

## **Burned**

**Ellen Hopkins**

**Reviewed by: Elisabeth Suarez, 15**

**Star Teen Book Reviewer of the Be the Star You Are! Charity**

[www.bethestaryouare.com](http://www.bethestaryouare.com)

16-year-old Pattyn Von Stratten, one of several daughters living in a strict Mormon household, begins to question her religion and the morals of her family. Her father is an abusive alcoholic. Her mother is submissive to Pattyn's father, as their church community teaches women to be subservient to their significant other. Patty feels oppressed by her home life and the overbearingness of her family. She rebels by drinking and briefly dating a boy named Derek. After being dismissed by her parents all these years, Derek makes her feel pretty and interesting. When Pattyn's father finds out about their relationship, the two teens break up and Pattyn is grounded. She later discovers Derek got back together with his ex-girlfriend Carmen and found he had been spreading rumors about her. Patty then punches Carmen in the nose and damages school property.

Her parents are furious and Pattyn is sent to live with her Aunt J. By teaching Pattyn to drive, showing her how to ride a horse, and reminding Patty of her worth, Aunt J bonded with her niece. The two became very close. Aunt J even answered some of Pattyn's questions about the family and reveals all the hideous details of her father's past. Her aunt becomes a mother-figure and role-model who Patty can confide in. While at the ranch in Nevada, Pattyn is introduced to a sweet, handsome boy named Ethan that catches her eye. The two fall madly in love. The summer eventually ends and Pattyn must return home for her senior year. When she arrives, Pattyn is presented with a very pregnant mother and is once again living in fear of her father. Just when her situation seems as bad as it can get, things take a turn for the worse.

*Burned* is written in free verse poetry, which greatly emphasizes the feelings of the protagonist, Pattyn. The content was very intense and original. Throughout the book, Patty struggles with her faith and the idea of heaven. She feels extreme guilt while going against the beliefs of her church, but also feels excited and somewhat free. This can be relatable to some, but I wouldn't begin having distrustful thoughts about the Mormon community. I have read that the Mormon faith does not teach others that women are less than men. Of course, some LDS households or communities may be problematic and toxic, but so are many other families of all different religions. There are stories out there that show problems inside of the Mormon faith, but there are also stories that paint a different picture of the religion. I found the book to be a misrepresentation of families of the faith, but I am not of the Mormon religion and therefore not qualified to confirm that accusation from personal experience.

Another thing that rubbed me the wrong way was Aunt J's immense support of Pattyn and Ethan's relationship. It is never specified in the novel, but Aunt Jeanette never spoke to Patty about contraception. It was weird because Patty's aunt encouraged her to start dating, yet never thought of the consequences, which I found especially dangerous since Pattyn was not her child. Aunt J knew how Patty grew up—in a very sheltered household—but didn't think to educate her on proper protection when Pattyn wanted to date Ethan? It should be noted that Pattyn expressed to her aunt that she didn't want to follow her faith anymore, meaning that she was then open to

possibly going against the doctrines of the LDS church—which included premarital sex. Aunt J made me a bit uncomfortable and she didn't really teach Pattyn to be her own independent self outside of a man. I was glad that Aunt J was able to help Patty express her feelings.

Although some may enjoy the novel, I found it to be disappointing. Every page leaves you feeling desperate to help Patty's and her family to get away from their father. You want Pattyn to find a better life despite her circumstances and prove her dad wrong. I was also hoping she would discover herself outside of loving someone. Yet, the ending left me disturbed and hopeless. It's definitely not what I was expecting. When I knew the ending, it made the whole book is pretty depressing and empty. There was no real resolution of the plot. Overall, the poetry helped intensify the character's emotions but the themes regarding the Mormon faith could lead to some readers having distorted thoughts about the religion. The inclusion of the information about the Nevada atomic bomb radiation was interesting and a nice addition. Yet, the book could also potentially influence young audiences into thinking they are only apparent when they are in a relationship; that their worth depends on a significant other. Finally, Aunt J's encouragement of Pattyn and Ethan's relationship seemed inappropriate. If you like fast-paced dramas but are able to look past the *Burned*'s faults, I recommend this book for those ages sixteen and up, as the novel contains mature content such as death, abuse, sexual material, underage drinking, and inappropriate language.

### **Recommended Books:**

Crank by Ellen Hopkins

Impulse by Ellen Hopkins

Cut by Patricia McCormick

Go Ask Alice by Beatrice Sparks