



The Broken Places

Susan Perabo

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Susan Perabo's short-story collection, *Who I Was Supposed to Be*, was named a Best Book of 1999 by the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Miami Herald*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. *The Boston Globe* proclaimed the debut "a stunning introduction to a fresh new literary talent." Now Susan Perabo returns with *The Broken Places*, her eagerly anticipated novel about love and honor and how the aftermath of one terrifying night -- and one heroic act -- affects a close-knit family.

Twelve-year-old Paul Tucker knows his family is something akin to royalty in small-town Casey, Pennsylvania. His father, Sonny, is a dedicated career fireman, in line for the position of chief, long held by Paul's late grandfather, a local legend whose heroics continue to occupy the hearts and minds of all who knew and worked with him. Paul's mother, Laura, is a math teacher at the high school; Paul is sometimes annoyed by her worries over him (and her apparent lack of worry over his father), but his life is generally untroubled, his future bright, his time measured by sport seasons.

But on a windy October day, the collapse of an abandoned farmhouse forever alters the fates and perceptions of Paul, his family, and those closest to them. Sonny and the other Casey firemen attempt a dangerous rescue to reach a teenager buried under the rubble, and when Sonny himself is trapped by a secondary collapse, Paul, his mother, and the crowd of onlookers believe the worst. The wait is excruciating; it's baby Jessica all over again, but this time the "innocent victim" is sixteen-year-old Ian Finch, a swastika-tattooed hoodlum who may have brought the house down on himself while building bombs. Still, when Sonny emerges from the rubble hours later, the maimed teenager in his arms, the rescue becomes a minor miracle and a major public relations event, a validation of all things American and true. Sonny is immediately hailed as a national hero. And Paul's life is suddenly, and irrevocably, changed.

Beyond the limelight, the parades, and the intrusion of the national media into a quiet and predictable life, the Tucker household balance is upset. And Ian Finch's curious and continued involvement in Sonny's life creates a new and troubling set of hurdles for Paul to overcome. Somehow, though his father has been saved, he continues to slip through Paul's fingers. Secrets, lies, and changing alliances threaten Paul's relationship with his father and his mother and his understanding of what holds a family -- and a town -- together.

The Broken Places is a brilliant meditation on the psychology of heroism, the definition of family, and the true meaning of honor. With pitch-perfect dialogue, subtle but stunning insights, and a dazzling ability to uncork the quiet power of each character, Susan Perabo's *The Broken Places* uncovers and celebrates the unsettling truths of human nature.



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