



Who Are You, Calvin Bledsoe?

Brock Clarke

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Calvin Bledsoe is middle-aged, glum, and in dire need of a shakeup. Saddled with a strict Calvinist upbringing thanks to his celebrity mother, he's freshly divorced and stuck writing a blog for a pellet stove company in small-town Maine. But his dreary world gets upended when his colorful, unpredictable Aunt Beatrice shows up at his mother's funeral and all but kidnaps him for an impromptu jaunt through Europe. Their subsequent escapades are the subject of Brock Clarke's comic road trip tale, *Who Are You, Calvin Bledsoe?*

As Calvin and Beatrice hopscotch from Stockholm to Paris to Geneva to Lisbon, getting into one scrape after another, he comes to learn about his aunt's zany background, which is as far from Calvinist as one can get. Beatrice is a top-notch thief with an ex-husband who happens to be an arms dealer and a son who's into animal pornography. Before long, Calvin learns that his own family isn't as squeaky clean as he's always thought.

His parentage comes into question, too, but there's little time to ruminate. In hot pursuit are Calvin's vengeful ex-wife, a comely fellow traveler who claims to be from Sheboygan but whom Beatrice insists is an Interpol agent, and an obsessive minister who is convinced that Calvin's mother is still alive.

Seesawing between surreal plot twists and verbal jousts, *Who Are You, Calvin Bledsoe?* is a coming-of-age story wrapped around wry religious critique. Calvin's Calvinist doctrine clashes against Beatrice's freewheeling lifestyle at every turn.

Seasoning his comic stew with sly turns of phrase and deadpan humor, Clarke guides the audience toward a touching answer to the question posed by the book's title. Although some may scratch their heads at the concluding flurry of events, Clarke is just as interested in the journey as he is in the destination, and in his deft hands, *Who Are You, Calvin Bledsoe?* is cheeky, absurd, and surprisingly poignant.

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