



We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night

Joel Thomas Hynes

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A blackly comic and heart-rending odyssey by the inimitable author of *Down to the Dirt*

Scrappy tough guy and three-time loser Johnny Keough is going a little stir-crazy awaiting trial for an alleged assault charge involving his girlfriend, Madonna, and a teapot. Facing three to five years in a maximum-security prison, Johnny knows this might just be the end of the road. But when Madonna doesn't show up for court due to a fatal accident, shell-shocked Johnny seizes his unexpected "clean slate" as a sign from above and embarks on an epic hitchhiking journey across Canada to deliver her ashes to a fabled beach on the outskirts of Vancouver.

Johnny's wanderings see him propelled in and out of the driver's seat of stolen cars, knocking heads with cagey cops, nearly decapitated by a moose, coming face-to-face with his incarcerated biological father in a Kingston jail, and finding surprising connections with strangers on the lonely road west. But most of all, he revisits the choices and mistakes of his past—his relationships with his adoptive father and a cousin who meant the world to him, and his first real chance at love with the woman who is now lost to him.

We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night is the story of one man's kicking-and-screaming attempt to recuperate from a life of petty crime and shattered relationships, and somehow accept and maybe even like the new man emerging from within, the one he so desperately needs to become.

We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night Details

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From Reader Review We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night for online ebook

Stephanie Fleming says

I've read everything Joel Thomas Hynes has published and this book is one of my favourites. His characters are unforgettable. His dark humour soothes me and his take on Newfoundland culture makes me homesick like no other author.

Sue Smith says

Lordy, this was depressing.

Don't get me wrong - it was an very interesting look at the inner workings of a young man that has had very little going for him from the get go, (and I mean very little -zero- zippo - zilch- nadda) and yet his heart is rock solid when it's in the right place, even though it seems beyond comprehension that he could ever have a good heart. Johnny Keough is one messed up young man with a world of hurt on his shoulders (seemingly self-induced) and an extra load waiting down the road (also self induced). A full-time punk with little prospects for rosy future, drug addled, booze swilling, match stick fire quick temper - all adding up to assault and battery charges from the woman he loves that will equal 3 to 5 in the big house. Yes, things don't look good for Johnny.

But it's funny how life can change in the blink of an eye - how you can be on one path, only to all of a sudden be on another - and we get to go along for the ride with our hero Johnny.

Strap in too, for what a hell of a ride this is. All along the way we get Johnny's inner diatribe as he makes his way from Newfoundland to the far west coast and the wonderful city of Vancouver and we discover little by little what made Johnny the man he is today. How each memory is dredged up and shared and we get a little bit more of the picture of what makes Johnny tick. And every footfall he makes, every time you hear another piece of his story you'll find yourself going from really detesting this guy to realizing that life utterly failed him and despite all of it, you start to root for him. You want him to see it through - to reach that finish line before the finish line reaches him.

Go Johnny go!

This book is well worth the read. It won't be pretty and there are times you will probably think -'why did I start this book?' But trust me, it's worth it - every gritty word. Plus this book is an awesome introduction into the world of Newfoundland-speak for those of you who have never been exposed to such a treat of a language! (I personally have never been to Newfoundland but know lots of people that hail from the rock and have heard tales the would probably curl your nose hairs. But that's neither here nor there).

David says

Johnny Keough is awful. I wouldn't last 10 minutes in a room with him. But somehow, Joel Thomas Hynes makes me care about this man and wish him well. A superb narrative.

Zoom says

Brilliant book. If you can get past all the things you don't like about Johnny, you'll be rewarded by the kindling of your empathy. Johnny's the epitome of the underdog. He's like the stubborn little weed that grows in the town dump. You know how some people are born on 3rd base and think they hit a triple? Johnny struck out before he was even born, and things went downhill from there. Just when you think he's hit rock bottom, someone digs a hole and he stumbles in. Even when he gets lucky, it all turns to shit. Literally.

I loved this book. It reminds me of the novel Martin John, in that it coaxes a wee bit of light to illuminate the life of an unlovable man. Johnny's got just enough human decency to keep him from being pathetic. And there's just enough humour in this book to keep it from being depressing.

Alex O'Brien says

The tragic and captivating story of a young hoodlum who travels from Newfoundland to British Columbia to spread his deceased girlfriend's ashes on a beach. The author, Joel Thomas Hynes, has Johnny Keough tell his own tale in the third person vernacular, creating a violent and volatile character who is surprisingly empathetic due to his abusive and difficult childhood. Johnny has a mesmerizing voice and the book is dark but often very funny.

Maggie Muggins says

We have all seen them. People down on their luck, career criminals, born into a life where nothing much was expected but to be a mess. Johnny Keough is a stereotypical “skeet” on a hilarious, quirky and bone breaking journey across the country to fulfill his dead girlfriends last will and testament. In real life you would walk across the street to avoid a character like Johnny but Joel Thomas Hynes makes him a likeable if not pitiful character. The Rowdyman for the truly shameless.

