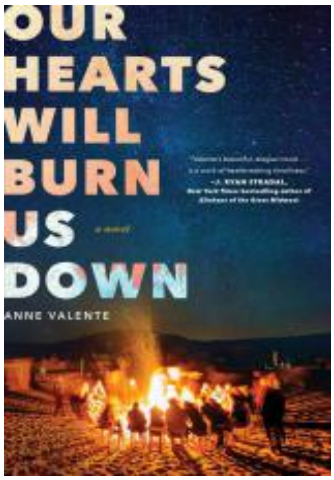
Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down

by Anne Valente



About the Book

The lives of four teenagers are capsized by a shocking school shooting and its aftermath in this powerful debut novel, a coming-of-age story with the haunting power of STATION ELEVEN and the bittersweet poignancy of EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU.

As members of the yearbook committee, Nick, Zola, Matt and Christina are eager to capture all the memorable moments of their junior year at Lewis and Clark High School --- the plays and football games, dances and fund-drives, teachers and classes that are the epicenter of their teenage lives. But how do you document a horrific tragedy --- a deadly school shooting by a classmate?

Struggling to comprehend this cataclysmic event --- and propelled by a sense of responsibility to the town, their parents and their school --- these four "lucky" survivors vow to honor the memories of those lost, and also, the memories forgotten in the shadow of violence. But the shooting is only the first inexplicable trauma to rock their small suburban St. Louis town. A series of mysterious house fires have hit the families of the victims one by one, pushing the grieving town to the edge.

Nick, the son of the lead detective investigating the events, plunges into the case on his own, scouring the Internet to uncover what could cause a fire with no evident starting point. As their friend pulls farther away, Matt and Christina battle to save damaged relationships, while Zola fights to keep herself together.

A story of grief, community and family, of the search for understanding and normalcy in the wake of devastating loss, OUR HEARTS WILL BURN US DOWN explores profound questions about resiliency, memory and recovery that brilliantly illuminate the deepest recesses of the human heart.

Discussion Guide

While no guide is available at this time, be sure to check out our fiction discussion questions, which may help you in your group's discussion of the book.

Author Bio

Anne Valente is the author of the story collection BY LIGHT WE KNEW OUR NAMES, which won the Dzanc Books Short Story Prize, and the fiction chapbook AN ELEGY FOR MATHEMATICS. Her work has appeared literary journals, including in *One Story*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review*; *Best American Non-Required Reading 2011* , and *The Believer* and the *Washington Post*. She teaches in the Creative Writing Department at Santa Fe University of Art and Design, and lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Critical Praise

?Valente?s beautiful, elegiac novel about a community in mourning, and the unseen forces that unravel and consume us after a tragedy, is a work of heartbreaking timeliness.?

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