



By Light We Knew Our Names

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From ghosts to pink dolphins to a fight club of young women who practice beneath the Alaskan aurora borealis, *By Light We Knew Our Names* examines the beauty and heartbreak of the world we live in. Across thirteen stories, this collection explores the thin border between magic and grief.

By Light We Knew Our Names Details

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From Reader Review By Light We Knew Our Names for online ebook

Varsha Ravi (between.bookends) says

4.5/5

This short story collection which consists of 13 stories, simply just took my breath away. The stories in this collection are realistic but have a sort of weird/magical realism-esque undertone to it. Some stories are more realistic, some others distinctly surreal and some sort of straddle the border and could be arguably either. So it would be the perfect choice if you are not sure whether you enjoy magical realism, but you want to give it a try, nonetheless.

The general theme within most of the stories in this collection deal with loss in some form or the other and its so incredibly beautifully captured. It just left me in awe of how touching, painful, real and tangible words on a page can be, and how it can invoke such powerful emotions from within. The stories in this collection explore sadness, humour, joy, science, mystery, magic and our relationships with the natural world with incredible deftness and I was completely consumed into every story. And. I have to talk about Anne Valente's writing. It's absolutely stunning and fluid without being overdone.

This collection was just perfect in every single way, and it is one of the best books I have ever read. And one that I know I'll keep revisiting.

Elli (The Bibliophile) says

This was an amazing collection of short stories! There was so much variety, but also clear themes that ran throughout. Beautifully written, poignant plots and a joy to read overall! This collection proves that short stories can be just as heart wrenching as a full-length novel! Can't stop gushing! Plus the cover is beautiful.

Leesa says

Anne Valente has a heartbreakingly gentle way of writing. Even the stories that made me a bit scared/anxious of what was coming next...the words were careful, gentle, soft. From moment to moment, magical or everyday. Everything felt true. So much beauty here. This is one of my new favorite collections, indeed. Resplendent.

Ellie (faerieontheshelf) says

4.5!

Full review to come but Anne Valente has a beautiful writing style & this collection of stories on a whole veered towards the very good as I enjoyed most of the stories

Vanessa says

3.5 stars.

By Light We Knew Our Names by Anne Valente was, although a good and highly entertaining short story collection, nonetheless a victim of the hype machine for me. I wish that I had come across this collection having never heard of it before, simply being drawn in by the beautiful cover and the enticing synopsis, rather than by the rave reviews from various people on BookTube. I can't help but wonder if my experience of the book would have been heightened even just a little. But nevertheless, this is still a very good read, and one that although I didn't adore like so many people, I would in fact return to and read again.

The eleven stories in this collection all have a sadness at their centre, with some being more hopeful than others. They cover a variety of topics, from sexual assault and adultery, to grief and illness. Very heavy subjects indeed, and ones that, based on my initial reading of the first story, I was not expecting at all. However, for the most part I did feel that the somewhat heavier stories were in fact the better stories in this collection.

My opinion regarding my favourites in this collection may be an unpopular one, because I actually felt that the stories in the second half of this collection were a lot stronger, and I found my enjoyment increasing a great deal towards the end, which bumped my rating up a half star. My favourites in the collection would have to be *Latchkey* (the first story, and the only one I have read twice), *By Light We Knew Our Names* (brutal but beautiful), *Minivan*, *Until Our Shadows Claim Us* (possibly my favourite in the collection, and the one that drew me in the most), and *Mollusk*, *Membrane*, *Human Heart*.

I am glad that I read this collection **finally**, but I'm afraid I wasn't as enamoured by it as so many other people were. Like I said though, this is a collection that I would return to, as now I know what to expect from it, I feel I may be more open to just letting myself sit and experience the stories on a slightly deeper level. Anne Valente can definitely write, and although her writing was not quite as lyrical as I was expecting based on other people's reviews, there were now and again some very heart wrenching moments that held me fast and wouldn't let me go.

