

No Fences in Alaska

Glen Sobey

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A love letter to family relationships and Alaskan life, No Fences in Alaska is a gratifying young adult novel.

Glen Sobey's young adult novel *No Fences in Alaska* is a coming-of-age story set against the arresting backdrop of the Alaskan wilderness.

Harper is sixteen and full of youthful rebellion. Her father's hurtful choice to expel her from their family's Christian school drove her to sex, drugs, and some reckless friendships. When she discovers that she's pregnant, she decides that she cannot handle another night of yelling with her father. She calls the last person anyone expects: her father's estranged father, Cooper.

Cooper has lived alone in Alaska for years, but he offers to take Harper in at a time when her parents are at their wit's end. In the Alaskan wilderness, Harper and Cooper try to give each other the space and love they need to heal—Harper from the consequences of her choices, including her unplanned pregnancy, and Cooper from the symptoms of early onset dementia. In a dark turn, Harper also grapples with the negative powers of the internet and blackmail, particularly because of her cruel ex-boyfriend, Zachary. The whole family has to consider what it means to love unconditionally and figure out how to mend their relationships, many of which have been broken for years.

Harper and her father, Greg, are the story's first core. Despite their mistakes, neither is vilified. Their choices are frustrating but understandable, including Harper blackmailing her boyfriend in order to get away from him and Greg restricting Harper's freedom in order to keep her safe. Skillful flashbacks result in growing understanding of how things got so bad. Cooper, while he acts as somewhat saintly in Harper's present, is also complex and flawed.

The story progresses at a satisfying rate. Every moment of despair and sorrow is connected to the potential for hope. The book's humor is well-timed, and the prose is clear and active. Introspective scenes follow characters on their own, particularly Harper and Cooper, and add balance to the text. Details about rural, free, and unencumbered Alaskan life are textured and evocative, even Utopian at times.

An unpredictable and original spiritual thread runs throughout the story; it is faceted and nuanced, and it results in uplifting moments. Holding attention to its realistic and satisfying end, this is a resonant story.

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LAURA LEAVITT (May 13, 2019)

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