



# When We Were Worthy

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**A win brought them together, but loss may tear them apart.**

When the sound of sirens cuts through a cool fall night, the small town of Worthy, Georgia, hurtles from triumph to tragedy. Just hours before, they'd watched the Wildcats score a winning touchdown. Now, they're faced with the deaths of three cheerleaders—their promising lives cut short in a fatal crash. And the boy in the other car—the only one to survive—is believed to be at fault. As rumors begin to fly and accusations spin, allegiances form and long-kept secrets emerge.

At the center of the whirlwind are four women, each grappling with loss, regret, shame, and lies: Marglyn, a grieving mother; Darcy, whose son had been behind the wheel; Ava, a substitute teacher with a scandalous secret; and Leah, a cheerleader who should have been in the car with her friends, but wasn't. If the truth comes out, will it bring redemption—or will it be their downfall?

## When We Were Worthy Details

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Author : Marybeth Mayhew Whalen

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# From Reader Review When We Were Worthy for online ebook

## Brandice says

*When We Were Worthy* is a story of a small town in Georgia, rocked by tragedy following a high school football game one night. Three cheerleaders are killed in a car accident and the driver of the other car, a student who survived, is accused of being at fault. The story is told from varying perspectives: two different moms, a teacher, and another cheerleader who wasn't in the car that night. The story focuses on the aftermath of the accident - grief, defense, scandal, shame, and sorrow.

The book reminded me in some ways of *The Party* by Robyn Harding, particularly because of the varying viewpoints between teenagers and adults, surrounding a single event, but I liked *When We Were Worthy* more. Though there were numerous predictable elements, I thought it was a better story in plot and in the writing itself.

I actually went to a high school football game last night as a friend was coaching, and I was reminded of how much is invested in the football team at some schools, and how young the students actually are, although I didn't feel that young myself back then.

Even though *When We Were Worthy* is a fictional story, it was very realistic. To lose anyone at such a young age is always a tragedy. Reading Marglyn's perspective (a grieving mom of one of the cheerleaders who died) of the story was the most painful, in my opinion, but Whalen did a great job putting the reader in her shoes and invoking her feelings.

The book resolved the lingering questions that arise from the accident and I stayed interested in the story the whole way through.

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## Chelsea Humphrey says

My first MBW novel was her previous book, *The Things We Wish Were True* (pub 2016) and I adored it! Being a fellow southern belle, Marybeth's writing feels familiar in an easygoing sense, and when I had the opportunity to meet her in Savannah later that same year, I was able to experience her warm heart and welcoming persona first hand. I've been hooked ever since, and from the briefest of details that I was able to pry from her one year ago, I knew *When We Were Worthy* would be a special read; I just had no idea just how emotional and terrifyingly real it would feel. As a mother of young children, I've already begun imagining what parenting teenagers will feel like, which made this book feel so relatable and eye-opening.

I don't want to give any plot details away, but the story is told through multiple POVs that seem mostly unrelated, then gradually begin to come together and bring us the details of what I will refer to as "The Event". While there is much heaviness to the book's content, it still maintained that upbeat, hopeful feeling of a small town rocked by tragedy that bands together and rises from the rubble. The stories are completely different, but it did have a similar feel to Fredrik Backman's *Beartown* in the small town/sports arena. Personally, I enjoyed how this book was equal parts Adult and Young Adult Fiction. Two of the narratives are from adults and the other two are student aged, so we get a nice blend of the story and how it's viewed overall. Anyone who has grown up in the south knows the importance of high school football on Friday nights, and this story was the perfect portrayal of its place in southern culture and how deeply it shapes the

families closely involved with the sport.

If you, like me, are a big fan of books that turn tragedy into a beautiful opportunity for forgiveness, I think you'll really enjoy *When We Were Worthy*. You can truly feel the love, sweat, and tears that went into writing this novel, not only from an author who is passionate about her stories, but a mother who dearly loves her children. A beautiful story wrapped in a gorgeous cover (amiright?), you really won't want to miss the experience it is to read this novel. Highly recommended for the usual lovers of Lake Union books, but also those who enjoy a bit of variety and mixture of genres in their literature. As a huge fan of Whalen's books, I can't wait to see what she's working on next!

