



## Everything Beautiful Began After

By **Simon Van Booy**  
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### Introduction

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.

### Questions for Discussion

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 overjoyed to know he is doomed."

### About the Author

Simon Van Booy grew up in rural Wales. He is the author of *The Secret Lives of People in Love* and *Love Begins in Winter*, which won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. He is the editor of three philosophy books, titled *Why We Fight*, *Why We Need Love*, and *Why Our Decisions Don't Matter*, and his essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Guardian*, and on NPR. He lives in New York City, where he teaches at the School of Visual Arts and is involved in the Rutgers Early College Humanities program for young adults living in underserved communities. He was a finalist for the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise, and his work has

been translated into thirteen different languages.