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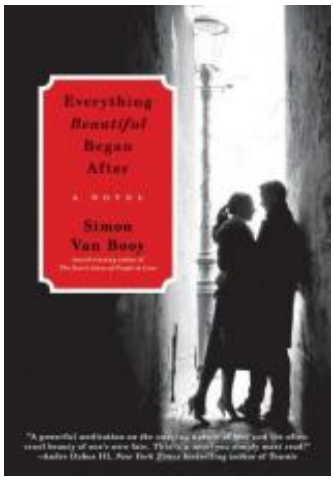
Everything Beautiful Began After

by Simon Van Booy



About the Book

Rebecca is young, lost, and beautiful. A gifted artist, she seeks solace and inspiration in the Mediterranean heat of Athens --- trying to understand who she is and how she can love without fear.

George has come to Athens to learn ancient languages after growing up in New England boarding schools and Ivy League colleges. He has no close relationships with anyone and spends his days hunched over books or wandering the city in a drunken stupor.

Henry is in Athens to dig. An accomplished young archaeologist, he devotedly uncovers the city?s past as a way to escape his own, which holds a secret that not even his doting parents can talk about.

...And then, with a series of chance meetings, Rebecca, George, and Henry are suddenly in flight, their lives brighter and clearer than ever, as they fall headlong into a summer that will forever define them in the decades to come.

Discussion Guide

1. Rebecca, Henry, and George all have different reasons for moving to Athens --- but what are the real reasons these three loners have ended up in this chaotic Mediterranean city?

2. Rebecca and George have both had disappointing relationships with their parents. Ironically, Henry has a normal relationship with his parents, but ends up suffering the most. Do you think there's a reason for this?

3. Do you think early childhood experiences play a part in the kinds of work the characters choose to pursue? Do you think early childhood experiences play a major part in who we end up becoming as adults?

4. The author switches between 1st, 3rd, and the rarely used 2nd person viewpoint in the second half of the book. How did this impact your experience as a reader?

5. How does the prologue tie into the final part (set in Paris) of the book?

6. By the end of the book, do you think the characters have resolved their inner torments? Laid to rest their ghosts?

7. Were you surprised by what happened in the middle of the story?

8. In many ways, this book is about second chances. Do you think life is full of second chances? Can you think of any minor characters in the novel who are given second chances?

9. The emotional success of the characters in the novel seems to depend on how they react to setback and tragedy. Do you think it's true that people are able to love deeply after some devastating experience?

10. Professor Peterson remains a strong but elusive character --- do you think there's a reason for this? Could he be a metaphor for history? Or Knowledge?

11. Why do you think Henry decides not to share the 'journal' with Rebecca's sister? What would you have done?

12. What was your experience of how the author related the experiences of the Rebecca, Henry, and George to the characters of Greek literature?

13. Why do you think Henry took to the skies in the middle of the book? Do you think it's possible to travel and not 'learn anything'?

14. Discuss the quote on page 299 of the novel:

"And you will appreciate tiny things --- and step with the confidence of someone over- joyed to know he is doomed."

Author Bio

Simon Van Booy is the award-winning, bestselling author of more than a dozen books for adults and children, including THE ILLUSION OF SEPARATENESS and THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE. Simon is the editor of three volumes of philosophy and has written for *The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Washington Post* and the *BBC*. His books have been translated into many languages and optioned for film. Raised in rural North Wales, he currently lives in New York where he is also a book editor and a volunteer E.M.T. crew chief.

Critical Praise

"If F. Scott Fitzgerald and Marguerite Duras had had a son, he would be Simon Van Booy; this is a truly special writer who does things with abstract language that is so evocative and original your breath literally catches in your chest. Yet

he is also an earthy realist who can tell a story that pulls us along like a speeding taxi in a far-off country. These admirable qualities and more come to bear beautifully in this debut novel that does not read like a debut novel; Everything Beautiful Began After is a powerful meditation on the undying nature of love and the often cruel beauty of one?s own fate. This is a novel you simply must read!"

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