



A Flame Worth the Candle

Arthur Kevin Rein

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In the tantalizing young adult novel A Flame Worth the Candle, a young romance is troubled by family mysteries.

In Arthur Kevin Rein's absorbing young adult novel *A Flame Worth the Candle*, teenagers work to unravel the mystery of a girl's disappearance.

During the summer of 2013, Sam works at his family's camper resort. There, he develops a relationship with Diane, who is mysterious and beautiful. He's drawn into the mystery of her sister's disappearance; it appears to be linked to the powerful Manticore family and the secretive goings-on at their estate in the forest. Sam and Diane's attempts to solve the mystery are complicated by the sudden reappearance of Diane's father, newly released from prison. Their own passion for each other is an additional distraction.

Fast-moving and suspenseful, the novel follows the teenagers through twisting action scenes, as when they go on the run with fresh knowledge or when they seem to be on the verge of discovering what happened to Diane's sister but worry about the consequences of showing up on someone's doorstep unannounced. There's a gritty, realistic quality to the prose: "We were driving at the speed of time and it wasn't catching up with us. Not yet." And Sam and Diane's conversations with each other and with others are deep and emotional, including Diane's interactions with her estranged father. Diane's concerns over what a reunion with her sister might look like, given all that might have been done to her in the intervening years, are also involving.

The subplot of Sam and Diane's romance runs alongside the mystery; it consumes most of the book's attention toward its end, which explores in a poignant manner how love adapts in the face of loss. Some romantic tension is also established via the fact that Sam comes from a loving family while Diane does not; their affection for each other has to survive the realities of her suffering. It's a dimensional challenge that's handled with sensitivity. Here and elsewhere, the novel steers clear of neat idealism, focusing instead on celebrating moments of beauty. And it moves toward an unpredictable ending whose revelations are obscured until just the right moment, making its progression tantalizing.

In the romance-tinged mystery novel *A Flame Worth the Candle*, a teenager helps his new love interest seek out her missing sister.

SARAH FRIDESWIDE (December 12, 2023)

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