of being marked with 'the stamp of femininity.'"*

That "stamp" keeps the town from whispering too much about a single, lovely, redheaded woman living in the house of a married man while the wife is on "holiday."

Now Mary-Love Caskey, mother of Oscar and sister of James, doesn't like Elinor, not one bit. It doesn't help her not to like her, knowing how much James appreciates her or having to watch Oscar looking at her with doe eyes, like a moon sick calf. She doesn't like the fact that Elinor is odd by nature and that she doesn't know her people.

Strange, unusual things start happening beyond the normal strange things that seem to be a hallmark of Southern living. Those peculiar things about the South that so inspired William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, and Pat Conroy to capture those essences on paper. Jewelry buried with a corpse suddenly reappears, and people go missing; there are strange noises, bumps and bangs, and doors shimmy and shake in ways they shouldn't. **"Oh, Mama,' she pleaded in a whisper, 'don't open that door.'"**

Of course, Mama hasn't watched the movies that I've watched over the years. The golden rule of horror cinema is...**never...open...the...door.**

The novel spirals more and more out of control as Elinor and Mary-Love become more creative in their battles to control each other.

Michael McDowell wrote this six part series in the 1980s. It was the first serialized horror novel that I had ever encountered. The mass market originals were published by Avon books and have these distinctive creepy black covers. Copies in very good to fine condition are becoming quite collectible. I had many, many copies go through my hands over the years of working in the used book business. This serialization actually inspired Stephen King, who is a big fan of McDowell's writing, to serialize *The Green Mile* in 1996.

Did you hear something, Michael McDowell?

McDowell was a collector of death memorabilia, which might account for some of the disturbing descriptions that he uses in his writing. He was born in Alabama and died in Massachusetts, unfortunately, at the tender age of 49. Yet another creative person lost to the AIDS epidemic. He knew the South intimately. I could tell by the descriptions of these colorful characters that he created them in similar fashion to how Frankenstein assembled his monster, with pieces and parts of numerous people.

As you can tell by the opening quote I started this review with, his books ooze with gothic nuances. The novel on the surface feels so normal, but underlying the words is this feeling of impending doom and the sizzling hum of menacing danger. The reader knows things aren't quite right, but we don't know exactly why.

So get your feet wet **"in the churning water dyed the color of the clay beneath---dyed red, Perdido red"**

and swelter a while with the people of Alabama as they clean up their water swollen hymnals, bump the alligators off their front porch, and try to restore their town to dryland. Rest assured, I'll be reading the rest.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Tressa says

Michael McDowell died of AIDS in 1999. He was taken from the publishing world way too soon.

I'm a southerner and a big fan of southern gothic literature. McDowell wrote a series called Blackwater that tells the story of a southern family's rise and fall, all due to a stranger who showed up in town one day.

I'm including an article I wrote for my library's blog about this wonderful author. Please search down his books and read them. You won't be disappointed.

The recent 9th annual Alabama Bound at the Central library brought to mind my all-time favorite Alabama author, Michael McDowell. Never heard of him? It could be the fact that not every great writer makes the New York Times bestseller's list. Well, to be honest, most of our great writers don't. McDowell is one of those writers. Unfortunately, he died too soon and too underrated.

McDowell was born in 1950 in Enterprise, Alabama. He died in 1999 of AIDS-related illness in Boston, Massachusetts. In between he left his mark on different fiction genres and even rubbed elbows with Hollywood's Tim Burton through their collaborations on Beetlejuice (1987) and Nightmare Before Christmas (1993).

My first introduction to McDowell happened 25 years ago in my favorite used bookstore on Rocky Ridge Road. Browsing the horror section I came across a series set in Alabama. Blackwater (1983) is a serial of six books that tells the story of the Caskey family's rise to power in the small mill town of Perdido, Alabama. The twist in the story is that the matriarch is something other than human; something that crawled from the red mud of the Perdido riverbank and set her ambitious sights on a man and a town.

The Amulet (1979), Cold Moon Over Babylon (1980) and The Elementals (1981) are also set in Alabama and contain similar supernatural themes of revenge and redemption. McDowell is an expert at bringing to life the mannerisms and diction of his southern characters, from the sweet tea they guzzle in the summer to their endearing use of "gone" for "going." It's not for nothing that McDowell's southern gothics are matriach-heavy; he really had an understanding of just who heads up families here in the south.

McDowell takes a wide turn in his two turn of the century novels set in New York, Katie (1982) and Gilded Needles (1980). Katie tells the story of a cunning woman, her dull, psychic stepdaughter and their desperate attempts to hang on to a carpetbag full of blood money. Don't let the book cover showing a silhouette of a girl holding an ax dripping with blood and the line "Katie kills for kicks and cash" scare you away. This is not a pulp fiction throwaway but a smart, tense story that will keep you white knuckled until the last word. Gilded Needles chronicles the clashes between a mother and her family of thieves and a powerful, wealthy New York judge.

