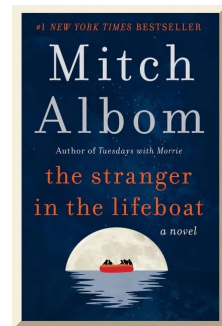


The Stranger in the Lifeboat

Harper

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1. Consider each of the survivors in the lifeboat—Lambert, Nevin, Geri, Yannis, Nina, Mrs. Laghari, Jean Philippe, Bernadette, Alice, and Benji. What qualities define each of them? How does this influence how each reacts to the presence and story of the stranger?
2. What are Inspector Jarty LeFleur and his wife suffering from? How has this suffering affected each of them? In what way does this experience make the notebook personally valuable?
3. Why has Benji “struggled with faith much of [his] life”? What are other challenges of genuine faith? What are the potential risks of such belief?
4. What are various ways some explain the existence of suffering and pain, respond to the profound question, “the terrible things that befall us...How does a supreme being permit them?”
5. How is it that an event like The Grand Idea voyage meant to “change the world” can also make service staff feel “so invisible” and forbid them to make eye contact with the guests?
6. What are profound physical and psychological effects of being at sea versus being on land? Beyond the physical, what are the connotations of at sea? How might this be at work in the novel?
7. Bernadette, from Haiti, and Benji, from Ireland, discover that they both left because it was a “hard life there.” What about their experience of difficulty might be similar, even universal? In what ways would their sufferings have been different?
8. What might Benji mean when he expresses to Annabelle the paradoxical idea that “beauty and anguish can share the same moment”?
9. As Benji suffers in the boat, he begins to move from feeling “so tightly connected to the world you cannot imagine letting go” to one in which “you surrender to a drifting phase” and feel less connected. What’s happening in this shift? What is a healthy amount of attachment to the things of the world?
10. When Yannis mentions science, the stranger says that, “science explained away the sun...the stars...all the creatures...and my greatest creation...you.” What is he saying about the role of science in the life of humans? What should the relationship be between science and faith? When does each serve humans best?

11. In what ways is Geri “a steadying force” on the raft?

12. When Nina implores the stranger to ease their worry, he says, “worry is something you create...to fill a void.” What might he mean by this? Why else might humans worry? In what ways is worry a valuable part of being human or something that is unhealthy?

13. After waking from a powerful dream about being saved to find himself still in the lifeboat, Benji feels “the enormity of death begin to hit.” What might this mean? What physical and psychological effects might it have? In what ways might such profound awareness be of value to people?

14. Dobby was angry and resentful about the ways in which “class, wealth, privilege” were at work in the world. What were the problems and dangers he was referring to?

15. At one point, trying to understand his friend Dobby, Benji wonders, “could a person truly change his nature?” What is a person’s nature? What influences it as a person grows up? What forces might make a person’s nature evolve and improve or change for the worse?

16. Watching Nina and Yannis sit closely with each other, Benji realizes that people “burn for water [and] growl for food...but what we yearn for most is comfort.” What forms can deep, personal comfort take? Why is it so important?

17. Given the tragic death of his four-year-old daughter, LeFleur grows angry when reading about the stranger in the boat, says that prayer is “a crutch that let you dump your misfortunes” until you reached “a ‘better’ heaven” and found “no comfort in invisible forces.” What is the potential value of prayer? How is prayer similar to or different from talking with a loved one? How should one balance a commitment to action in life on earth with faith in an afterlife?

18. What might Alice mean when she explains to Benji that “feeling loss is part of why you are on Earth”? What harm is done to the body, mind, and heart when we lose something valuable? What is the potential value of losing things or people we love? What are healthy ways to respond to great loss?

19. LeFleur, after finished reading the notebook, embracing his wife, and sleeping deeply, “felt peace.” What happened? What was the nature of what he was feeling?

20. After time alone in the lifeboat, Benji realizes that his “greatest foe has been loneliness.” What is loneliness? How is it different from being alone? What are the strongest ways to respond to loneliness?

21. Alice’s final wisdom for Benji is that, “we all need to hold on to something.” What are the many and various forms that this holding might take? How might it transcend time and place? What effects does this act of holding have on us?