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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Less by Andrew Sean Greer

Summary

Who says you can't run away from your problems?

You are a failed novelist about to turn fifty. A wedding invitation arrives in the mail: your boyfriend of the past nine years is engaged to someone else.

You can't say yes — it would be too awkward — and you can't say no — it would look like defeat. On your desk are a series of invitations to half-baked literary events around the world.

QUESTION: How do you arrange to skip town?

ANSWER: You accept them all.

What would possibly go wrong?

Arthur Less will almost fall in love in Paris, almost fall to his death in Berlin, barely escape to a Moroccan ski chalet from a Saharan sandstorm, accidentally book himself as the (only) writer-in-residence at a Christian Retreat Center in Southern India, and encounter, on a desert island in the Arabian Sea, the last person on Earth he wants to face.

Somewhere in there: he will turn fifty. Through it all, there is his first love. And there is his last. Because, despite all these mishaps, missteps, misunderstandings and mistakes, Less is, above all, a love story.

A scintillating satire of the American abroad, a rumination on time and the human heart, a bittersweet romance of chances lost, by an author the New York Times has hailed as "inspired, lyrical," "elegiac," "ingenious," as well as "too sappy by half," Less shows a writer at the peak of his talents raising the curtain on our shared human comedy.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had days, weeks, years, like what Arthur Less is feeling — times when nothing, absolutely nothing, seems to be going your way? What's your solution?

2. Everyone points to the book's laugh-out-loud humor. What do you find particularly funny — dialogue, Arthur's haplessness and pratfalls, random observations, the entire tone of the book?
3. How would you describe Arthur? Are you sympathetic to him, or is he primarily a self-pitying guy in midlife crisis? Does he exhibit any humanity or is he too self-indulgent to connect with others? Or do you find yourself falling and rooting for him? Does your attitude toward him change during the course of the novel?
4. Talk about the writing seminar Arthur gives in Berlin — his inventiveness in attempting to get students to fall in love with literature.
5. What do you think of the consolation his former lover/mentor offers him during the phone call from Japan? Is turning 50 all that bad (for those who've been there, done that)?
6. So at the end of his peregrinations, what has Arthur Less come to understand about his life and life in general?
7. Finally, were you surprised by the big reveal at the end?

Summary from the publisher and Discussion Questions from litlovers.com