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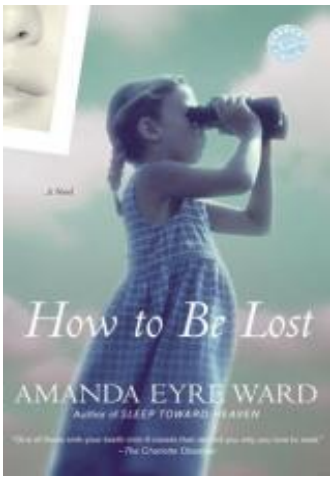
How to Be Lost

by Amanda Eyre Ward



About the Book

When five-year-old Ellie disappears, the Winters family is devastated. Fifteen years later, Ellie's sister Caroline, now a cocktail waitress in New Orleans, sees a magazine picture of a woman who looks like Ellie all grown-up, and resolves to find her and fix their broken family. Her journey leads her to Montana, where her search, and her family history become more complex and confusing by the moment.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the significance of the title? Who in the book is lost?

2. What is the distinction between being lost and being missing?

3. What is Caroline searching for?

4. How does Ellie's disappearance affect the relationship between Madeline and Caroline?

5. How is setting important in **How to Be Lost**? Where does Caroline feel most comfortable, and why?

6. What role does alcohol play in the novel? How does it initiate, complicate, or smooth out circumstances?

7. In what way do Winnie and Peggy function as surrogate sisters for Caroline?

8. There are a number of mothers in **How to Be Lost**: Isabelle, Sarah, Winnie, Madeline, and Mrs. Lake. Discuss these different images of motherhood. Are any of these mothers revered? Criticized? What role do these women play in protecting their children and offering them a sense of the world?

9. Bernard tells Agnes that "There's always another chance to take what you deserve." Do you think that Bernard's belief is always possible? Do any other characters in the novel seem to hold a similar view?

10. Roxie utters only a few words in the novel, but she leaves a strong impression on Caroline. What role does Roxie play in Caroline's journey? What sort of revelations do Roxie and Olivia provide for Caroline?

11. Compare and contrast Charlene with Agnes. Both are lost to their families but there is a distinct difference - the element of choice. Discuss these two women and how the element of choice affects their separate lives.

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13. At the beginning of the novel, Caroline attempts to avoid going home to her mother's condo in New York for the holiday, but by the book's end, she feels at home there. What brings about this change? How is home defined for her in the end?

14. Ward uses multiple perspectives - Caroline's first-person account, Agnes's letters, and a third-person, omniscient narrator - to tell this story. How did this structure affect the story and your understanding of it? What is the role of the reader in unraveling of the mystery of the Winters family?

15. If you have read Ward's previous novel, **Sleep Toward Heaven**, do you see any common themes or elements in **How to Be Lost**?

Author Bio

Amanda Eyre Ward is the *New York Times* bestselling author of CAT & VIVIAN, SLEEP TOWARD HEAVEN, HOW TO BE LOST, LOVE STORIES IN THIS TOWN, FORGIVE ME, CLOSE YOUR EYES, THE SAME SKY, THE NEARNESS OF YOU, THE JETSETTERS, THE LIFEGUARDS, LOVERS AND LIARS and ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES.

Her bestselling novels have been featured in *People* magazine, the *New York Times* and more. Amanda publishes nonfiction in *Travel + Leisure,* the *New York Times, Texas Monthly* and more, and publishes original work on Audible.com. Amanda?s work has been optioned for film and television and translated into 15 languages. She lives in Austin, TX.

Critical Praise

"Ward (**Sleep Toward Heaven**) tracks a young woman's search for her missing sister-and herself-with economy and compassion in this believable and moving tale of hope's ability to best the most unforgiving of sorrows."

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