Lucia says

Latchkey is an incredible story.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I really enjoyed this book of short stories that was sometimes magical, sometimes insightful, sometimes grieving. I found it in Hoopla while looking for something about Alaska, but only one story is specifically set under the northern lights. What a cover, too.

For fans of Karen Russell (especially *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*) or Kelly Link (for instance *Magic for Beginners*.)

Nastya Khyzhniak says

We wake up, we have our morning coffees and small breakfasts, we rush to start the day. We find a safe heaven in the subway to read, even if only for 20 minutes and then keep the story in our minds until there is time to finish it. "By the light..." is wonderfully magical (sometimes literally). Every story through the sadness or scary moments gives hope, subtle light which will help to discover your name as well. One doesn't just read the story as a spectator but is a part of "we". I just loved it! The book touches so many diverse subjects and you really don't know what to expect from a next page and a next story, but definitely don't want to stop until you've read them all.

Renee Godding says

Rating: 4.5 stars

2018 is going to go down as the year where I reach a deeper level of appreciation for short stories. And with powerhouses like Jen Campbell, Kirsty Logan, Daisy Johnson and now Anne Valente entering my life, I think I have good reason for it.

I have nothing but respect for people who can put pen to paper and create characters that feel lifelike, and convey feelings that so many of us have, but can't express. For people who can create and sustain a world for hundreds of pages, to the point where that world is just as real to you as your own. Even more respect do I have for those people who can do this exact thing in a maximum of 20 pages. There is truly an art to sanding down your message, until nothing but the core remains.

The collection is woven together by themes of loss and grief, all explored through a lens of magical realism, which in my opinion is the perfect fit for both the theme and this format. I have mentioned before how grief is a topic that is close to my heart. For me personally, it's the single most difficult experience to describe in words. At the risk of sounding woolly; it can be a tangible, almost physical presence in your life for years, yet remain unfathomable, and escape your ability to be grounded by mere words. At times it can seem to inhabit a reality of its own, as it can not belong in yours. This type of darker magical realism can sometimes be the most "true" way of describing that feeling, despite being fiction.

Many of Anne Valente's stories do exactly that. My personal favorites from this collection include *Not for Ghosts or Daffodils* (probably my favorite out of all of them), *Mollusk*, *Membrane*, *Human Heart* and *To the Place Where We Take Flight*, all of which I would individually give 5 stars.

Unfortunately, this high level is not consistent throughout the collection. Overall, the second half felt was much stronger than the first. Some of the earlier stories, for example *Dear Amelia* and *Terrible Angels* were closer to two stars and brought down my total rating by half a star.

Despite those two stories, Valente's prose is beautiful and she clearly has a lot of talent in this genre. Enough so that I feel like the stories that didn't click with me still have the deeper layers to connect to other readers, or maybe to me at a different point in my life.

This collection has earned itself a permanent place on my shelf, and I can see myself coming back to this many times in the future.

Ferdy says

Really enjoyed most of the stories, there were only a couple that were boring/hard to get through. *Latchkey* and *A Very Compassionate Baby* were the most interesting, the magical realism elements really drew me in. The ones that were most impactful were *Minivan* and *By Light We Knew Our Names*, they were brutal and depressing. I disliked *Dear Amelia* and *A Taste of Tea*, they were rather dull and nowhere near as engrossing as the other stories.

Teresa says

3.5

One of many impressive elements to these stories is the description of emotions felt in the physical body. The writing is always beautiful, though the stories start to feel a bit too familiar and the voices too similar as they accumulate. A few are told in first-person plural and, while that point-of-view fits each, I have to admit to being bored at the first and weary by the last. In general, though, the latter was a great story, keeping me reading in a state of tension.

The magical elements are rendered well, though I felt defeated by some of the whimsical names of the titles themselves. (I admit also to a certain lack of imagination.) A couple of the stories are brutal and realistic in their depiction of violence against women—no magic or whimsy there— though the phenomena of nature is a consolation of sorts. Conflict between science and nature is a recurring theme.

