



That Burning Summer

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In July 1940, sixteen-year-old Peggy finds a crashed plane and its injured pilot, Henryk, in the marsh off the south coast of England. The Polish airman expresses fear of the war, telling Peggy he cannot go back to the Royal Air Force. Taking pity on the soldier, Peggy hides him in a nearby church, though neither has any idea of what the future might hold or how they might save Henryk from going back to the RAF in the long term. Complicating their plans is Peggy's rule-following eleven-year-old brother, Ernest, who discovers Henryk's parachute and soon catches on to the mystery—and who may unintentionally destroy the temporary sanctuary that Peggy was able to offer.

The novel, told from alternating points of view, addresses the complicated moral grounds of desertion, cowardice, and compassion. Peggy, Ernest, and Henryk all have layered emotions about the war and each other that they must work through in the aftermath of Henryk's accident. Trust at times runs thin, and shifting loyalties complicate their relationships. Despite the characters' obvious sincerity, the culture of the war leads to an aura of suspicion that further disturbs the precarious peace. And while the novel starts off slowly, it soon picks up the pace, rapidly moving toward a final, explosive conclusion.

That Burning Summer is a surprisingly sweet read, ideal for fans of historical fiction. The story takes a serious tone, but will pay off for those willing to take the thoughtful journey with Peggy, Henryk, and Ernest.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (Children's 2017)

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