

Love and Ruin

In the Historical fiction *Love and Ruin* author Paula McLain illustrates the relationship between Ernest Hemingway and his third wife, Martha Gellhorn. Martha is considered one of the most important war correspondents of the 20th century and is, herself, the author of several fiction and nonfiction books.

Martha meets Hemingway for the first time in late 1936 in a bar in Key West. She has just come off a bad relationship with a married man and is still grieving the loss of her father who recently died. She is in her late 20th and Ernest is ten years older and also still married to his second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer.

Martha and Hemingway, along with other war correspondence, travel together to Spain to cover the Spanish Civil War. Martha was already nationally recognized for her reporting of the Great Depression and felt she could make a difference by telling the American people about the atrocities in Spain. There, she experiences some very traumatic moments that inspire her. While in Spain Martha becomes infatuated with Hemmingway, and the two writers begin a close relationship. After their return from Spain, Martha joins Ernest in Cuba where she convinces Ernest to purchase the villa, Finca Vigia. Martha's dream is for the two of them to be able to write their own novels in the tranquility of Cuba, and under one roof. And while Pauline, his second wife remains in Key West with their two sons, life for Ernest and Martha becomes less tranquil.

Ernest and Martha marry in 1940. He is now a famous writer having won numerous awards for his book, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Martha loves her husband but refuses to give up her own identity as a writer and war correspondent. She has to make a choice either be a devoted wife in the shadow of her husband's fame or follow her own desires.

As the relationship begins to unravel, Martha follows her passion for reporting and stows away on the first hospital ship to land at Normandy on D-Day. She joins the troops and wades ashore making her the first journalist, male or female, to be so close to the action and manages to report back to her contacts. It was Martha who paved the way for future female reporters.

In *Love and Ruin* Hemingway is portrayed as the great writer that he was. However, McLain also captures his dark and tormented side. He did love his sons and was devoted to them, but he was an alcoholic and womanizer. Plagued with a fear of being alone, it didn't take Hemingway long after Martha divorced him to find another woman, who would later become his fourth wife. He never forgave Martha for leaving him.

There still remains some questions about Martha and her own inner struggles. She did have an affair with Ernest Hemingway knowing he was still married and the father of three sons. Should she have walked away? Once alone Martha moved on to become famous doing what she loved for more than sixty years. She married once for a short time, divorced and never married again.

Be sure to look for this fascinating and insightful book the next time you visit our library.

Happy Reading!