



The Slippage

By Ben Greenman
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Introduction

William and Louisa Day are a suburban husband and wife, with no children, confronting the question of what their relationship means to them and if and how it will survive. One day, after weeks of bizarre behavior disappearing in the middle of parties, hoarding mail Louisa approaches William with a stark request: "I want you to build us a house." Caught off guard, William is suddenly forced to reckon with his own hopes and desires, his growing discomfort at home and work, and, in the end, his wife's fight-or-flight ultimatum. The result is an emotionally powerful novel, marked by Ben Greenman's trademark blend of yearning and mordant wit.

Questions for Discussion

1. Early on, the main character, William, says "he could not, at twenty-five, have anticipated the life he would live. He had not been a genius of the present back then, let alone the future." What does it mean in this book to be a genius of the present, or the future? Do people try to master the circumstances of their life? Can they? Or are they pushed around by circumstance?
2. The book opens with a neighborhood party, and there are parties scheduled throughout. Why do you think that is the case? Do they show how people in the novel connect with one another, or how they cannot connect?
3. What are Louisa's motives in suggesting to William that he build her a house? Why does William react the way he does?
4. The novel finds its characters participating in several kinds of construction and destruction: creative, romantic, physical. What are some of them? How much do the constructive behaviors repair the work of the destructive ones? Or does destruction come to dominate?
5. What role do children play in the book, both in places where they are present and places where they are absent?
6. Both William and Tom struggle with aspects of their life (self-control, creative outlets, sustaining relationships). What are the differences in how they deal with these issues? Is either approach more successful?
7. William has relationships (in the broad sense) with several different women: his wife, Emma, Karla. How are the women different? How do they serve his needs and/or distract him from his responsibilities, and how does William meet the needs of these women or distract them from their responsibilities?
8. Several of Tom's charts are described in the book, and some are shown in the author's PS section. Do you find them primarily comic or tragic, both as artworks and as a strategy for dealing with life's disappointments?
9. Tom describes the concept of slippage like this: "It isn't the moment when a graph turns upward or downward. It's the moment when it turns on you." What does he mean? Do you see examples of this in your own life?
10. Who do you sympathize more with at the end, William or Louisa?