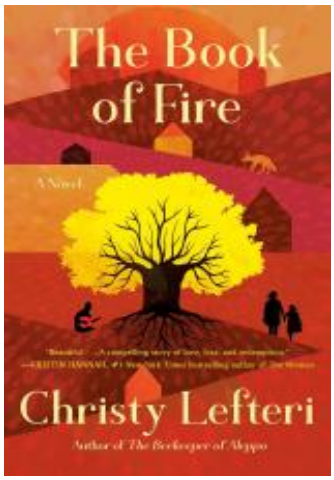
The Book of Fire

by Christy Lefteri



About the Book

In present-day Greece, deep in an ancient forest, lives a family: Irini, a musician, who teaches children to read and play music; her husband, Tasso, who paints pictures of the forest, his greatest muse; and Chara, their young daughter, whose name means joy. On the fateful day that will forever alter the trajectory of their lives, flames chase fleeing birds across the sky. The wildfire that will consume their home, and their lives as they know it, races toward them.

Months later, as the village tries to rebuild, Irini stumbles upon the man who started the fire, a land speculator who had intended only a small, controlled burn to clear forestland to build on but instead ignited a catastrophe. He is dying, although the cause is unclear, and in her anger at all he took from them, Irini makes a split-second decision that will haunt her.

As the local police investigate the suspicious death, Tasso mourns his father, who has not been seen since before the fire. Tasso?s hands were burnt in the flames, leaving him unable to paint, and he struggles to cope with the overwhelming loss of his artistic voice and his beloved forest. Only his young daughter, who wants to repair the damage that?s been done, gives him hope for the future.

Gorgeously written, sweeping in scope and intimate in tone, THE BOOK OF FIRE is a masterful work about the search for meaning in the wake of tragedy, as well as the universal ties that bind people together, and to the land that they call home.

Discussion Guide

1. What was your biggest takeaway from THE BOOK OF FIRE? Talk about the thematic meaning and symbolism of the title, from the literal fire to the book-within-a-book story structure.

2. Discuss the novel?s narrative style. Did you enjoy the way the author swerved between past and present? What other storytelling techniques, from foreshadowing to cliffhanger chapter endings, kept you turning the pages? You may choose to share some of your favorite lines of dialogue, characterizations or descriptions as well.

3. The forest is at the heart of the action in THE BOOK OF FIRE. Talk about how this landscape --- as both a source of life and the ashes that remain --- functions as a character, or even a character *witness*, in THE BOOK OF FIRE. How do Irini, Chara and Tasso (even Rosalie) interact and/or reckon with it? What about Mr. Monk?

4. Consider the ways in which fire --- ?the way it lit up across the land, the way it charged down the mountain, swallowing up whatever and whoever stood in its way" --- is also character in and of itself. How does THE BOOK OF FIRE contend with Mother Nature and her comforts and occasional wrath? How do *you*?

5. ?There is something about stories that allows us to process the present,? Irini writes. ?We listen to tales of tribulations overcome so that we might imagine we can survive ours.? How does Irini use storytelling to guide Chara through moments of terror or grief? How do the stories from Iirini?s own childhood come back to comfort --- or haunt --- her?

6. What do love and loss look like in the world of this novel? What does THE BOOK OF FIRE have to say about the nature of tragedy and triumph, betrayal and forgiveness, in a family? A small village? An entire country?

7. Throughout the course of the novel, Irina is torn over her role in Mr. Monk?s fate. ?The truth is,? she writes, ?that I am not the person I thought I was.? Who do *you* think she is, or becomes, in THE BOOK OF FIRE? Does Irini possess the two ?gifts? that Zeus gave Hermes of shame and justice? Discuss the meaning of this Greek myth and its implications in the world of this novel and in society at large.

8. How, if at all, did reading THE BOOK OF FIRE change or enrich your understanding of natural disasters? Did this fictional account give you an opportunity to reflect on the effects of climate change on wildfires in the Mediterranean, North America and across the globe? You may choose to talk about such topics as global warming and environmental activism, too.

9. If you had the chance to ask the author one question about THE BOOK OF FIRE --- about the inspiration for her story, the writing process or her personal background --- what might it be?

10. What kind of future do you imagine for Irini, Chara and Tasso beyond the final chapter of this book? You may choose to answer the same question for Monk?s ex-wife and daughter as well.

Author Bio

Brought up in London, Christy Lefteri is the child of Cypriot refugees. She holds a PhD in creative writing from Brunel University, where she was a lecturer for many years. She is the author of THE BOOK OF FIRE, SONGBIRDS and the international bestseller THE BEEKEEPER OF ALEPPO, which won the Aspen Words Literary Prize and was the runner-up for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. Her first novel, A WATERMELON, A FISH AND A BIBLE, was longlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

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