



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

Love and Ruin by Paula McLain

1. Martha tells us from the outset that, for better or worse, she is a born traveler. What kind of expectation does that set up about her personality and disposition? What character traits might “born travelers” have that others don’t?
2. Just before Martha meets Ernest, her father dies. How might that make her more impressionable or susceptible to Ernest’s influence?
3. When Martha begins to feel Ernest is drawn to her, she initially resists, saying he’s “too Hemingway.” What does she mean by that? What is she afraid of?
4. When Martha finds the house in Cuba, the Finca Vigía, she falls in love with it instantly, even though it’s in ruins. What does she hope to gain by restoring the property and living there with Ernest? What are the risks?
5. Although Martha loves Ernest and doesn’t want to give up her life with him, she has a lot of trepidation about marrying him. What factors contribute to her anxiety? What does she stand to lose?
6. When *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is published in 1940, it’s a runaway success, selling more copies than any American novel before it save *Gone with the Wind*. Discuss how the book’s success and Ernest’s intensifying fame challenge Martha as his wife and as a writer?
7. When Martha and Ernest go off to China, they’re both working as reporters in search of a story. How do their journalistic methods differ? Are they different kinds of travelers, with different worldviews? Would you say they’re compatible? Why or why not?
8. When Martha is finally convinced she must go to Europe to report on the war if she’s going to live with herself, Ernest feels more and more despondent and abandoned. Finally, he betrays her by taking her correspondent’s credentials from “Collier’s,” effectively replacing her on the masthead. Can we comprehend his actions and find empathy for him? Why or why not?

The above questions were adapted from

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/534054/love-and-ruin-by-paula-mclain/9781101967386/readers-guide/> to enhance your discussion of the book.

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