Naomi says

A Goodreads Giveaway. The first few pages (or even chapters) might put you off, but stick with it. Behind all that anger and profanity is a powerfully told story.

Penny (Literary Hoarders) says

How interested am I truly in reading this? A man gets off from an assault charge only because his girlfriend dies - so he hitchhikes across Canada with his now "clean slate". Hmmmm -- have feelings about that, can I put them aside - do I need to put them aside when I could spend more time reading the other titles that made the 2017 Giller Longlist?

We'll just leave it at me not trying to hard to get my hands on this one and maybe only if it makes the shortlist. :-) (interesting book to make the longlist though don't you think?)

Djj says

Full disclosure, the author is a friend of a friend and I bought the book at a book signing. I always worry with art made by people I know. Will I have to complement the font to find something nice to say?

Happily, Mr. Hynes has given us a superbly written story about Johnny, a down and out Newfoundlander who travels across Canada to, let's say (to avoid spoilers), help a friend and deal with some family issues. Johnny narrates the story in an inner monologue. His thoughts are both profane and lyrical. The book can be difficult to read at times as Hynes demands that you immerse yourself in Johnny's thoughts and rhythm, and Johnny is in constant pain. He may be the most tragic hero I've come across in years. His life has been difficult and filled with tragedy. But give yourself over and you won't be disappointed.

Joe Beaton says

Joel Thomas Hynes does a fantastic job portraying Johnny Keough as a low life miserable prick. By all outward appearances there's been nothing on the protagonist's mind but swilling, drugging and fornicating since he was twelve years old. The lifestyle has resulted in violence both by and against him, stints in prison, and even being hailed as an unlikely hero for helping an elderly couple escape a house fire. All this before he hightails it from Newfoundland with an urn of his dead girlfriend's ashes under his arm. Does the cross-Canada journey change him? Not a bit. He's still a thief and a thug constantly on the lookout for a score without regard for the consequences. I don't imagine there are too many readers who like Johnny any more when he finally arrives in Vancouver than when he began the trek, but they do understand him. The author's stream of consciousness writing style brings a fractured yet articulate voice to Johnny's every thought, and in doing so, incrementally brings the reader to a place where they reluctantly empathize with the three-time loser.

Somehow it doesn't seem right to say I enjoyed this novel, so instead I'll say 'We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night' is a brilliantly told raw and savage story that I couldn't put down.

Trudy says

Are there more than five stars?

Shannon says

Wow, this was a tough read for a variety of reasons but I'm glad I stuck it through. It took me a long time to figure out what this book was even about, who we were following (including if it was only one person), and what was going on. This is mostly due to the protagonist, Johnny, referring to himself in the third person. Also, no quotation marks are used, so understanding the dialogue was challenging. At some point I found the rhythm of things, and was able to understand Johnny, but it took a long time to find that rhythm.

Although I don't normally note things like warnings, I would like to note that there is a hell a lot of swearing in this one. So much so that I kept on wanting to find a quote to share the cadence of Johnny, but I couldn't .. which says a lot about Johnny. There is also a lot of harsh stuff that happens in the book, so for more sensitive readers it might be looking into those specifics before taking the plunge.

A big thank you to anyone who has reviewed this one GoodReads, reading your reviews helped me decided to stick with it (view spoiler), and even though it didn't get easier per se, it was really worth it in the end. Like so many Canadian books, it sneaks up on you somewhere in the middle, grabs hold, and won't let go.

A compelling, and challenging, read.

Krista says

Mumble mumble down there. Some sorta big talk to his wife or his girlfriend. An oath, a curse. Talkin about Johnny, gotta be. Big talk, nothin he'd say to Johnny's face. Role-playing. Shag this. Johnny's down the stairs and out the front hall to the door. He dont even bother to put on the sneakers cause he's not gonna be using his feet. You gotta be able to dance, dance, dance whenever the mood takes you. That's the rule, that's the law. Johnny gives the knuckles a good scrape across the panelling in the porch before he opens the door. Sting and burn, bleed, come on bleed. Clench and release, clench and release. Buddy started it, didnt he? Good night, he says. Johnny's night. Good. Johnny raps on buddy's door. It's a new door with a big patterned window to let the light in. Must be nice, letting all that light in. Must be nice to have it all lined up, new doors, taking the garbage out.

We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night started off as one of my favourite kinds of book – grittily intriguing with a sociopathic character whose present situation needs to be puzzled out (I mean, Johnny wants to *have a little chat* with buddy just for saying good night to him, even though Johnny isn't *technically* supposed to be leaving his apartment after ten p.m.) – and from there it whizzes along, moving Johnny forward through the present while he mentally revisits the events in his past that led him to where he is; *how* he is. This is a formula that worked so well for me in books like Trainspotting or The Glorious Heresies – that satisfying mental evolution I experienced from initially regarding the characters as trash to recognising their humanity – but in this book it all felt a bit...formulaic. Early conversations that Johnny has with others (and himself) dangle the clues – What do you know about car fires, Johnny? How did that brand new John Deere cap get up in the branches of the black spruce? Just when will we get back to the jeezly hens? – and it

becomes obvious that the point is: No matter how bad you think Johnny is, his childhood was worse. Author Joel Thomas Hynes is a bit too obvious in his plotting and pacing here for my taste, but I do love a Newfie tale and enjoyed the voice of his sentences.