Even though I read only one story per day, I think I would've liked each even more if I'd come across it in isolation, in its original publication in the various literary magazines where each first appeared. That was not likely to happen, so I'm glad to have been introduced to this writer through this collection.

Tara says

This book has its own feel, its own place in the world of fiction. Valente is an extremely gifted writer, with an ability to merge science, magical realism, and reality in a wondrous way, but she never lets go of what truly matters, the core of her writing, which is the need of all humans to be loved and to feel safe. She forces you to slow down your reading, to luxuriate in her sensuous sentences that flow like many tributaries into one large river of truth. Highly recommended for short story lovers, especially fans of Anthony Doerr and Kim Edwards.

Amy | shoutame says

I believe this is the first ever short story collection I have ever read. It was brilliant!

This is a collection of thirteen stories that encompass so many themes I don't even know where to begin. We see girls punching pillows underneath the northern lights, a boy strumming a guitar for his sick mother, a woman whose marriage has ended in a lot of green tea and so many more amazing and beautifully

constructed stories. Grief, sickness, love and life are wonderfully explored by Valente in this novel. I can't really do the book justice in my description, all I can say is that you should definitely go and pick it up!

I fell in love with Anne Valente's writing style, nearer the end I was rationing myself to a story a day as I wanted it to last longer! I know after this I shall be hunting out some more short story collections to add to my reading list. I would highly recommend to all.

TheSkepticalReader says

4.5 stars - a *very* close 5 star read.

This treasured collection of short stories gripped me from the very first story. I should warn you beforehand, this is not an easy book to swallow. Some of the stories are really hard-hitting and will tear you apart in a million pieces. But nevertheless, if you are feeling brave one day, I strongly encourage you to give this collection a try.

Valente is a poet. Her writing is in every word perfection and the way she crafts these beautiful stories is simply astounding. Not only can she be incredibly creative in imagery and symbolism, but the way she writes her characters—particularly the younger ones—is highly impressive. As someone who struggles very badly with short story collections, I began reading this one story a day but once I hit the forth short story, I couldn't stop reading and flew through it. I usually struggle with short stories because I don't find myself as invested into each story but this collection is perfection from the start.

Some stories have a strong sense of magic, while most remain realistic. What is amazing about some of the magical realism stories is that there is always room for speculation as to what's what and whether it *is* "magical" or not. I love stories that offer you more than one interpretation and more than one way of looking at things so I have to really admire the fact that I took so much away from each of the stories.

The only reason why this book remains short of a perfect, five-star read is due one story towards the end that wasn't nearly as gripping for me as the rest of them were. While I did enjoy the ending of it, majority of the story remained a dull experience and was unfortunately not redeemable by the last three pages. Still, don't let that deteriorate you from picking up this wonderful book. *By Light We Knew Our Names* is still a brilliant piece of art.

I should warn you, I'm bound to keep changing my rating from 4 to 5 stars as I keep mulling over some of the stories overtime. But there isn't a single person I can think of that I *wouldn't* recommend this collection to.

Hannah says

I have been trying and failing to write this review for days now. I don't quite know how to review it still. I can say this though: I wanted to love this. But I didn't.

The cover is beyond beautiful (even more so than it looks on the pictures) and Anne Valente's writing is stunning but I struggled with how bleak this book was, relentlessly so. Short stories are often sad and often

bleak but this felt unnecessarily cruel.

The stories focus loss and trauma. This is done extremely well but made it necessary for me to take long breaks between the stories. People lose somebody or something important to them and are suspended in this world of grief. I can intellectually understand how well structured the short stories were but reading them did not often give me pleasure. I also found the stories repetitive in their bleakness and their near hopelessness.

There were a few stories that I enjoyed - and these were the ones that were more hopeful and less devastating. Here Anne Valente's talent for creating characters and stories really shone. The first story in this collection of a child finding out just how special they are worked exceptionally well and remained my favourite until the end.

This review and other thoughts on books can be found on my blog: <https://ihavethoughtsonbooks.wordpress...>