**\*Many thanks to the publisher for providing my copy; it was a pleasure to provide my honest thoughts here!**

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## **Tulay says**

### **Dramatic, emotional book.**

If you have dark clouds over your head, don't read this story. Wait for them clear. Life in small town in Georgia, high school football, cheerleaders and popular girls and boys. And not so popular ones. Story told by four mothers, their tragic losses, where they're in their personal lives. Very good tragic story.

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## **Kristy says**

Mary Claire ("MC") and Brynne are beautiful head cheerleaders and together they rule the local high school of small Worthy, Georgia along with a pack of popular football boys. MC and Brynne have basically adopted two other JV cheerleaders, Keary and Leah, whom they promoted up to varsity. But one evening, everything changes in Worthy when, after another winning football game, one of the high school students, Graham, crashes his car into another, which is carrying a group of three cheerleaders. The girls are killed and suddenly nothing in the small town will ever be the same.

*This is a story of heartbreak, secrets, and small towns*, told from the perspective of four women. Marglyn, Mary Claire's mother; Darcy, Graham's mother; Ava, a Worthy outsider who has recently moved to town with her husband and who is a substitute teacher at the high school; and Leah, one of the four beloved cheerleaders. All four women have secrets and are struggling to find their place within Worthy.

*This novel pulls you in immediately, starting with the crash, which is startling and heartbreaking.* From there, everything truly changes in this tiny town, as they grapple with losing "their girls" and with finding someone to blame. Further, the crash starts to uncover some buried secrets. Why wasn't Leah in the car with her other cheerleader friends? Basically, a chain of events is unleashed that no one sees coming. As such, we are witness to a variety of people who are hurting, hiding, and struggling in their own ways--though Whalen does an excellent job of capturing some glimmers of hope as well.

She portrays small town living well: the way football is life, for instance. The four voices are extremely well-done, and you can easily picture the characters and the townspeople. This is a story of interconnected people in a town; *it's a slow burning novel but compelling*, with the majority of the suspense coming from

the secrecy in what Leah was doing that night. Seriously, why wasn't she with her friends in that car? For the most part, I found myself caught up in the drama, with the exception of some of the portions involving Ava and her issues--that was the one area that dragged a bit for me.

Mostly this is a fairly poignant novel. Be prepared--there are lot of *feelings*. Each women takes plenty of time in their chapters to describe how they feel. But Whalen is an excellent writer, and you'll find yourself caught up in the tale of this town and its messed up happenings, which are certainly better depicted than in many small town novels. There's a twist at the end that makes up for so many plot pieces wrapping up a little too neatly. Overall, a sad one, but compelling, hopeful, and lovely too. Certainly worth a read.

I received a copy of this novel from the publisher and Netgalley (thank you!) in return for an unbiased review; it is available everywhere as of 09/12/2017.

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## **Jeannie says**

This was such an emotional read! I was not expecting to feel so much for these characters but I did and it made my heart hurt. Marglyn's part of the story made me cry. This was so hard to put down, I had to know how it was going to end. I recommend this one, just be prepared for some tears.

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## **Crumb says**

*wor·thy*

*adjective*

*having or showing the qualities or abilities that merit recognition in a specified way.*

In a town called 'Worthy' the people sure try to live up to it's name. With a name like 'worthy', you can make the correct assumption that expectations run high, especially for their revered football team. The football team is God in Worthy and the whole town shuts down for them. On a fateful and tragic night, Mary Claire and her friends were driving to a football game, expecting to cheer per usual, and never came home. And never will again. They died in a tragic car accident. That one car crash set in motion a chain of events that reverberated through the town and through its people. It created a chasm between the people of Worthy and had everyone pointing fingers of blame.

This book was simply a character study. I was hoping for more and maybe that was my fault. Perhaps my expectations going into this book were too high. Sometimes when I am really excited for a book.. I tend to "over hype" it in my mind and then feel a bit let down. This is one of those cases. I don't think this book is 'worthy' of any rating higher than a three out of five stars. It was a very effective character study and analysis but that was it. A fine book. An average book. Meh.

