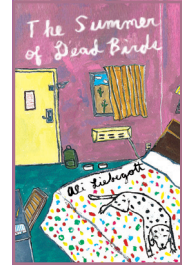


READING GROUP GUIDE

THE SUMMER OF DEAD BIRDS by Ali Liebeggott

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1. The book's epigraph, a quote from Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Book of Pilgrimage*, reflects on the "immense loneliness" of summer. What role do you think "summertime" plays in this book? In what ways does the narrator subvert or confirm your associations with this season? How does the narrator "go into [her] heart as onto a vast plain" as Rilke insists that his reader must?
2. This book is separated into three parts and nearly every page marks the beginning of a new chapter. How do you think the marked segmentation of the work affects your comprehension of the content and your perception of the author's voice?
3. More often than not, the narrator finds herself wishing she could do more for the injured creatures she encounters in this book, although each one is far beyond help. Have you ever fought a battle you knew you couldn't win or tried to save something you knew could not be saved? How did it change your perception of loss? How did you anticipate the losing?
4. The theme of departure and flight weighs heavily on the narrator's mind. What is illustrated by the fact that the narrator is the only figure in the book who is never fully granted the type of flight she so often witnesses? What does flight mean to you? Have you ever tried to leave grief behind, or been left behind by someone fleeing grief themselves?
5. Although one of the main plot points of this book is the narrator's lesbian relationship with her ex-partner, the narrator reflects very little on the queer nuances of her love or loss, instead maintaining a steady focus on the mechanics of the relationship itself. In what ways does this decentering of identities serve to complicate prevalent queer narratives? Can you think of other books in which the nuances of queerness in queer love are not the central focus of the text?
6. On page 77, the narrator notes: "you need to find a humble beaten god / like a bad petting-zoo goat . . . a god like a bar buddy / with a flawed and sloppy past . . . a god who'd never say anything stupid / who'd understand how a person could climb / the bleachers." In what ways does the narrator's description of this "god" stray from conventional or innately religious understandings of the term? Can you think of any people or things in your life that you take as "gods" in a way that might deviate from religious definitions of the term?
7. Through the course of this book, the narrator incessantly holds fast to embodiments of greater things in her life. What is the significance of the narrator's collection of mementos and what do you think drives this compulsion? Can you think of objects in your own life that, once mundane, have taken on new meanings as memories of greater things you once had?
8. Many deaths are described in this text. But rather than end the book with Rorschach's final moments, Liebeggott leaves the reader in a scene of hollow celebration of Rorschach's birthday. How would the text be different were we to witness Rorschach's death? What is the significance of the birthday as the final scene? Why do you think the author chooses to end her narrative before the occurrence of the event around which the text is centered?

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