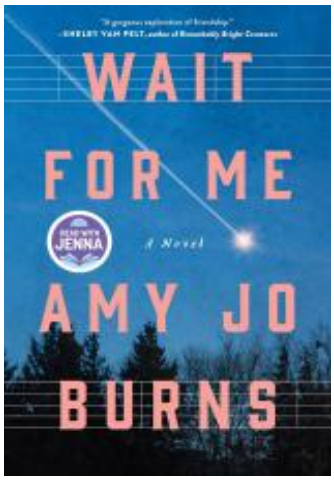
Wait for Me

by Amy Jo Burns



About the Book

From the author of MERCURY and SHINER comes a novel about the bond between two female folk singers, the love stories that haunt them, and the music that brings them together to burn bright.

Young folk singer Elle Harlow reaches the height of her prowess in 1973, with two wildly beloved albums to her name and a hidden history of impossible heartbreak. When she sets foot on the famed Grand Ole Opry stage, a far cry from the mountain that raised her, Elle gives the biggest performance of her life. Then, to the dismay of shocked fans, her producer, and the man who still loves her, she vanishes.

Almost two decades later, 18-year-old Marijohn Shaw is spending her summer pumping gas, writing songs on her broken mandolin, and longing for a mother. Her father, Abe, has always sworn he was the last person to see Elle Harlow alive. But when a meteor strikes the woods of their sleepy Pennsylvania town and a piece of Elle?s past emerges from the wreckage, the truth of her disappearance sets fire to everything Marijohn believes about herself, her music, and her ability to love with abandon.

WAIT FOR ME exalts the lush hills of Appalachia and the bright lights of Nashville as it reveals the legacy of Elle Harlow, the bold voice that defined her, the intimate betrayal that undid her, and the unexpected faith of another young woman determined to resurrect her.

Discussion Guide

1. WAIT FOR ME is filled with dynamic characters. Who was your favorite, and why?

2. How does the setting of the Pennsylvania woods and the West Virginia mountains function in the novel? Is ?home? a place of safety or a trap for Elle? For Marijohn?

3. The novel begins with a meteor strike that unearths the past. Besides being a plot device, what do you think the meteor represents for the characters in the book?

4. Discuss Marijohn and Lazarus? friendship. Do you think Lazarus knew how Marijohn felt about him? Did he make the right decision to leave home? What do you think of his brush with fame? Do you view it as an act of betrayal?

5. How familiar were you with the Nashville music scene before reading the novel? Did the characters remind you of any country music stars, especially when you think of a meteoric rise to fame or the friendship and rivalry between Elle and Josie?

6. Music plays a different role in each character?s life. Discuss the thread of music and musical instruments throughout the novel, from the Appalachian hills to Nashville to the town of Lenora. How did the author?s inclusion of lyrics throughout the book affect your reading experience?

7. The mandolin is broken, repaired, stolen and returned. What does this instrument symbolize? Does the fact that it was broken make the music it produces more valuable? Does Elle?s experience losing Merry make her music better? Do you agree that great art requires suffering?

8. Merry is a healer who doesn?t speak, yet she has a profound impact on Elle. How does the novel explore the power of silence versus the power of voice?

9. One of the book?s central lyrics is ?Try to heal everything, and you?ll heal nothing at all.? Discuss what happened at Josie?s family home when Elle tried to heal Jaclyn. Why do you think Josie?s family reacted the way they did? What emotions did you feel as this scene unfolded?

10. In a dream, Merry tells Elle: ?There are some things we never get over.? Is the novel ultimately about healing from the past or learning to live alongside the damage?

11. WAIT FOR ME explores a number of female friendships. Discuss the diversity of these friendships and why some of them became strong while others soured. Why do you think the author chose to focus on the female friendships, compared to the romantic relationships in the novel?

12. Weston claims he took the mandolin to fix it for Elle, but his actions led to heartbreak. Do you believe his intentions were pure? Can you forgive him for his role in the deception involving Josie?

13. Discuss Arlo?s role in the story. He is both a protector and an exploiter of Elle. He keeps her secrets and pays her royalties, but he also manipulates her career and life. Is he well-meaning or a necessary evil?

14. Elle disappears from the public eye for nearly two decades. What is the real reason she left Nashville, do you believe? Is there more than one reason? Do you interpret her disappearance as an act of cowardice, self-preservation or something else?

15. Josie steals Elle?s songs to launch her career. Do you view Josie as a villain, or is she a victim of a predatory industry and her own desperation? Did your opinion of her change as you read? Do you feel she received the ending she deserved, or was her fate too harsh?

16. Discuss the mystery of where Marijohn came from. Were you surprised by the truth about where she came from?

17. Lazarus calls Marijohn the bravest person he knows, but she disagrees. Do you stand by the choices that Marijohn makes? Was it brave to stay in Lenora or brave to leave it? How does the book define bravery?

18. By the end of the book, Marijohn is carving out her own path in music. Do you think she will be able to succeed where Elle and Josie struggled, or is she beginning the same dangerous cycle?

Author Bio

Amy Jo Burns is the author of the memoir CINDERLAND and three novels: SHINER, which was a Barnes & Noble Discover Pick and an NPR Best Book of the Year; MERCURY, a Barnes & Noble Book Club pick, a Book of the Month pick, a *People Magazine* Book of the Week, and an Editor?s Choice selection in *The New York Times*; and WAIT FOR ME.

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