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Better Luck Next Time

by Julia Claiborne Johnson



About the Book

The eagerly anticipated second novel from the bestselling author of BE FRANK WITH ME, a charming story of endings, new beginnings, and the complexities and complications of friendship and love, set in late 1930s Reno.

It?s 1938, and women seeking a quick, no-questions split from their husbands head to the ?divorce capital of the world,? Reno, Nevada. There?s one catch: they have to wait six weeks to become ?residents.? Many of these wealthy, soon-to-be divorcees flock to the Flying Leap, a dude ranch that caters to their every need.

Twenty-four-year-old Ward spent one year at Yale before his family lost everything in the Great Depression; now he?s earning an honest living as a ranch hand at the Flying Leap. Admired for his dashing good looks --- ?Cary Grant in cowboy boots? --- Ward thinks he has the Flying Leap?s clients all figured out. But two new guests are about to upend everything he thinks he knows: Nina, a St. Louis heiress and amateur pilot back for her third divorce, and Emily, whose bravest moment in life was leaving her cheating husband back in San Francisco and driving herself to Reno.

A novel about divorce, marriage and everything that comes in between (money, class, ambition and opportunity), BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME is a hilarious yet poignant examination of the ways friendship can save us, love can destroy us, and the family we create can be stronger than the family we come from.

Discussion Guide

1. ?Myth has two main functions. The first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as: ?Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death??? The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs.? Were you familiar with the history of Nevada divorce ranches before reading BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME? What was the most interesting thing you learned about this time in history?

2. Why do you think the author chose to frame the story through Ward?s retelling 50 years later? How does it affect your experience of the story, knowing that we?re seeing this through the eyes of Ward looking back on it? How different do you think the story would have been if it were told through the recollections of a different character instead?

3. Why do you think Nina and Emily take to each other so quickly despite all their differences? What makes their friendship work so well?

4. There are several allusions to Hollywood throughout the story, from the ranch being designed by a movie set designer to characters comparing each other?s appearances to various actors. Why do the characters like to imagine themselves as part of a movie? Do you think it had to do with the historical context of the Great Depression and the power that popular film had begun to have on the imagination in the 1930s?

5. Do you think Nina, Emily and Ward ever would have become friends outside of the Flying Leap? How does the environment bring them together in a way that overcomes the differences of their everyday lives?

6. What is the role of class in the story? How do the characters? various backgrounds and social standings affect how they interact with and view each other?

7. Emily says she and Ward were ?just pretending,? but he disagrees. Do you think they were pretending, or were their feelings genuine? How do various characters pretend throughout the book, and why is it so hard for them to be authentic?

8. How did you feel about the ending? Why do you think the author ended the book on such an open-ended note? What do you think (or hope) happened next?

9. Who is your favorite character in the story, and why? Was there a character you particularly related to?

10. BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME is inspired in part by true events from the author?s family history. Are there any stories in your own family history that you think could make for an interesting book?

Author Bio

Julia Claiborne Johnson is the author of BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME and the bestselling BE FRANK WITH ME, a finalist for the American Bookseller?s Association Best Debut Novel Award. She grew up on a farm in Tennessee before moving to New York City, where she worked at *Mademoiselle* and *Glamour* magazines. She now lives in Los Angeles with her comedy-writer husband and their two children.

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Publication Date: January 11, 2022
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: Custom House
ISBN-10: 0062916386
ISBN-13: 9780062916389