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## Tina says

My first book by Marybeth Mayhew Whalen and what a tremendous story! She is a very talented author.

The story takes place in a small town in Georgia. A devastating event occurs for the town and changes many lives forever. The story is told by 4 different people and each has something else going on in their lives (but are connected to the one big event.)

The story is heartbreaking especially if you are a parent of a teen. It shows how one terrible event can not only change one person's life but a whole small town. It's about sorrow, judgement, and eventual forgiveness.

Thank-you once again to Lake Union Publishing (who never ceases to disappoint me) and NetGalley for allowing me the opportunity to read this advanced reader's edition.

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## Deanna says

My reviews can also be seen at: <https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress.com/>

After reading the description for ***WHEN WE WERE WORTHY***, I knew it was another novel that I just had to read.

The events in the novel take place in, WORTHY, GEORGIA. Population 4162

Worthy is the like most small towns, everyone knows each other and their business. On Sundays in Worthy, you'd better show up in one of the towns many different churches or you'd be gossiped about. Not a lot to do in town, a few fast food places and one decent restaurant... Chessman's. Not a lot of places for teens to hang-out. There is one pub but most of the teens know that if they even TRIED to sneak in, SOMEONE in the small town would tell their parents.

Fall in Worthy = Football. This is a town where football is EVERYTHING. Once the season starts, Worthy is more team than town.

***"One thing everyone agreed on - it was the perfect night for football"***

The book begins with "The Girls" Mary Claire, Brynne, and Keary telling us about that night.

That night, The Worthy Wildcats had just won their game. They were in the midst of another winning season and it looked like they were headed to the state championship.

***"Our boys really showed up tonight"***

Webb Hart, Ian Stone and Seth Bishop are the team's heroes. The boys who can do no wrong in Worthy. But if they did do wrong? Most often it was just swept under the rug.

After the game, the teens had a party to get to. Mary Claire, Brynne and Keary got ready at Mary Claire's house. Normally Leah would be with them. Brynne told the other two girls that Leah had something

important to do.

***Where was Leah?***

They think back to the moments that could have changed everything. How many of those moments are in a day? How something so small can change everything. They were all excited about the night ahead, never thinking that it would end so tragically.

**Ava Chessman** is not from Worthy originally, but her husband Clay is. Ava is a substitute teacher and Clay runs Chessman's his families restaurant. She was at the game with her husband, Clay. Feeling ignored she gets up to buy a drink. That's when she runs into the one she calls "trouble"

***People should never forget that in Worthy...someone is always watching.***

**Marglyn Miner** can't stop beating herself up for the argument she had with her daughter, Mary Claire that night. Marglyn is at the mall later that evening when her phone rings, it's her husband's phone number, but when she hears a strange voice asks if she is Marglyn Miner, she instantly knows something is wrong. Then she hears words nobody ever wants to hear.....

**Darcy LaRue** is trying to keep it together. She's separated from her husband, Tommy who was one of Worthy's previous football stars. They have one son together, Graham. When Tommy suddenly shows up at her house, she wonders why he's there. But then she suddenly remembers all the sirens she'd been hearing. Tommy tells her they need to get to the hospital.

**Leah Bennett** is thinking that no matter what the football players do, they get away it. Boys will be boys, they say. Brynne is cheer captain and Leah is just a sophomore who was lucky to be cheering varsity. So when Brynne tells her she needs to "*go the extra mile*", she does.

***What was Leah doing that was more important? Why did Brynne seem so secretive about it?***

I enjoyed this novel and read it in just a couple of sittings. Four women, all with their own secrets. A terrible tragedy that will bring most of these secrets to light. We see the story through the eyes of many characters. How the tragedy affected each of them as well as those they loved. Well defined characters, all with flaws, some bigger than others. What happens when a lapse in judgment leads to such horrible consequences? There are many benefits to living in a small town but at the same time in a small town your mistakes follow you everywhere and are seen by everyone.

