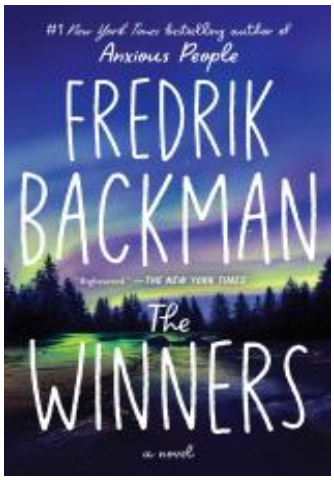
The Winners

by Fredrik Backman



About the Book

A breathtaking new novel from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of ANXIOUS PEOPLE and A MAN CALLED OVE, THE WINNERS returns to the close-knit, resilient community of Beartown for a story about first loves, second chances and last goodbyes.

Over the course of two weeks, everything in Beartown will change.

Maya Andersson and Benji Ovich, two young people who left in search of a life far from the forest town, come home and joyfully reunite with their closest childhood friends. There is a new sense of optimism and purpose in the town, embodied in the impressive new ice rink that has been built down by the lake.

Two years have passed since the events that no one wants to think about. Everyone has tried to move on, but there?s something about this place that prevents it. The destruction caused by a ferocious late-summer storm reignites the old rivalry between Beartown and the neighboring town of Hed, a rivalry that has always been fought through their ice hockey teams.

Maya?s parents, Peter and Kira, are caught up in an investigation of the hockey club?s murky finances, and Amat --- once the star of the Beartown team --- has lost his way after an injury and a failed attempt to get drafted into the NHL. Simmering tensions between the two towns turn into acts of intimidation and then violence. All the while, a 14-year-old boy grows increasingly alienated from this hockey-obsessed community and is determined to take revenge on the people he holds responsible for his beloved sister?s death. He has a pistol and a plan that will leave Beartown with a loss that is almost more that it can stand.

As it beautifully captures all the complexities of daily life and explores questions of friendship, loyalty, loss and identity, this emotion-packed novel asks us to reconsider what it means to win, what it means to lose, and what it means to

forgive.

Discussion Guide

1. THE WINNERS opens with a storm that rages across Beartown and Hed. How do different people (Ana, Hannah, Johnny, Kira, Peter, Tails, etc.) react in this extraordinary situation, and what does it reveal about their characters? What are some of the unexpected things that happen as a result?

2. For the first time in years, we are told, the Beartown hockey team is better and more well-funded than the Hed team. How has their newfound superiority changed their attitudes toward their neighbors? How have the people from Hed reacted to being second best? What examples in your own life can you think of with a role reversal such as this, and what were the effects?

3. Fredrik Backman chose to write about two towns obsessed with hockey and the drama that comes from their passionate feelings about the game. Are there other kinds of activities besides sports that can inspire such strong feelings of connection and personal identification in a community? If you aren?t a hockey fan, did the book still speak to you?

4. Ramona, the prickly owner of the Bearskin pub, says early in the book, ?Here in the forest people are more dependent on each other than in big cities. People here are stuck together? (pg. 3). Is this true for Maya, who comes back to Beartown after going to college in the big city? For Benji, who leaves and comes back? Discuss among the group your own experiences or ideas about living in a small town versus a big city. Do you find what Ramona says holds true?

5. Both Beartown and Hed want to win, but more than that we are told they want to watch the other town lose. How does this attitude shape the events of the novel?

6. There are a few different depictions of father/daughter relationships in the book. Are there certain common themes that connect them? How is each one unique? What does Fredrik Backman have to say about the emotional landscape of parenting?

7. Ruth and Maya grew up in Beartown around the same time, and they left home within six months of each other. They each endured a horrific sexual assault, but then their stories took very different paths. What do you think it was that allowed Maya to survive her experience while Ruth did not?

8. Over the three books in the *Beartown* trilogy, Amat has gone from an underdog to a champion, but in THE WINNERS, he is faced with his biggest challenges yet. Why does Amat struggle despite all his natural talent? How does the way we handle success sometimes put us on the road to failure?

9. Backman writes of Teemu, one of the Beartown hockey hooligans, ?People like him need a future, otherwise they sink? (pg. 129). How are the prospects of each town and the economic situation tied to the violent events that unfold in the novel? How does having a plan for the future help troubled youths like Teemu from sinking?

10. What is Ramona?s role with the youth of Beartown? How does she act as an unconventional parental figure in their lives? Does she remind you of any people in your own life who helped raise you who weren?t your parents?

11. Backman writes, ??Marriage.? There ought to be a different word for it once you?ve been married for enough years. When you?ve long since passed the point where it stopped feeling like a choice.? (pg. 317) What do you think Fredrik Backman means? Do you agree with this statement?

12. Lev is one of the most surprising characters in the book. In what ways did your perceptions of him change over the course of the novel? In what ways does Lev fit in perfectly with the rest of Beartown?

13. Kira?s psychologist asks her to choose if she?d rather be important or loved, and Kira refuses to answer. What do you think the real answer for Kira would be? How would you answer the question for the other characters? Yourself?

14. Backman uses the word ?bang? as a motif throughout the novel. What different sounds does this word represent? How do you see the author using it for different purposes in different parts of the book?

15. The young girl Alicia is a hockey prodigy. In what ways does she represent change in Beartown? In what ways does she represent the same old Beartown?

16. THE WINNERS asks us to consider if everyone is deserving of forgiveness, and if someone who commits a terrible crime can be punished enough to wipe their slate clean. What do you think about these challenging questions? Has there been a time in your life when you?ve struggled with forgiving someone else? With forgiving yourself?

17. There are so many powerful and emotional moments in the book. What part of the book moved you the most?

Author Bio

Fredrik Backman is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of A MAN CALLED OVE, MY GRANDMOTHER ASKED ME TO TELL YOU SHE'S SORRY, BRITT-MARIE WAS HERE, BEARTOWN, US AGAINST YOU, ANXIOUS PEOPLE, THE WINNERS and MY FRIENDS, as well as two novellas and one work of nonfiction. His books are published in more than 40 countries. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.

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