



★ **We Are Light**

Gerda Blees

Michele Hutchison, Translator

World Editions (Aug 1, 2023)

Softcover \$17.99 (240pp)

978-1-64286-127-3

In Gerda Blees's novel *We Are Light*, a woman's quiet, bizarre death exposes the tragic gap between ethics and legality.

The leader of the Sound & Love Commune, Melodie manipulates loyalty and obedience from her small group of followers. When she tells them they can survive on light rather than food, they listen, even as Melodie's sister Elisabeth starves to death before their eyes.

The story of how all of this came to pass, and whether the law has the power to punish Melodie for her lies, comes together link by link, forming a grim, unbreakable chain that binds the commune together, even in death. It's an unconventional story, told via the settings, objects, and feelings that played a role in it, as with the house where Elisabeth's death occurred and the cello that Melodie once loved but could never make a career with. Some voices are focused and sure of themselves, while others lapse into stream-of-consciousness style, spilling their feelings with a freedom that they can't manage in person.

The story itself chimes in at one point to confirm what has become more obvious: it will end with no surprises, no shocking revelations or happy-ever-afters. And yet it remains as hypnotizing as ever, exploring every nook and cranny of the cult members' damaged psyches.

Even once the critical events are laid out, questions remain about who is guilty, what guilt is, and which actions merit punishment. There are no easy answers, or even easy questions. In the end, all that remains is the eerie, discomfiting realization that common notions of justice, culpability, and innocence are more fragile than they seem to be.

We Are Light is a haunting novel in which obsession, mental illness, and deferred dreams lead to complex, compounding tragedies.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2023)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.