Everyone wants answers. Someone needs to pay! Out for blood for some actions yet turning a blind eye to the actions of others? What happens when the answers you are looking for are not what you were expecting?

***"In Worthy, truth lived right next door to perception, but they weren't exactly friendly neighbors"***

WHEN WE WERE WORTHY is well written and thought-provoking novel about love, lies, guilt, grief, forgiveness, and so much more. I am really looking forward to reading more from Marybeth Mayhew Whalen.

Thank you NetGalley and Lake Union Publishing for providing an advanced readers copy of this book for me to read in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Lindsay - Traveling Sister says**

4 stars!

This was an intriguing and thought-provoking story. Several times I found myself wondering how I would handle being put in a similar situation as the main characters in this novel.

The lives of three varsity cheerleaders are taken in a tragic car accident in the small town of Worthy. Each and every member of this tight-knit community is affected by this devastating loss. The story is narrated by four women strongly affected by these deaths and shows how they each grieve the losses of these young women.

The author, Marybeth Mayhew Whalen, delivers a well-written story through well-developed characters' perspectives. I felt like I was a part of this small town tragedy – I could sense their loss and desperation for answers. The novel flowed perfectly and kept an edge of suspense throughout.

A big thank you to NetGalley, Lake Union Publishing and Marybeth Mayhew Whalen for an ARC in exchange for an honest review!

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## **BIBLIOMANIAC MJ says**

Worthy... a small southern town where football is everything and everyone knows the lives of everyone. Or so it seems! There are several secrets abound and many of them will come out as the town experiences the devastating deaths of 3 cheerleaders who perished in a car accident, on the way to a party after a victorious football game. The driver of the other car, a boy from the same school, is thought to be at fault.

A tale told from several points of view, one initially feels like they're independent of each other, but they do eventually come together as the details of the accident emerge. Through these points of view we get to meet: Leah, also a cheerleader who was meant to have been in the car on the night of the accident; Marglyn, one of the grieving mothers who lost her daughter in the crash; Ava, a teacher at the school with a big secret; and Darcy, the mother of the boy behind the wheel of the other vehicle.

As a mother of teenagers myself, I could easily relate to the situations presented in this highly emotional, heavy and spine-chillingly real tale. It also drives home the point of how important it is to be there for your teenagers, even though they may push you away!

Although a tragic tale, it is also one of positivity as the town, who will be forever changed, comes to terms with their grief, overcome their judgements and eventually are left with forgiveness and hope in their hearts.

An emotional, dramatic and captivating read, which comes highly recommended by me.

It was my pleasure to review my first read by this author in exchange for an honest review. Many thanks to her, Lake Union Publishing and Netgalley for the opportunity.

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## Kendall says

In my opinion, this book definitely did NOT live up to the hype or my expectations.

When We Were Worthy is a small town atmosphere about three popular cheerleaders that are killed in a horrific car accident. The young boy driving in the other vehicle manages to make it out alive.. seriously injured but alive. This story is about the accident and how the town handles this situation including the mothers, cheerleaders, high school students, football players, and the rest of the gossip that unfolds in this small town.

I was not engaged in this gossip at all. WAYYYY too much going on in this story and I was really really bored. I am all for gossip in my novels.. but they have to HAVE substance and an actual punch to the kick. This had ZERO punch.... I was struggling to finish this one. I was waiting and waiting for this novel to pick up and wow... definitely not there at all for me.

Overall, 2 stars for me on this one.

Thank you to Netgalley and Lake Union Publishing for an advanced arc in exchange for an honest review.  
Publication date: 9/12/17.

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## Sarah Joint says

**Can we just take a moment to admire that gorgeous cover?** Look at it! Stunning. I was powerless against it and had to give this one a shot.

Small town Worthy, Georgia. Where football is huge, wins make your week and losses devastate. That's a lot of pressure to put on high school boys... and a huge ego rush when they succeed. But this story isn't really about those boys... it's about the girls, the cheerleaders.

**Three cheerleaders will remain forever young in Worthy: they died in a car accident on the way to a party after a big game.** The other car involved is assumed to be at fault, a boy who attended the same school. He will live on while their lives have been cut tragically short.

