



The Passenger Seat

Vijay Khurana

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The innocence of boyhood is eclipsed by a fraught world in Vijay Khurana's coming-of-age novel *The Passenger Seat*.

From the first page, Teddy and Adam are described as “boys, or men,” as if even the narrator is uncertain about which side of adulthood the two high school seniors fall on. Both take boyish risks, like jumping off a bridge into the water below, but they also often spend their time playing a violent, suggestive video game, *Patriot*. Frustrated with their home and school lives and faced with uncertain futures, the friends drive Adam's truck north toward Alaska with no idea what future lies in wait.

The novel is charged with enough momentum to break speed limits as the two friends learn to survive without baths or consistent food and through a series of mistakes: Impatient Teddy does not sneak up close enough to shoot a snowshoe hare for supper; Adam's wrong turn leaves them dead-ended at a swamp.

The book depicts the road in all its freedom and reliability as “endless becoming, a color palette always and somehow never changing.” However, the road stands in contrast to the friends' inner lives. The gun they carry with them haunts the space between words. Their faith in each other bends toward uncertainty. The dependability of the outside world is a mirror to the friends' distrust of all that lies outside of themselves. This distrust is the catalyst for the major change that electrifies the latter half of the book.

A challenging novel that pushes against the elastic comfort of the expected, *The Passenger Seat* tests what makes a boy turn into a man and arrives in a territory both unexpected and certain.

NICK GARDNER (March / April 2025)

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