



Where My Body Ends and the World Begins

Tony Romano

Allium Press of Chicago (Dec 12, 2017)

Softcover \$17.99 (262pp)

978-0-9967558-7-0

Romano is a masterful storyteller, unfolding a captivating and imaginative tale.

This engrossing, surprising, and psychologically astute novel takes a real-life event—the devastating 1958 fire at the Our Lady of the Angels school that killed ninety-two children and several nuns—and considers its impact on the survivors and the surrounding Italian-American community on the west side of Chicago.

Nearly a decade after the fire, twenty-year-old Anthony Lazzeri is struggling with the consequences of the tragedy he survived, and which claimed the life of his sister. He is often at odds with his family, his sometime-girlfriend Maryann, and his own body. He strives to imagine a future for himself.

From its wrenching opening, in which Anthony shatters his leg in an accident, to its tumultuous conclusion, where he tumbles into a series of challenging realizations, much of the story is centered on Anthony's attempt to come to terms with his losses. Adding to the tension is the fact that his neighbor, a retired police detective, is convinced that Anthony was involved in setting the fire.

Romano is a masterful storyteller, unfolding a captivating and imaginative tale as Anthony gradually, in twists and turns, confronts the troubled relationships, buried memories, guilt, and self-deceptions that are weighing him down. While most of the novel is told from Anthony's point of view, Romano cleverly intersperses insights from Maryann that imply that Anthony's narration and memories may not be entirely reliable.

The story expertly captures the texture and cadence of its Italian community: the clipped speech of city workers in the Streets and Sanitation department where Anthony works, the stoic camaraderie at the Billy Goat and other smoky taverns where he searches for his father, and the comforts of his Nonna's warm bread and homemade ravioli. Characters are well drawn, distinct, and sympathetic.

Where My Body Ends and the World Begins is a gripping coming-of-age novel. It tells the unique story of one young man's tentative, halting attempts to understand loss, while also making a broader statement about the strength of community and family, and about the wounds we endure, especially those that may never completely heal.

KRISTEN RABE (November/December 2017)

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