We get a lot of perspectives in this one that were a little hard for me to keep track of. Leah is always obvious, but the women all have husbands or exes and children and it was just a whirlwind of names and information. **Leah** is a cheerleader who was friends with the three girls. Everyone is surprised she wasn't in the car with her best friends. She wasn't, and there's a reason for that she's not willing to share. **Marglyn** is a grieving mother, having lost her beautiful daughter in the crash. She carries a lot of guilt. **Ava** is a teacher at the school with a big secret she's trying to keep under wraps. And **Darcy**, who is the mother of the boy who may have caused the crash. She's grateful to still have her son, but how can she help him deal with the backlash?

**A lot of secrets come out in the outpouring of grief after that tragic night. Some lives were lost, some will never be the same.**

It was hard for me personally to identify with the characters, they were a bit old-fashioned and frustrated me at times. I also can't imagine what it's like to live in a tiny southern town where everyone talks behind your

back if you're spotted at the liquor store. We're just fine with a stiff drink or four where I live! My frustrations with them were mostly explained or resolved, though. All in all, it's a well-written book and a quick read I think many will enjoy, especially those who grew up in small towns. Very dramatic, very emotional, and very absorbing. I was hovering between a 3.5 and a 4 for this one, and in the end the beautiful and vivid writing wins out.

*I received an ARC of this book from Net Galley and Lake Union Publishing, thank you! My review is honest and unbiased.*

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## Larry H says

I'm somewhere between 4 and 4.5 stars here.

*Well I was born in a small town  
And I live in a small town  
Probably die in a small town  
Oh, those small communities  
All my friends are so small town  
My parents live in the same small town*  
—"Small Town," John Cougar Mellencamp

Marybeth Mayhew Whalen once again shows off her knack for getting inside the scandals and secrets of small-town America in her new novel, ***When We Were Worthy***, and she does so in great soapy fashion.

"In Worthy, truth lived right next door to perception, but they weren't exactly friendly neighbors."

Worthy, Georgia is a small town ruled by football, as many small Southern towns are. "Once football season started, we were more the team than the town." Two beautiful cheerleaders, Brynne and Mary Claire ("MC"), rule the school, making or breaking lives by the amount of attention they pay to others. When they bestow their friendship on two sophomore cheerleaders, Keary and Leah, and encourage them to join the varsity squad, it elevates their social standing, but it also makes the two girls beholden to the seniors and their friends.

One night, after a successful game, the victory spirit of Worthy is cut short, when an accident claims the lives of MC, Brynne, and Keary. The boy who appears to have caused the accident is also from town, and survives, which, in the eyes of many in town, is unfortunate. The town and its residents are thrown for a complete loop—the cheerleaders become the stuff of legend, angels chosen to descend to heaven, and Worthy's citizens are mired in grief, anger, and suspicion.

***When We Were Worthy*** follows four women in the midst of the tragedy—Leah, who should have been in that car with her friends that night, but the reason why she wasn't may be worse than the accident; Marglyn, a grieving mother trying to make sense of it all; Darcy, once one of the town's cheerleaders, but now the mother of the boy responsible for the accident; and Ava, a substitute teacher who moved to Worthy with her husband, who grew up there, and has a secret that, if exposed, could cause many ripples through the town. From many of these women, you get a slightly fully sense of those who died, their good points and their foibles, and their real effect on others in Worthy.

The tension simmers in the town, and you know a powder keg will explode somewhere. Will it be those who threaten to hurt the boy allegedly responsible for the girls' deaths? Will it be the marriage that is barely holding together, or the one which has recently come apart? Will the secrets that have been hidden get exposed, and will the truths come to light? Whalen knows how to keep your attention, giving you just enough to keep reading, and keep wondering what will happen.

This is the second book of Whalen's I've read, and I am again impressed at her ability to create drama without it veering into melodrama, soap opera tension without devolving into camp, and characters that aren't always sympathetic but you can't stop reading about them. Many have compared her to Liane Moriarty (as if more than one author can't seem to occupy this space), and while there is some similarity, Whalen has a style and a talent all her own.