Stephen King didn't call McDowell one of the "finest writers of paperback originals in America today" for nothing. Tabitha King was asked to complete McDowell's unfinished novel *Candles Burning*, which was published last year to good reviews.

Many of McDowell's books are out of print and hard to find. So if you find yourself in some dusty used bookstore and happen to spot one, grab it for posterity.

Kimberly says

The Flood is the first in a series of six books in Michael McDowell's BLACKWATER series. This was a fantastic start that had everything you could want to satisfy those that love Southern Gothic books, and leave you wanting to continue the series immediately. A strange woman, stranded by a flood, is rescued in town. What follows in this book is how she takes to life in town and sets about marrying into one of the richest, most influential families there. Elinor is a mysterious character that I can't help but like--both for what I've learned about her, and what I haven't yet.

I don't want to give away too much here (as there are five other books to read yet), but fans of Gothic, atmospheric horror will not be disappointed in this book, or--I suspect--this entire series.

Highest recommendation!

Cody | codysbookshelf says

This was my introduction to the writing of Michael McDowell, and wow, what an experience!

The first volume in a series of six slim paperbacks, *The Flood* serves as an introduction to the characters of Perdido, Alabama: particularly the Caskey family and their slaves, and Elinor Dammert — a mysterious newcomer. Set in 1919, McDowell captures the essence of southern life perfectly, in all its strangeness and pettiness and peculiar beauty. I live only a couple hours north of the area the author is writing about, which was very cool. Not enough horror takes place in my neck of the woods!

This is very much a slow burn of a novel (or novella, if you prefer), with a higher priority on character development than anything else. I don't know the last time I read about an extended family that felt this colorful and alive and memorable . . . maybe never?

A fantastic read through and through, I highly recommend this book, and I cannot wait to move on to the rest of the series. Consider me a Michael McDowell fan.

Peter says

The Flood is the first book in the Blackwater series. If you are a fan of Southern Gothic, then I think that you will enjoy Michael McDowell style. A flood wipes out the town of Perdido, Alabama in 1919. Oscar Caskey and Bray Sugarwhite rescue Elinor Dammert, who is stranded at the Osceola Hotel. Oscar and Bray bring

Elinor back to Caskey household. Elinor seems to win most of the hearts of the Caskey family, with the exception of Mary Love and Sister. The Caskey's are the rich family in Perdido. Mary Love is the ruler of the Caskey clan and everything has to be done her way. The Caskey family is truly dysfunctional and you are drawn into their own lives and problems. I could not wait to read the next book in The Blackwater Series. If you read the saga of the Caskey family, I know that you will not be disappointed. I recommend this series!

The Behrg says

There are a lot of things to love in McDowell's opening to his Blackwater Series. The setting, of a town recovering from a flood; the characters that inhabit this Southern world, their complexities and prejudices; the dialogue, which reveals as much through what isn't said as what is; the elements of gothic horror, with Elinore Dammert, the Perdido river, and far more questions presented than answers. But all of these things amount to nothing without the absolute authenticity which shines throughout this work.

Writing about the South isn't as easy as one might expect. There's a fine line between making things feel real and stepping into the colorful land of cliches. This really is what elevates this work to the next level, as McDowell straddles that line as if it never even existed, never straying too far one way or the other. This is a magnificent set up, and if you reach the end of this book and aren't wanting to dive immediately into Part 2, well I recommend you read some Dan Brown books or something.

Pleasantly surprised with this read and hungry for what comes next in the lives of Elinore Dammert and the folks of Perdido.

Char says

This book has it all for any horror fan!

Creepy creature masquerading as human? Check!

Southern gothic style tale set in a small town? Check!

Horrible happenings surrounded in mystery? Check!

Vivid characters and scenes that are easily and perfectly rendered in your mind? Check!

All the small town, gossipy mean-ness and the grit of day to day life? Check!

Combine all that yumminess with a writer possessing a mastery of the language, without being too cheesy, without being pretentious, and with an eye towards FUN. You can't go wrong!

This is a novella, so it doesn't take long to whip through. It's also a cliffhanger. I normally hate that, but in this case I knew that it was a serial novel so I expected and embraced that ending, secure in the knowledge that I have book 2 ready to go. What I have right here is the literary equivalent of binge watching. Right on!

Jon Recluse says

When a deluge floods a small Alabama town, it leaves something more than river mud behind.....something unexpected.

And so begins the saga of the Caskey family, in an atmospheric tale of pure, unfiltered Southern Gothic; smooth as moonshine and slicker than red river mud.

McDowell blends small town life in the Old South with an engaging mystery, scathing social commentary that almost becomes a comedy of manners if it didn't ring so true, and a hint of the supernatural, which trickles through this tale like a rivulet of cold sweat between your shoulder blades.

It simply doesn't get much better than this.
