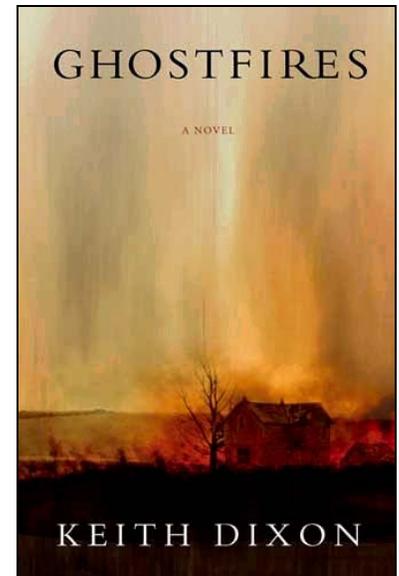


READING GROUP GUIDE

Ghostfires by Keith Dixon



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Introduction to *Ghostfires*

One man believes Linda Bascomb was murdered. A second believes she took her own life. The first is her husband, Warren, an aging surgeon who has lost his medical license because of his morphine addiction. The second is her son, Ben, a husband and father who struggles every day to remain sober and avoid bankruptcy.

Warren has entered into an arrangement with his son that has since kept Ben financially afloat and Warren supplied with morphine. Ben's wife, Emma, desperately seeks to distance her husband from Warren before their relationship destroys her family. Opposing her efforts is Victor Javier, the mastermind of the arrangement, an immigrant whose cruelty masks a hope for his mother's deliverance.

Though Linda Bascomb was once the true connection between Warren and Ben, her memory becomes the specter that polarizes them. As the pain of unresolved history accumulates, their embittered agreement collapses, and in the process destroys one life, changes another forever, and drives both from the emotional and chemical shelters in which they hide. In the inevitable reckoning, Ben and Warren are forced to acknowledge the power the dead exert on the living, the elusive nature of redemption, and the ways the things we lose define us.

Sometimes shocking, always incisive, Keith Dixon's brilliant debut novel is a harsh but compassionate portrayal of love and need. Set on the emotionally bleak outskirts of New York City, *Ghostfires*, with stylistic power and psychological precision, lays bare a corrupt American dream-and a family with scores to settle.

Praise for *Ghostfires*

"*Ghostfires* is a remarkable first novel. Few books have captured the tragic and debilitating effects of addiction. In startlingly fresh and dramatic terms, it presents the downward spiral of a fundamentally decent man and those he loves. At once powerful and subtle, raw and nuanced, Dixon's book captures, in stunning prose, the dark intricacies of familial love and guilt, loyalty and betrayal."

-Michael C. White, author of the *New York Times* Notable Book, *A Brother's Blood*

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. *Ghostfires* uses a great deal of fire imagery – what do you think the book was saying about fires and their aftermaths?
2. Discuss the possibility that the author was trying to write a ghost story. Did he succeed? What is a ghost story?
3. Do you think Ned Strickland was a moral or immoral person? Was Victor? Discuss whether or not a person's goal justifies the means he uses to attain it. Is it possible for a person to be kind and cruel at the same time?
4. Is heaven really, as Rhazi suggests, 'a place with no memory'? Why did that remark appeal to Warren so deeply?
5. Why did the author use such an unusual approach to writing chapter seven? Did having Ned read the evaluation make the chapter more or less interesting? Would you have preferred to have seen the actual evaluation?
6. Was Emma's situation better or worse at the end of the novel than it was at the beginning?

About the Author

Keith Dixon works as an editor for *The New York Times*. He lives in New York City.