



Burns Road

Brian Pelton

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In *Burns Road*, novelist and screenwriter Brian Pelton continues the Steadman family saga introduced in his earlier novel, *None Wasted, None Spared*. Along with a group of friends, the Steadmans have left Depression-era Seattle to start over on Burns Road in the rural town of Woodinville. There, the families cobble together their homes with help from one another. The Depression rages on, but “in their safe harbor from city woes, [the Steadmans] could find time to figure how to start again.” It is a promising beginning.

Pelton creates a realistic setting for his characters, using period details to provide a keen sense of family life and the everyday hardships of the times. He makes it easy to envision the scenarios: neighbors lending neighbors their support, the younger Steadman boy waiting impatiently for Little Orphan Annie to come on the radio, the rest of the family becoming “intimate[s] of Franklin Roosevelt and privy to events across the country.” Through the opinions of the characters—on issues ranging from Roosevelt’s policies to the rise of Hitler—Pelton captures important aspects of the Depression era.

Where Pelton is less successful is with his inappropriate side stories and with the development of certain characters. A foray into the supernatural—in the guise of appearances by the devil—is out of sync with the main plot. A local woman introduced early on as a promisingly colorful character more or less disappears. The younger Steadman son meets an unsavory fate that suits neither the character nor the storyline. In addition, occasional crudeness—from sperm analogies and stomach acid to autoeroticism—simply does not suit the overall mood of the novel.

The main characters, particularly the Steadman parents and their elder son, represent the sympathetic and believable aspects of *Burns Road*. And while the story told is a good, solid one, well worth telling, the book could use further editing to fix the many typos and grammatical errors in the text. Words are often misspelled as in “desserts” for “deserts,” “boost” for “boast” and “scrapping” for “scraping,” to name a few.

With *Burns Road*, Pelton has set the stage for another sequel, and it could be a good one. Readers will want to know what becomes of patriarch Phillip and matriarch Vera, as well as their son Jack. The story remains to be told, and provided Pelton sticks with what he does best, it promises to be an engaging read.

CHERYL M. HIBBARD (January 20, 2012)

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