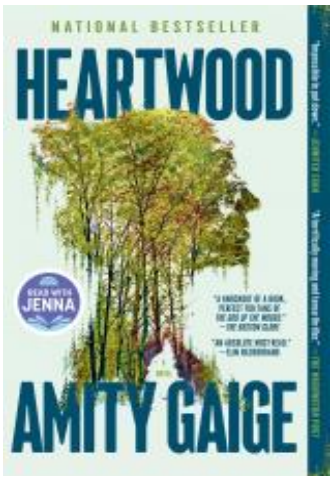
Heartwood

by Amity Gaige



About the Book

?A riveting wilderness suspense novel by a novelist at the height of her powers? (Jennifer Egan, Pulitzer Prize?winning author of THE CANDY HOUSE), HEARTWOOD takes you on a gripping journey as a search and rescue team races against time when an experienced hiker mysteriously disappears on the Appalachian Trail in Maine.

In the heart of the Maine woods, an experienced Appalachian Trail hiker goes missing. She is 42-year-old Valerie Gillis, who has vanished 200 miles from her final destination. Alone in the wilderness, Valerie pours her thoughts into fractured, poetic letters to her mother as she battles the elements and struggles to keep hoping.

At the heart of the investigation is Beverly, the determined Maine State Game Warden tasked with finding Valerie, who leads the search on the ground. Meanwhile, Lena, a 76-year-old birdwatcher in a Connecticut retirement community, becomes an unexpected armchair detective. Roving between these compelling narratives, a puzzle emerges, intensifying the frantic search, as Valerie?s disappearance may not be accidental.

HEARTWOOD is a ?gem of a thousand facets --- suspenseful, transporting, tender, and ultimately soul-mending,? (Megan Majumdar, *New York Times* bestselling author of A BURNING), which tells the story of a lost hiker?s odyssey and is a moving rendering of each character?s interior journey. The mystery inspires larger questions about the many ways in which we get lost, and how we are found. At its core, HEARTWOOD is a redemptive novel, written with both enormous literary ambition and love.

Discussion Guide

1. Each of the three main characters in HEARTWOOD find solace in nature. Lena loves bird watching and foraging. For Valerie, long-distance hiking makes her feel ?whole.? Bev thinks of the backcountry as her ?mother.? When was the last

time you really felt connected to nature?

2. Talk about how you felt as Valerie described her lostness. What do you think you would feel or do if you became lost in the outdoors?

3. Valerie writes letters to her mother while she is lost in the woods. Who would you write to, and what would you want them to know?

4. What do you think about the novel's connection between lostness and being motherless?

5. For many readers, Santo is a surprising favorite character. What did you think about his role in the investigation and his friendships with Valerie and Cody the warden??

6. HEARTWOOD is as much about being lost as it is about being found. What times in your life have you been ?lost? emotionally, spiritually or psychologically, and who rescued you? ?

7. HEARTWOOD was written during the pandemic, and Lena was inspired by how difficult quarantine was for older people. Did reading HEARTWOOD remind you of that difficult time? And was there anything you turned to, like reading, internet-sleuthing or hiking, that helped you get through it?

8. Though there are true stories of people going missing while hiking, there is also a vibrant and supportive trail community. The book is in many ways a celebration of the American wilderness. Did reading HEARTWOOD make you want to hike the Appalachian Trail?

Author Bio

HEARTWOOD is Amity Gaige?s fifth novel. It was selected by Jenna Bush Hager as a Read with Jenna pick for April 2025 and became an instant national bestseller. Amity is the author of four previous novels: O MY DARLING, THE FOLDED WORLD, SCHRODER and SEA WIFE. SEA WIFE was a 2020 *New York Times* Notable Book and a finalist for the Mark Twain American Voice Award. SCHRODER was also a *New York Times* Notable Book and a best book of 2013 according to *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*, among others, and was shortlisted for UK?s Folio Prize in 2014. In 2018, Amity was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in Fiction. She lives in West Hartford, Connecticut, with her family and teaches creative writing at Yale.

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