



Answering 911: Life in the Hot Seat

Caroline Burau

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“At a pace matching the flashing lights on a 911 console, Caroline Burau puts us in the hot seat and shows us the madness, the sadness, and the gallows humor of a profession that serves and protects in ways we never dream. And by telling us what goes on when the microphone is silent, she has taken the voice on the radio and given it heart.” Michael Perry, author of *Population 485* and *Truck: A Love Story*


“A witty, gritty look at life on the receiving end of our cries for help.” *Reader’s Digest* (Editor’s Choice)

You answer a call from a fourteen-year-old boy asking for someone to arrest his mother, who is smoking crack in their bathroom. You talk with him until the cops arrive, making sure there are no weapons around and learning that his favorite subject in school is lunch. Five minutes later, you have to deal with someone complaining about his neighbor’s clarinet practice.

What is it like to be on the receiving end of desperate calls for help . . . every day? Caroline Burau, a former newspaper reporter and nursing student who couldn’t stand the sight of blood, takes a job as an emergency dispatcher because she likes helping people. But on-the-job training at the comm center proves to be more than she bargained for. As she adjusts to a daily life of catastrophe and comedy, domestics and drunks, cops and robbers, junk food and sarcasm, lost cats and suicides, she discovers that crisis can become routine, that coworkers can be mean—that she must continue to care and, at times, learn how to let go.

“The day may come when I have to dial 911. I hope to God that the person who answers is Caroline Burau or someone like her. Funny, honest, and elegantly simple, this book left me with a sense of grace and hope.”—Alison McGhee, author of *Shadow Baby*, *Rainlight*, *Was It Beautiful?* and *Falling Boy*

Caroline Burau is a 911 dispatch operator for the police and fire departments in White Bear Lake, Minnesota.

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