RACHEL HAWKINS

THE HEIRESS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did reading Ruby's letters alongside Cam's and Jules's narration shape your reading experience and serve to build the suspense?

2. Rumors, gossip, and controversy swirls around Ruby, the McTavishes, and Ashby House. How do the articles and stories featured in the novel make the media a main character and augment the atmosphere for the reader?

3. In what way do each of Ruby's husbands reflect and define certain periods in her life? How do her reasons for murdering them evolve over the course of the story?

4. How would you define family? After reading this novel, did your perception of the term shift at all? If so, in what ways?

5. Ruby's portrait—Andrew's painting—was the only thing that survived the Ashby House fire, her image untouched by the flames. What is the significance of Andrew's depiction of Ruby being all that remains of Ashby House for Cam and his chosen family?

6. Ruby and Ashby House are thought to hold a darkness within them. Jules believed that the love she shared with Cam could drive out the darkness that exuded from those walls, but it didn't, just as Ruby and Andrew's love couldn't drive out Ruby's darkness. What do you believe this "darkness" is and where does it come from—if it's even darkness at all? Based on the series of events in this novel, what do you think can drive out the darkness, if not love?

7. This novel explores the concept of nature versus nurture—three children in this novel are raised by people they don't share blood with (Ruby, Dora, and Cam). Did your opinion on this debate shift after reading *The Heiress*? Is it possible that Ruby and Cam inherited more than just the family fortune from the McTavishes?

8. The color red is highlighted several times throughout the novel. In what scenarios is it mentioned, and what do you think it signifies?

9. Several names in this book are symbolic, i.e. Ruby and Jules. What do you make of Grace's name? What do you imagine Jules will name her and Cam's baby?

10. The McTavish name carries a lot of privilege—members of the family get away with murder (literally) numerous times. Discuss the power and reckless freedom that comes with the McTavishes' wealth and how the Darnells are affected by it.

11. Cam worked hard to separate himself from his family, but when he returned to Ashby House ten years later, he felt immediately transported to his past. Is it possible to ever fully rid yourself of where you came from? How does Cam define himself in opposition to the McTavishes?

12. Why do you think Ruby created a memorial for each of her husbands? She claims that she wants to right some of her and the McTavishes' wrongs—are these memorials a form of penance? Or do you think they solely intended to make her look innocent? Explain.

13. Why did Ruby adopt Cam? Did her plan play out as she had hoped?

14. The "real" McTavishes (i.e., Ben, Libby, and Nelle) saw the family fortune and Ashby House as a source of power, while Cam saw it as a confining trap. Discuss the dynamics of their different views. Do you think the idea of "birthright" has anything to do with it?

15. What is the significance of the baby doll with one eye closed? When Ruby and Nelle were children, Ruby fears her parents will make her trade dolls with Nelle: "If they do, I will throw this doll into the fire. I will burn it before I let Nelle have it." (page 31) Does this early insight into Ruby's character help you to understand her later actions? How does her will reflect this mentality? Additionally, that same doll is next to Nelle in her death bed. What do you make of this?

16. In a letter to Ruby, Jules writes "I'd wonder yet again if in addition to being a murderess, you were a witch. Because it had to be magic, Ruby. It had to be something." (page 279) How does this version of Ruby relate to the definition of "changeling" on page 5?

17. How did the end of the novel make you feel? Do you believe Jules got her happy ending after all?



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