

## Summary:

Less Than Zero is the debut novel of Bret Easton Ellis, published in 1985. It was his first published effort, released when he was 21 years old and still a student at Bennington College.

Titled after the Elvis Costello song of the same name, the novel follows the life of Clay, a rich, young college student who has returned to his hometown of Los Angeles, California for winter break circa 1984. Through first-person narration, Clay describes his progressive alienation from the culture around him, loss of faith in his friends, and his meditations on events in his recent past.

After reuniting with his ex-girlfriend Blair, and friends like Trent, now a successful model, Clay embarks on a series of drug-fueled nights of partying, during which he picks up various men and women for one-night stands. While partying, he tries to track down his best friend from high school, Julian, with whom he hasn't spoken in months. In between descriptions of his days and nights, Clay recounts a vacation spent with his parents and grandparents, during which he seemed to be the only person concerned that his grandmother was dying of cancer.

Over time, Clay becomes progressively disillusioned with the party scene as he witnesses the apathy of his friends towards the suffering of one another and those around them: at one party, he watches as the revellers joke and take Polaroids of his friend, Muriel, while she injects heroin; at another, he and Blair are the only two who exhibit revulsion when Trent shows a snuff film, which sexually excites several partygoers.

Clay ultimately tracks down Julian, who he learns has become a heroin addict and turned to prostitution in order to pay off a debt to his drug dealer, Finn, who emotionally and sexually abuses him. Believing what he has been told, yet still feeling an empty desire to witness this awful scene for himself, Clay accompanies Julian to a rendezvous in a hotel room with a married closeted businessman from Indiana, where he is compelled by the john to watch the man and Julian have sex for several hours.

After attending a concert with his friends, Clay accompanies them to an alleyway, where they stare, fascinated, at the corpse of a young man, presumably dead by overdose. Afterward, Clay follows the group back to the home of his drug dealer, Rip, who wants to show off his latest acquisition: a twelve-year-old sex slave whom Rip has been keeping drugged in his bedroom. After Clay admonishes Rip, and warns him that he risks losing everything he has, Rip chides him, and insists he "has nothing to lose" before encouraging everyone to rape the girl. Clay leaves, but Trent decides to stay so that he can participate.

Now feeling completely isolated and with winter break coming to an end, Clay reflects on the brutal nature of his surroundings as he returns to college in New Hampshire