



Till the Wheels Fall Off

Brad Zellar

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A man mired in his past discovers a promising future in Brad Zellar's novel *Till the Wheels Fall Off*.

Matt, a Midwestern kid whose father was killed in Vietnam and whose mother is quiet and impenetrable, finds refuge in the roller rink owned by his stepfather, Russ. Living adjacent to the rink, Matt bonds with Russ through music. When Russ and Matt's mother divorce, Matt's long, troubled journey toward adulthood begins. Complicating matters are his issues with ADHD and hypnagogia, a kind of hallucinatory state between wakefulness and sleep. Matt recounts formative events from his past; as links to that history re-emerge in his life, he finds glimpses of hope in the present.

The writing is hypnotic and memorable. Its imagery is stunning, and its descriptions are evocative. Much of the good that comes Matt's way is due to the kindness of extended family members, along with a bit of luck. Matt, in dealing with his physical and emotional setbacks, survives long enough to benefit from their goodwill, serving as a reminder that it's okay to ask for, and accept, help.

The book is rooted in nostalgia. Much of the story takes place in an era absent of cell phones; at one point, Matt says, "I suppose some people—most people—dream of the future, but my dreams are almost exclusively of the past." Elsewhere, he expands on the bonds that music can forge, along with its ability to spark curiosity and send listeners in new, unplanned directions. The book also serves that function, entertaining and enticing with its details of Russ and Matt's extensive playlists, along with references to poems and other works.

Till the Wheels Fall Off is an affecting, introspective novel that embraces the beauty of memory and the power of resilience.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2022)

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