

Surviving danger — on the frontier and in the mind

"The Great Alone"
By Kristin Hannah
St. Martin's Press
448 pp
\$28.99

Spring break-up probably has yet to begin in Alaska, but in the Lower 48, the change in seasons is already drawing us outside. Even so, I hope you'll consider picking up Bainbridge Island author Kristin Hannah's latest book, which is largely set in the Last Frontier state.

"The Great Alone" is about homesteading in Alaska in the 1970s, as seen through the eyes of 13-year-old Leni Allbright, who grows up in a beautiful but harsh place that can make or break people.

Leni has come to Kenai Peninsula with her parents. Cora and Ernt Allbright are trying to find a place where Ernt, a Vietnam vet who suffers from PTSD, can find some peace. They are utterly unprepared for homesteading life, but the locals quickly chip in to help them set up their place and

teach them how to grow a garden, milk goats, tend chickens, fish and hunt.

Ernt had been prone to bouts of despair and agitation, even violence. But during that first summer, the welcoming neigh-

move carefully around Ernt, who has reverted to his dark moods and unpredictable outbursts. Cora bears the brunt of his physical violence, but it takes a heavy emotional toll on Leni, too.

Ernt's paranoia escalates, and

loves the man she married and remains loyal to him.

This story is told over a span of a little more than a decade, and as Leni comes of age, she yearns to break free of her father's violence and domination.

McGrew" ("Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear").

Later in that poem, there's a line that talks about "the gnawing hunger of lonely men," and Kristin Hannah captures not only that desperation in her book, but also the strength of the women who navigate through the slush of a male-dominated world to redefine loyalty and love.

Kristin Hannah unerringly captures an era and a place in this powder keg of a book. "The Great Alone" is a heartbreaking, fierce and utterly consuming read.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com

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bors, 18-hour days, and hard work seem to do him a world of good.

But winter encroaches all too soon, and when the cold and monotony of that long season set in, it becomes all too apparent that, despite their efforts, the Allbrights are ill-prepared. Cooped up in their cabin, Cora and Leni

as his behavior becomes increasingly erratic in town as well as at home, the other homesteaders become aware of the peril that Cora and Leni face. They try to offer support, but the legal system in the 1970s doesn't recognize domestic violence as a crime, and Cora has recourse to little protection. Besides, she still

But she, also, feels bound by loyalty to her mother, who has endured years of abuse, and who would have no one to look out for her if Leni were to leave.

Fans of the Far North poet Robert Service may recognize that this book's title borrows from Service's famous poem called "The Shooting of Dan

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