

Reading Group Guide

A Year Since the Rain

by Shane Wilson



About the Book

Alan—a heart-broken and stubborn computer programmer—took much in his life for granted, including the vast supply of water in his town. But when the rains stop falling and the rivers dry up, he begins to realize how temporary it all can be. His life begins to unravel as, across town, a sinkhole threatens to swallow every bit of the place he has come to call home.

Taken on a journey of self-discovery by the magical women in his life, Alan is drawn into an unexpected affair and comes face-to-face with a Mystic who walks through his dreams. For Alan, dreams become a new reality, and reality erodes into something of a dream. As his town transforms into an arid wasteland that crumbles beneath his feet, Alan is compelled by the inevitable to strike out into the unknown or perish.

Discussion Guide

1. Alan spends much of the book trying to decide just how magical his neighbor is—really if she is magical at all. What are your initial impressions of the girl next door that Alan refers to as a “witch” in the opening line? How do your opinions of her change as Alan notices more about her? How do your opinions of Alan change?
2. Why does Alan fall in love with his unnamed subject so quickly? How would you characterize Alan’s relationship with her? What do you make of her leaving him in the middle of the night? Is that action justified? Does it say more about her that she didn’t give him a second chance, or about him that he needed one?
3. Is Alan’s sadness after he is left during the night really about a bad breakup? What else could he be mourning? What do you make of her leaving him in the middle of the night? Is that action justified? Does it say more about her that she didn’t give him a second chance, or about him that he needed one? Would you even consider this a break-up?
4. After his “break-up,” how would you describe Alan’s relationship with the world around him? His neighbors, his coworkers, his boss, etc.?

5. Why doesn't Alan ever reveal the name of the woman he calls "Legs?" What does this nickname reveal about him during this portion of the book? Alan writes that he knows her real name. What reason does he give for not writing her name in his letters? How does the revelation that he *did* know her name change your opinion of their relationship?
6. Who is Jeff to Alan? Do you think Jeff is helpful to Alan? Or does he slow Alan's development?
7. Discuss Desi's role in Alan's life. Does she have anything to do with his growth? Does she hold him back? Does she hold herself back? What do you make of how she exits Alan's life? Did she want him to be the one to find her? Why?
8. Who are the women in Alan's cave dream?
9. Why does Nona decide it's important that Alan returns home to see his mother?
10. Is Nona a witch?
11. Alan learns a lot from his father's journal. What pieces of information do you think helped Alan the most? Why?
12. Do you think Alan and Sam will continue to explore their romantic relationship? Or are they a product of extreme circumstance? Are there parallels between his relationship with Sam and his unnamed ex from the beginning? How are the two relationships similar? How are they different?
13. Who is more pragmatic? Alan or his father? Why do you think so?
14. Do you think Alan is a dynamic character or a static character? Why? Do you think he is a reliable or an unreliable narrator? Why?
15. Who do you think has the most significant impact on Alan's development? Why?
16. Alan reflects on the nature of his task at different times in the book. He proclaims writing a "selfish act," claims to be writing his ex out of his system in a type of exorcism, and finally decides that the writing isn't actually for her. What is Alan's motivation to write the story of his last year in Wasser? At what point during the year do you think he started writing it?
17. Think about the story as it is sandwiched between the two notes from the archivist at Shiloh State University. How do these notes change the way you read the text? What if they hadn't been there?