

★ **All the Castles Burned****Michael Nye**

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Emotional but never sentimental, All the Castles Burned contrasts privilege with working-class struggles for a gripping story of human resilience.

All the Castles Burned by Michael Nye is a coming-of-age story that is as painful as it is touching.

The novel focuses on teenager Owen Webb's formative years. He is the son of working-class parents but scores a scholarship to the prestigious Rockcastle Preparatory Academy. His school experience is troubled, filled with fights and anger. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that his deep-rooted issues emanate from his distant and judgmental father and inconsistent mother.

When Owen meets rich and popular Carson Bly and joins Rockcastle's basketball team, he starts to feel like he might finally belong. However, Carson's privileged life has a dark side. When a shocking revelation rocks Owen's family, he realizes that nothing is what it seems.

The book takes a deep look at emotional holes that form early in life. Against an atmosphere of looming disaster, Owen's life is irrevocably changed by his relationship with Carson. Woven through his interactions with the older boy are empty and troubling snapshots of a home life that provided none of the security Owen so desperately needs.

As his parents' marriage crumbles at an ever-quickenning pace, Owen looks for refuge in his mysterious friendship and acceptance in a family that may just be more troubled than his own.

Owen may be troubled, but his charming toughness permeates the book and prevents it from becoming too gloomy or hopeless. His attempts to define who he is in an increasingly unstable world are as sharply realistic as they are heartbreaking.

Emotional but never sentimental, *All the Castles Burned* contrasts privilege with working-class struggles and examines what it means to be raised by parents who, due to their own wounds, simply cannot be there for their children.

A gripping bildungsroman that leaves many intriguing questions about trauma unanswered, *All the Castles Burned* is a powerful and poignant tale of human resilience.

ANGELA MCQUAY (January/February 2018)

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