*When We Were Worthy* isn't a book that makes you think, except perhaps what you might do if faced with the situations some of the characters were. But it is a tremendously entertaining book, one that cements Whalen's storytelling talent. If you like small-town drama, you'll like this one.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo....>

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## **Diane S ? says**

I live in a small town, though not as small as Worthy, the Georgia town portrayed in this novel. Worthy is a big football town, as is mine, but while the football players and cheerleaders rule the school in Worthy, I don't feel that was the case in my town. Three varsity cheerleaders, the cream of the crop, are killed in a horrific car accident. The young boy driving the other car, seriously injured but still alive, becomes the focus of the town's rage. As the others grieve the loss of their daughters, we are treated to an inside view of how this town handles the accident.

So, all well and good up to this point, interesting and I was finding the viewpoints of the four mothers involved realistic and poignant. This is where it started to derail for me, pictures on a cell phone, another town target. Too much going on, the focus shifting before shifting back again. Worthy just had too much going on, and it began to seem like an episode of *Knots Landing* or any soap opera of your choice. A definite feeling that less instead of more would have been better, at least for this reader. A more focused rendering.

Then we have voices from the beyond, did we really need more? Then the emotions came off as over the top, too dramatic, just too much. I gave this a three because there were a few characters I really liked, among them sixteen years old Leah, who should have been in the car with the other cheerleaders. She has a big secret, though I guessed really early what that was, but through the course of the book she grows up and changes.

These are just my views, never been much for overdramatized speech and emotions, but you may find them perfectly to your liking. This is a good story, but I could have been better if the author had just pulled back a little.

ARC from Netgalley.

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## Susanne Strong says

4 Stars.

In the town of Worthy, Football is all that matters - that is until tragedy strikes.

A car crash happens - killing the three most popular High School cheerleaders: MC, Brynne, and Keary, leaving the town in pieces. The worst part? Graham, a teenager from the High School was also involved in the collision and everyone believes he was responsible - and he survived. Leah, another cheerleader, who was besties with MC, Brynne and Keary was supposed to be in the car with them that night. Yet for some reason, she wasn't and everyone would like to know why and she refuses to say.

Marglyn, MC's mom is devastated by her daughters' death, even though she and her daughter had their differences and MC never seemed to want to be around her. Marglyn isn't like the other moms who lost their daughters. All they want is revenge..

Ava is a substitute teacher at the school and she taught one of the girls who died. Ava she has a secret of her own and it was about to come out .. before. And after the crash, she thought her secret was safe. Talk about being naive! And now, her life is in shambles. And her husband Clay? Well, he wants nothing to do with her..

Darcy, Graham's mother feels awful about the crash, she really does. That said, she is just grateful that her son is alive and she doesn't want him talking about that night or what actually happened. Oddly enough, the only person who she feels she can talk to is Clay. Can you say complicated?

Leah, on the other hand can't stop thinking about that night. Yet she can't talk about it. Her secret isn't safe with anyone. The only person she wants to be around is her old friend Talmadge. He makes her feel safe. Worthy. Yet she can't talk to him either.

Worthy is the kind of small town where everyone has secrets. Secrets that can implode or secrets that, if exposed, can be freeing. The difference is in how they are handled. "When We Were Worthy" by Marybeth Mayhew Whalen is a character driven novel about choices, grief, secrets, scandal, tragedy, family and friendship. It is a story about survival. Ava, Marglyn, Darcy and Leah all have choices to make, choices that will determine whether or not they are Worthy.

This book enraptured me from the very first word. I love strong women (I like to think that I am one (pun intended)) and this novel featured several. I like how all of them were portrayed. Damaged, heartbroken, obviously scared at times, yet each character had something about their spirit that persevered. Marybeth Mayhew Whalen drew me in like cotton candy, I was glued to the story and was invested in the characters and this novel like you wouldn't believe. It got me, what can I say? I hope it enraptures you the same way.

Thank you to NetGalley, Lake Union Publishing and Marybeth Mayhew Whalen for an ARC of this novel in exchange for an honest review.

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