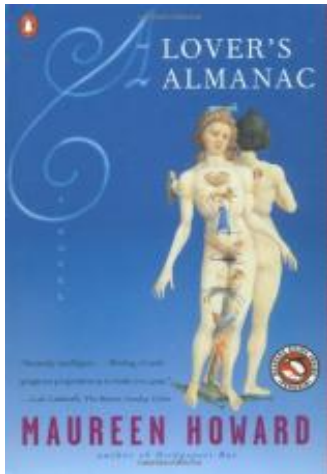


A Lover's Almanac

by Maureen Howard



About the Book

January 1, 2000 (leap year), 224th year of American Independence, in the city and environs of New York.

Louise Moffett teeters in stiletto heels through her confetti-littered loft, lamenting the details of her disastrous millennium bash and the heartbreaking fallout that accompanies her entry into the new century. Across town, her lover, Artie, awakens with a hangover and the cloudy memory of a botched marriage proposal the night before. So begins *A Lover's Almanac*, a romantic, thinking-person's love story about fate -- how and why we live the lives we do and fall in love with the people we do.

The lapsed lovers are two thirty-somethings in New York City. Louise, a Midwestern farm girl, is a hot artist. Artie, an orphan raised by his grandfather after the death of his hippie mother, is a hapless computer wizard. As we follow their romance, we draw back to learn about their parents' and grandparents' lives, about the events, public and private, that have affected their fates. At intervals, we turn from the characters' stories to consider the lives of the geniuses who have so profoundly affected our society: Edison, Einstein, Franklin, and other creative thinkers of the past. In this "broad meditation on Western thought" (*Los Angeles Times*), Howard asks: How do we make our own histories -- and how do we connect to history writ large? To what extent do we control our destinies? As we plumb the depths of Maureen Howard's lush prose to discern the curious, looping narrative strands at the novel's heart, we find a witty, moving, and brilliantly simple love story. In the grander sense, as we ponder the fate of the characters in light of the novel's intricate historical backdrop, "a modern version of the great panoramas of the past" (*The New York Times Book Review*) is revealed, one that braids love, memory, and fate into a rich tapestry encompassing all our histories.

Discussion Guide

1. In the past, the almanac was an indispensable tool for interacting with the practical world. Today it has become more a compendium of minutiae, a source of entertainment. How does Maureen Howard play with these different definitions of the almanac? What does each of these competing conceptions lend to the novel?
2. A surface look at **A Lover's Almanac** reveals a variety of characters and story lines, some seemingly unrelated to each other, or touching for only brief, glancing moments. Through this, what is Maureen Howard saying about life in the context of our interactions with others? What is Sissy symbolic of? Does her presence confirm the idea of lives interrelated, or question it?
3. How does Louise's vocation as an artist relate to the larger themes of creativity and inspiration that permeate the novel?
4. What does Maureen Howard achieve through her use of historical references in *A Lover's Almanac*? Considering the point in time at which the story takes place, what is the author saying about the importance of looking back if we hope to move forward? How is this idea, on a personal scale, carried out in the lives of the characters?
5. Is Louise's art show *The Progress of Love* meant by Maureen Howard to be ironic? In what ways have Louise and Artie progressed through the course of the novel?
6. How does Maureen Howard play with the idea of fate throughout the novel? Do her characters make their own histories, or are they playing into destinies laid out for them?
7. What is the significance of Howard's many evocations of inventors and men of ideas?
8. In what ways do Louise and Artie embody their generation? Are those nearing adulthood late in this century lacking a sense of their place in history? In the culture of 2000, does this matter?

Author Bio

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Publication Date: January 1, 1999

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics)

ISBN-10: 0140275126

ISBN-13: 9780140275124