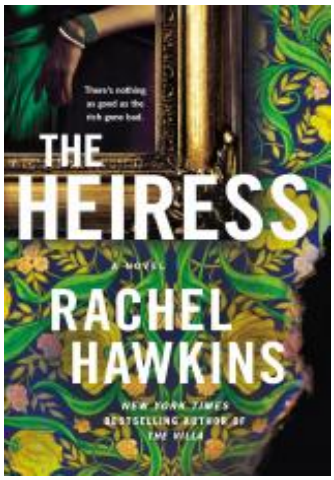
The Heiress

by Rachel Hawkins



About the Book

***New York Times* bestselling author Rachel Hawkins returns with a twisted new gothic suspense about an infamous heiress and the complicated inheritance she left behind.**

When Ruby McTavish Callahan Woodward Miller Kenmore dies, she?s not only North Carolina?s richest woman, she?s also its most notorious. The victim of a famous kidnapping as a child and a widow four times over, Ruby ruled the tiny town of Tavistock from Ashby House, her family?s estate high in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

But in the aftermath of her death, her adopted son, Camden, wants little to do with the house or the money --- and even less to do with the surviving McTavishes. Instead, he rejects his inheritance, settling into a normal life as an English teacher in Colorado and marrying Jules, a woman just as eager to escape her own messy past.

Ten years later, his uncle?s death pulls Cam and Jules back into the family fold at Ashby House. Its views are just as stunning as ever, its rooms just as elegant, but the legacy of Ruby is inescapable.

And as Ashby House tightens its grip on Jules and Camden, questions about the infamous heiress come to light. Was there any truth to the persistent rumors following her disappearance as a girl? What really happened to those four husbands, who all died under mysterious circumstances? And why did she adopt Cam in the first place? Soon, Jules and Cam realize that an inheritance can entail far more than what?s written in a will --- and that the bonds of family stretch far beyond the grave.

Discussion Guide

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

2. Rumors, gossip and controversy swirl 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 10 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?

Author Bio

Rachel Hawkins is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE WIFE UPSTAIRS, RECKLESS GIRLS, THE VILLA, THE HEIRESS and THE STORM, as well as multiple books for young readers. Her work has been translated into over a dozen languages. She studied gender and sexuality in Victorian literature at Auburn University and currently lives in Alabama.

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