**Where Things Come Back** by Corey Whaley

*(Booktalk by Corey Whaley, used with permission)*

Just when seventeen-year-old Cullen Witter thinks he understands everything about his small and painfully dull Arkansas town, it all disappears. . . .

In the summer before Cullen’s senior year, a nominally-depressed birdwatcher named John Barling thinks he spots a species of woodpecker thought to be extinct since the 1940s in Lily, Arkansas. His rediscovery of the so-called Lazarus Woodpecker sparks a flurry of press and woodpecker-mania. Soon all the kids are getting woodpecker haircuts and everyone’s eating “Lazarus burgers.” But as absurd as the town’s carnival atmosphere has become, nothing is more startling than the realization that Cullen’s sensitive, gifted fifteen-year-old brother Gabriel has suddenly and inexplicably disappeared.

While Cullen navigates his way through a summer of finding and losing love, holding his fragile family together, and muddling his way into adulthood, a young missionary in Africa, who has lost his faith, is searching for any semblance of meaning wherever he can find it. As distant as the two stories seem at the start, they are thoughtfully woven ever closer together and through masterful plotting, brought face to face in a surprising and harrowing climax.

Complex but truly extraordinary, tinged with melancholy and regret, comedy and absurdity, this novel finds wonder in the ordinary and emerges as ultimately hopeful. It’s about a lot more than what Cullen calls, “that damn bird.” It’s about the dream of second chances.