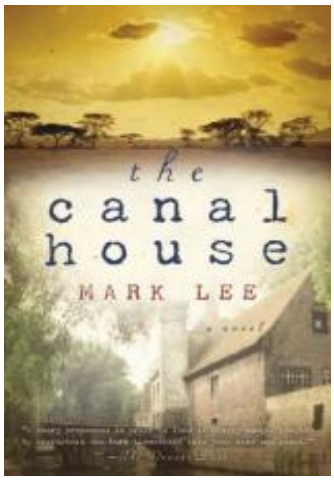
Canal House

by Mark Lee



About the Book

Photojournalist Nicky Bettencourt thinks he's seen everything until he teams up with the legendary war correspondent Daniel McFarland. To Daniel, the story is everything; people come later. But after a plane crash nearly takes his life, Daniel begins to see the world in a different way. He falls in love with Julia Cadell, an idealistic British doctor, and together they find refuge at an old canal house in the center of London. Soon after, Nicky, Daniel, and Julia are called to East Timor, where the government has fled and the entire country is a war zone, and Daniel must decide whether to get the story of a lifetime or to see beyond the headlines to the people whose lives are in the balance.

Fast-paced and gorgeously written, **The Canal House** is a gripping novel of love, faith, and friendship set in the dangerous world of international wartime journalism.

Discussion Guide

1. How does Nicky's profession as a photographer affect the way he sees the world around him? How does his job influence his perspective on Daniel and Julia's relationship? Do you trust Nicky as a narrator?

2. Why is Nicky drawn to Daniel? What does Daniel possess that Nicky realizes he himself lacks?

3. In chapter 15, when Nicky takes the photo of Richard and Julia leaning over the map of East Timor, he demonstrates the photographer's ability to reconstruct reality. To what extent is this a turning point for Nicky?

4. Why is Julia involved with Richard? Is he a shelter from a stressful life? Or does she see how he can serve a greater cause?

5. Did Richard acquire Julia only for her usefulness? In what way might he have loved her?

6. When we first meet Daniel, he's having an affair with an Italian aristocrat. How does Julia challenge Daniel's attitudes and expectations?

7. Daniel is a journalist with a commitment to the truth. In chapter 3, he worries that he will turn into someone like the cynical editor, Matthew Vickery. Contrast his actions in Uganda with those in East Timor. Should journalists become involved with their stories? Is it possible for journalists to stay detached from what is going on around them?

8. The airplane crash radically changes Daniel's view of the world. Why does this event--more than any other he had witnessed or endured--become a turning point? How does his time at Boma Mission confirm his new attitude? In chapter 7, Father Lokali connects love for God and the love for another. Can emotional love ever bring one closer to spiritual knowledge?

9. In chapter 9, Richard makes a crucial speech about relief aid during the dinner party. How are his attitudes also indicated in the pheasant hunt and in the setting of Westgate Castle? Is the manipulation of the truth ever justified in order to help others?

10. Why do Julia and Daniel have to retreat to the canal house? How does their relationship to each other--and to the world--change during their retreat? Why do they decide to leave the farm in Italy?

11. Is Daniel's sacrifice foreshadowed by the author? How does the tension build during the sequence in East Timor? Did you wonder if Richard might betray Daniel?

12. What is Daniel's legacy for Julia and Nicky? Do you think both characters reach the same level of understanding and acceptance? How does the final paragraph show how Nicky has changed?

Author Bio

Mark Lee has worked as a foreign correspondent for Reuters and the London Telegraph. A vice president of PEN Center USA, Lee is a foreign correspondent for various publications, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Los Angeles Times*. He lives in Southern California.

Critical Praise

"With a satisfying smack of authenticity, Lee is brilliant at capturing a whole culture in a paragraph."

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