

Raw Mettle
Synopsis
By Mark Crowell

The story of *The Angle of the Stone* takes place in a small town just north of Houston, TX. It is about a high school junior, Cole Dillman, who has the cards stacked against him. His lineage is from generations of dysfunction and he wants that to change. But how? His single mother offers more problems than solutions and he's doing his best just to keep his head above water. His idea of a future is simply to survive.

Cole has two things going for him: Diligence and a good heart. What he's lacking is direction, and while there are a scant few role models around him, he's too busy trying to survive to listen. His internal battles rage as the questions and concerns of life come faster than the answers.

There is a clique of three girls in his class that are determined to achieve more in life than to do well in school, find a career, and form a family. Led by Lucy Fulmer, they have formed a group self-named the 'Selles, short for Mademoiselles, and spend their time studying the arts and culture, seeking to be superior to the common walks in life. Their goals have been lofty, but now the other two members, Karlin Brinn and Lori Palmer, are beginning to see a bit of derangement in Lucy. Her hatred of Cole and love for a boyfriend at a military academy have become an obsession that puts a strain on the 'Selles functionality and the friendship of the girls.

As the story develops, Cole first appears as a rowdy adolescent who loves trouble. He's been in a fight and is confronted by the 'Selles, namely Lucy, who is quick to point out his deficiencies and her personal dislike of him. Though Cole isn't a poor student, he's not an idiot and knows how to give as well as take when it comes to Lucy. The seeds of hatred have been sown and we'll see Lucy's fixation on his misery blossom. This doesn't go unnoticed by Karlin and Lori and their curiosity of Cole is piqued.

Those surrounding Cole do little to help. A football coach who is so much like him, they butt heads at every meeting; an alcoholic employer who abuses Coles nature and strong work ethic; an aforementioned mother who can't be depended on to pay the utilities, much less give good advice; and a friend, Toby, who turns on him when his own life is upended. The only people he can count on for anything is his sister and brother-in-law who are doing their best to find their own normalcy.

Early on, Cole finds himself more independent than he'd like and decides his only option is to drop out of school. He knows this is a mistake, but also knows that something has to give and if nothing else, it will allow him time to breathe and think. We also see the dissolving of the 'Selles, Karlin and Lori starting to distance themselves from Lucy as she becomes more demanding of their time and patience. At the same time, Cole unknowingly comes to the defense of Lori with an act of chivalry, fighting off a man twice his size to protect her and her

mother. His bravery fuels both uncertainty and confusion for Lori and reignites a flame of passion in her mother.

As the story progresses, it becomes obvious to Lucy that Lori and Karlin have become traitors, showing an interest in Cole and a disinterest in Lucy's mentoring and love life with Barron Stockton. Barron, a groomed young man who is attending a military school, becomes a tool for her to both get to where she wants to be in life and to get back at Cole for daring to stand up to her. But his help comes at a price which she is willing to endure to quench the hatred she has for Cole.

Lori Palmer now has a dilemma. While grateful to Cole for him defending her, he isn't what she was expecting, or hoping for, as her knight in shining armor. Such an act was what she had always dreamed of and now that it had happened, she has regrets. What did Cole expect from her in return? Did he see her as a damsel in distress, or should she believe Lucy's version of Cole manipulating her for his own desires? At the other end of the spectrum, Lori's mother, May Palmer, finds herself breathless every time she thinks of Cole. The ferocity of his courage, his youthful vigor and fortitude, and his strong presence bring about thoughts that she shouldn't be having, thoughts of pleasure she hadn't had in years.

Karlin Brinn, the stoic member of the 'Selles, doesn't understand Lori's struggle with the Cole dilemma. Karlin has a curiosity about Cole, similar to a cat toying with a mouse. He's crude, yet kind, and innocent of his own self destructions. But when he comes to her rescue toward the end, she has no doubt who she wants close to her.

It quickly becomes evident that Lucy's behavior goes beyond obsessing and her relationships with family and friends begin dissolving, leaving her no recourse but to act on her own judgment and free will. The only way for her to exist, to find happiness, is to put an end to Cole.

Lori and Karlin, now free of Lucy, decide to take Cole on as a project. They rationalize that all he needs is some guidance, leadership, and friendship to fully blossom and come into his own. And though their plan is well intentioned, the underlying facts are that by helping Cole, it will ease Lori's mind to repay the debt of gratitude she feels for him without other expectations. For Karlin, it will become a matter of the heart.

The plan is introduced to Cole while having dinner with the girls. But other plans are being made, too, as Lucy has stalked Cole and is watching her former friends betray her even more. The final scene will show Lori, and May waiting in the emergency room as Karlin and Cole both try to recover from Lucy's wrath.

The Angle of the Stone is the first of the Cole Dillman trilogy.