ReadingGroupGuides
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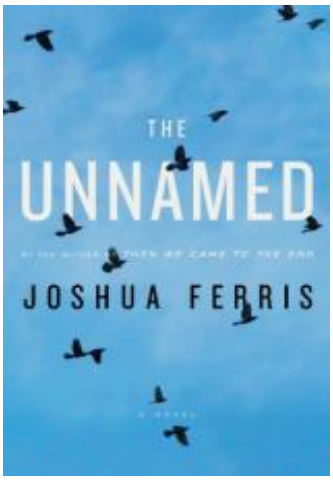
The Unnamed

by Joshua Ferris



About the Book

Joshua Ferris' debut novel **Then We Came to the End** was both heralded by critics and a *New York Times* bestseller, and marked the arrival of a startlingly talented young writer. With **The Unnamed**, Ferris imagines the collision between one man's free will and the forces of nature that are bigger than any of us. Tim Farnsworth walks. He walks out of meetings and out of bed. He walks in sweltering heat and numbing cold. He will walk without stopping until he falls asleep, wherever he is. This curious affliction has baffled medical experts around the globe and come perilously close to ruining what should be a happy life. Tim has a loving family, a successful law career and a beautiful suburban home, all of which he maintains spectacularly well until his feet start moving again. What drives a man to stay in a marriage, in a job? What forces him away? Is love or conscience enough to overcome the darker, stronger urges of the natural world? **The Unnamed** is a deeply felt, luminous novel...

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel?s opening paragraph. Why is it important that this story begins in the winter? What mood do the opening sentences create?

2. How would you describe the state of Tim and Jane?s marriage, based solely on what you learn of them in the novel?s first two chapters?

3. Discuss the importance of setting in the novel. How has living in an upscale suburb of New York shaped the Farnsworth family?

4. Describe the differences between Becka?s relationship with her mother and with her father. How does the progression of Tim?s illness change Becka?

5. How does Tim?s work as an attorney shape his sense of himself as a husband, a father, and an individual? What does he enjoy about his work, and why is he good at it?

6. Do you understand Tim?s affliction primarily as a metaphor or as a physical affliction? Why is it important for the doctors who attempt to treat him to know whether the disease is mental or physical?

7. Discuss the role of Frank Novovian in the novel.

8. Why do Tim and Jane move back into the city after Tim stops working as an attorney?

9. How does the final section of the novel differ from all previous sections? How would you characterize Tim?s interactions with the natural world? Does the novel?s ending provide a reconciliation of some kind, or simply a termination? How do Tim and Jane each deal with the process of grief, and grieving?

10. Why do you think the author uses fragments of the Emily Dickinson poem ?After great pain a formal feeling comes? to open the different sections of the novel?

Author Bio

Joshua Ferris is the author of four novels --- THEN WE CAME TO THE END, THE UNNAMED, TO RISE AGAIN AT A DECENT HOUR and A CALLING FOR CHARLIE BARNES --- and a collection of stories, THE DINNER PARTY. He was a finalist for the National Book Award, winner of the Barnes and Noble Discover Award and the PEN/Hemingway Award, and was named one of The New Yorker's "20 Under 40" writers in 2010. TO RISE AGAIN AT A DECENT HOUR won the Dylan Thomas Prize and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker, Granta* and *Best American Short Stories*. He lives in New York.

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