We're all looking for a change of scenery, at the very least. We're all lookin for our ticket. Who's not lookin to claw their way out from under what they're tangled up in? Who's not, underneath it all, desperate to let go of what they're hangin on to? And what's really worth hanging on to anymore?

Mild spoilers as I summarise the plot: We soon learn that Johnny is awaiting trial for the assault of his girlfriend, Madonna. We eventually see that she was the love of his life – the only person he ever settled down with; happy whether they were shoplifting, or cooking breakfast, or getting sober, or falling off the wagon – so why did Madonna have to ruin everything by smashing her face into the teapot Johnny was holding and then calling the cops? Because Madonna doesn't appear at the trial, Johnny is set free, and *events* send him on a cross-Canada road trip; running from the cops and a St. John's crime boss; hitchhiking west in increasingly filthy clothes and a deteriorating body. Although Johnny does share some of his history with the people he hitches rides from, most of the narrative occurs in his own head (where his thoughts return again and again to the same seminal moments until they're fully revealed), and by the end, we're supposed to realise that this broken, violent misanthrope couldn't have turned out any other way. Helpfully, this is spelled out a couple of times:

What do any of us ever know? That we used to be children but now we're not. That what we are now is just a collection of our blunders and our missteps, a mashed and battered accumulation of all our wrongs. Sick as our secrets. And now we mainly gotta lean into our years and hope too much of it dont splatter back into our fucken faces.

And speaking of what splatters back into our faces...no, you'd have to read that part to fully *get* it. The “road trip” might be a stock plotline, but I can't remember reading another one set in Canada. So as someone who has made this drive *many* times, I enjoyed the stops in Truro and Edmundston; could picture running into the woods to evade the Sûreté du Québec; winced when Johnny, *heading to the west coast*, left a car travelling to Timmins to make his side-trip to Kingston. On the other hand, and by coincidence, my husband and brother-in-law were talking the other night about some of their own youthful hitchhiking adventures and bemoaning the fact that those days are gone; no one in their right mind would pick up a solitary young man on the side of the road anymore. And here's Johnny: his face both sunburnt and swollen from ant bites from sleeping in the forest, wearing a stinking, filthy poncho to disguise the disintegrating suit he ran away in, limping from decaying boots, unable to do much more than grunt and scowl at people, and getting enough rides to move himself (and the plot) along. That made me wonder what time period this is actually supposed to be and that's confusing: Johnny mentions having had a DVD player with Madonna, but no one – not even his drug dealer pal, Shiner – seems to have a cell phone, and while a cop is able to run a (stolen) driver's license through his in-car computer, the law doesn't seem interested in tracking down the van he eventually steals. And another quibble: Diane Schoemperlen, in *This Is Not My Life*, made it sound a bit more complicated to visit an inmate, even in minimum security.

I wish I couldn't see the man behind the curtain of this book – Hynes doesn't quite pull off *art* here – but

that's not to say I didn't like it quite a bit. I'm waffling on a rating, so will feel like it's generous to round up to four stars.

Doug Lewars says

*** Possible Spoilers ***

They say that the first five pages of a book are the most important. I don't entirely agree with that but this book was 247 pages; so say 20% - which in this case would be 49 pages should be sufficient to obtain a pretty fair assessment. I should have stopped reading then. Frankly, I should have stopped at page one because in this case, the very first page defines the story nicely. Nevertheless, I read the reviews and they suggested that if one keeps reading, the book gets better. There's some truth to that. It did get better - marginally. The thing is, the protagonist was so unlikable that there was no way the author could make him - and by extension, the story - appealing.

The concept of the rebellious young person finding some sort of redemption - in this case through a road trip - has been done to death. In the nineteen-fifties there was the movie 'Rebel Without a Cause'. In the late sixties it was 'Easy Rider'. Now we have this novel by Joel Hynes. At least in Easy Rider the protagonists got shot in the end - and they were fairly sympathetic characters. In this case Johnny is probably more dead than alive but there still seems to be a pulse. Frankly, by the time I was approaching page 100, the best ending would have been for Johnny to have had a fatal accident and the remaining 147 pages left blank but such was not to be.

Is there anyone who might enjoy this book? Possibly. I think it might appeal to individuals under the age of twenty-five who are convinced that society is stacked against them and that laws were made exclusively to oppress whatever underclass they identify with. I would recommend that if anyone is thinking about reading this book, read page one and then decide. If you like the first page there's a good chance you'll like the book. If you don't, then despite other reviews, such improvement as may be detected is so small that you might as well save your time and go onto something else.

Friederike Knabe says

Actually, I gave up on the reading, couldn't get into the writing style nor the story. The book won last year's Governor General Award for Literature. But, it was not my kind of book at this time.
