

THE ART OF SURRENDER

A Novel by Blair

READER NOTES

Book Club Discussion Guide

WARNING

Contains Spoilers

The Art of Surrender follows two men — Ayman Saliba, a Gibraltarian working in his family's yacht-supply business, and Lucas Pfifer, a Swiss pharmaceutical executive — whose encounter in a Moroccan hamam sets in motion a story about desire, shame, and the slow, difficult work of allowing yourself to be truly known. The novel alternates between their two points of view across six parts, each voice with its own register: Ayman attentive and porous, Lucas composed and deflecting. This is a story about what it means to surrender — not as defeat, but as arrival.

The eleven questions below are offered as starting points for conversation, not a syllabus to work through. There are no correct answers, and the best discussions will range well beyond the questions themselves. Space is provided beneath each question for notes and thoughts you might like to bring to your group.

1.

The Airship theme runs throughout the book — discuss the similarities and differences for each occurrence.

2.

The relationships Ayman and Lucas have with their brothers have played an important part in each of their lives. Discuss the relationship and impact their brothers have had on each of the men.

3.

The settings play an integral part of the book, each setting possessing anthropomorphic characteristics. Discuss each location, the characteristics and the relevance to Ayman and Lucas.

4.

The Art of Surrender names something both men are learning, but from opposite directions. How does each man's understanding of surrender evolve across the novel, and does the title mean the same thing by the end as it does at the beginning?

5.

The novel opens in a hamam — a place designed for the removal of surface. How does the opening scene function as more than setting? What does it mean that this is where these two men first encounter each other?

6.

Lucas appears to be the worldly, experienced guide and Ayman the younger, less certain one. In what ways does the novel quietly invert this, and at what point does the reader begin to understand who is actually the more fragile of the two?

7.

Physical marks, injuries, rituals, and touch run throughout the book. How do both men use the body to communicate what they cannot or will not say aloud?

8.

Ayman and Lucas narrate in different registers — different emotional temperatures, different ways of seeing. What do we learn about each man specifically through the other's perspective?

9.

Both men have learned to divide themselves into acceptable and hidden parts. How does shame operate differently for each of them, and what does it cost each man to begin to dismantle it?

10.

The novel distinguishes between being wanted and being chosen. How does this distinction play out across the relationship, and which moments in the novel hinge on that difference?

11.

Water appears throughout the novel in many forms — the hamam, the Mediterranean voyage, the sea as both passage and threat. Discuss the water motif across the book: what does water represent at different points in the narrative, and how does its meaning shift for Ayman and Lucas as the story progresses?
