

Schwinn Black Phantom

Sue Perkins

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When ten-year-old Warren “Thump” Hearst returns from the hospital with his leg irreparably damaged from polio, he resigns himself to a hermetic life in his bedroom without friends or baseball. Because of his mother’s well-intentioned meddling, Thump encounters Duane “Whitey” Swift, a quirky and charming albino boy. At first, Thump is suspicious of his new acquaintance, but he soon succumbs to Whitey’s unique form of friendship.

With *Schwinn Black Phantom*, award-winning actress and Omaha native Sue Perkins has crafted a supremely entertaining novel, written in a sassy and original voice. The story contains creative spins, and the dialogue is stellar. The carefully chosen cultural references, including bologna sandwiches, the Sears catalog, and Burma-Shave, are spot on for the 1949 Midwestern setting.

The story is peppered with compelling hints of the paranormal, as well as a sense of fatalism and purpose. As Perkins follows the fifty-two-year friendship between Thump and Whitey, she masterfully bounces between past and present events from chapter to chapter. The end effect is quite suspenseful and causes the reader to want to be in two time periods at once.

The characters of Whitey and Thump are well developed, and throughout the book Perkins describes their friendship in a humorous and touching way. This is especially apparent when Whitey and Thump travel to a local farm in the middle of the night to do some illegal demolition work. Thump’s unusual voice is exhibited when he describes the scene directly to the reader, “I’m wondering if Whitey had a beer or two before he picked me up. We hang a right and wheel straight down into a ditch. Whitey guns the engine, sending dirt and rocks flying out behind us. I hit my head on the ceiling of the cab, as we fly out of the gully and into the rough ground around the orchard. As usual, I figure I’ll probably go home with an injury. It’s normal on an outing with Whitey. Always been that way, so why should it change now, just because we’re old farts?”

Unfortunately, there are a few problems with the book. First and foremost, the story has some timing issues. The beginning of the story feels excruciatingly slow, while the end of the novel feels rushed. Another problem is the gratuitous epilogue, which ties the story together too tightly and clarifies things that should have been left to the reader’s imagination. And there are some pesky typos which detract from the professional appearance of the novel and Perkins’ skillful writing.

Nonetheless, *Schwinn Black Phantom* is a rare gem of a book. For the most part, Perkins reveals the plot adeptly. The characters are original and accessible, and the story is imaginative. It is one of those irresistible novels that one wants to start again as soon as the last page is read.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (September 14, 2012)

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