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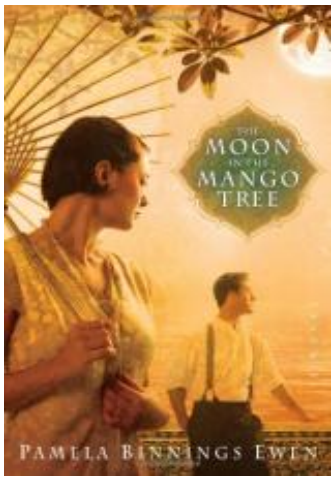
The Moon in the Mango Tree

by Pamela Binnings Ewen



About the Book

The Moon in the Mango Tree is set in the Roaring Twenties when young women were lobbying to get the right to vote and forge new ground. Barbara is faced with a decision to follow her own dream of becoming an opera singer and her responsibility to follow her husband to Siam, present day Thailand. When she chooses her husband, Barbara finds herself on a journey to the jungles of Siam to take on the role of missionary doctor?s wife. There she encounters the local people and Buddhist culture and the missionary workers trying to bring Jesus to this remote location. **The Moon in the Mango Tree** is an historical romance of love, patience and endurance.

Discussion Guide

1. Barbara Perkins has trained for years to sing grand opera. A former suffragette, she?s beautiful, talented, and smart. Twice during **The Moon in the Mango Tree** --- at the beginning and the end --- Barbara is forced to choose between pursuing a singing career and her love for Harvey. What factors do you think most influence her decision in each case?

2. Barbara travels to Siam with Harvey in 1919 and arrives at the mission near the ancient walled city of Nan, wary but optimistic. Immediately she clashes with Amalie and Emory Breeden. Reverend Breeden tells her that it is ?fear, not joy, that leads us.? How does this perspective influence Barbara? How does Joshua Smithers argue against this view of Christianity with the Potter?s Tale in chapter 19?

3. Barbara visits the deserted Buddhist temple Wat Phumin despite warnings from the missionaries. There she meets an elderly monk who describes life as a rainbow. What does he mean by that? How does this contrast with Barbara?s view of life? with the Siam mission?s view of life? What does Harvey?s reaction when he learns of her visit to the temple reveal about his relationship with Barbara?

4. What does Barbara mean when she says that her father was her ?listener?? Do you have a listener in your life?

5. During the monsoon, Harvey leaves Barbara to tend a village ravaged by jungle fever. Barbara?s feelings of abandonment lead to resentment and simmering anger. If she had learned what happened in the village at this point in the story, how do you think that might have changed the course of Barbara?s life?

6. What does Joshua Smithers mean when he warns Barbara that she must define what she means by the word ?religious? before she rejects it.

7. Toward the end of Part I, seeking comfort, Barbara compares Christian and Buddhist thought and comes to a startling conclusion. What conclusion does she reach? How does this change her own view of the mission at Nan and her own view of life?

8. Stars are mentioned several times throughout the book. What is the significance of this statement by Barbara in chapter 21: ?False stars? That too??

9. When, in 1926, Harvey and Barbara are asked to return to Siam, to Bangkok, she agrees to go, but resolves that things will be different this time. What does she mean by her statement that she was riding a glimmering chariot and forgot altogether the sun god?s warning: ?Keep to the middle course??

10. On her way to Rome in Chapter 29, Barbara concludes that for Harvey, duty and his work will always come first. Do you believe Harvey feels this way? Why did Barbara feel like a hatchling that?s just spotted the first crack in the shell?

11. In Rome, her new friend, Ted Jordan, tells her of stallion races that the Romans held thousands of years ago in Piazza Navonne. The winner?s head was lopped off at the finish line, he says, just at the moment of triumph. Barbara comments that the race was won, and we only remember the winners. The others are dust, gone and forgotten. What does she mean by that and how does it apply to her own life at that moment?

12. In Lausanne, Barbara finds herself crying as she watches her daughters sleep at night. What is the conflict that she?s facing? What does she mean when she muses that, ?It is not a matter of love.... True love requires strength, not weakness as a partner.?

13. During one of her singing lessons in Rome, the Maestro says to Barbara: ?*Free* the music. It is inside of you. Let it flow from within. You are the instrument.? When faced with the choice between Harvey and the new life that Rome offers, Barbara thinks of these words. What do they mean to her as she makes this final choice?

14. Many women today still struggle with the excruciating choice that Barbara was forced to make between family and a career. Do you believe that women today are able to give 100 percent to both? Do women have to choose between the two, or do you think there?s a way to compromise? What do you think of Barbara?s belief that when you choose between two things you love, one of them is lost? Have you ever had to make that choice?

15. The priest in Rome tells Barbara that Harvey?s work in Siam was no abstract ideal. What did he mean by that? He reminded Barbara of the words of the Apostle, Paul?*of faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these is love.* What do you think Paul means by these words --- wouldn?t it seem that faith would hold the higher value to the apostle?

Author Bio

Until recently retiring to write full time, Pamela Binnings Ewen was a partner in the Houston office of the international law firm of BakerBotts, L.L.P., specializing in corporate finance. She now lives just outside New Orleans in Mandeville, Louisiana with her husband, James Lott. She has served on the Board of Directors of Inprint, Inc., a non-profit organization supporting the literary arts in Houston, and is on the Board of Directors of The Pirate's Alley Faulkner Society in New Orleans.

Pamela's first novel, **Walk Back The Cat** (Broadman & Holman. May, 2006) is the story of an embittered and powerful clergyman who learns an ancient secret, confronting him with truth and a choice that may destroy him. She is also the best-selling author of the acclaimed non-fiction book **Faith On Trial**, published by Broadman & Holman in 1999, currently in its third printing. Although it was written for non-lawyers, **Faith On Trial** was also chosen as a text for a course on law and religion at Yale Law School in the Spring of 2000, along with **The Case For Christ** by Lee Stroble. Continuing the apologetics begun in **Faith On Trial**, Pamela also appears with Gary Habermas, Josh McDowell, Darrell Bock, Lee Stroble, and others in the film*Jesus: Fact or Fiction*, a Campus Crusade for Christ production. Her new novel, **The Moon in the Mango Tree** (B&H Publishing Group, May 2008) will be available next spring. Set in the 1920's and based on a true story, it is about a woman faced with making a choice between career and love, and her search for faith over the glittering decade.

Pamela is the latest writer to emerge from a Louisiana family recognized for its statistically improbable number of successful authors. A cousin, James Lee Burke, who won the Edgar Award, wrote about the common ancestral grandfathers in his Civil War novel **White Dove At Morning**. Among other writers in the family are Andre Dubus (Best Picture Oscar nomination for *The Bedroom*; his son, Andre Dubus III, author of **The House of Sand and Fog**, Best Picture Oscar nomination and an Oprah pick; Elizabeth Nell Dubus (the*Cajun* trilogy); and Alafair Burke, just starting out with the well received*Samantha Kincaid* mystery series. Pamela is currently working on a new book titled **Dancing on Glass**, which was recently short-listed as a finalist for the 2007 Faulkner/Wisdom creative writing novel award.

Critical Praise

"...deeply moving..."

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