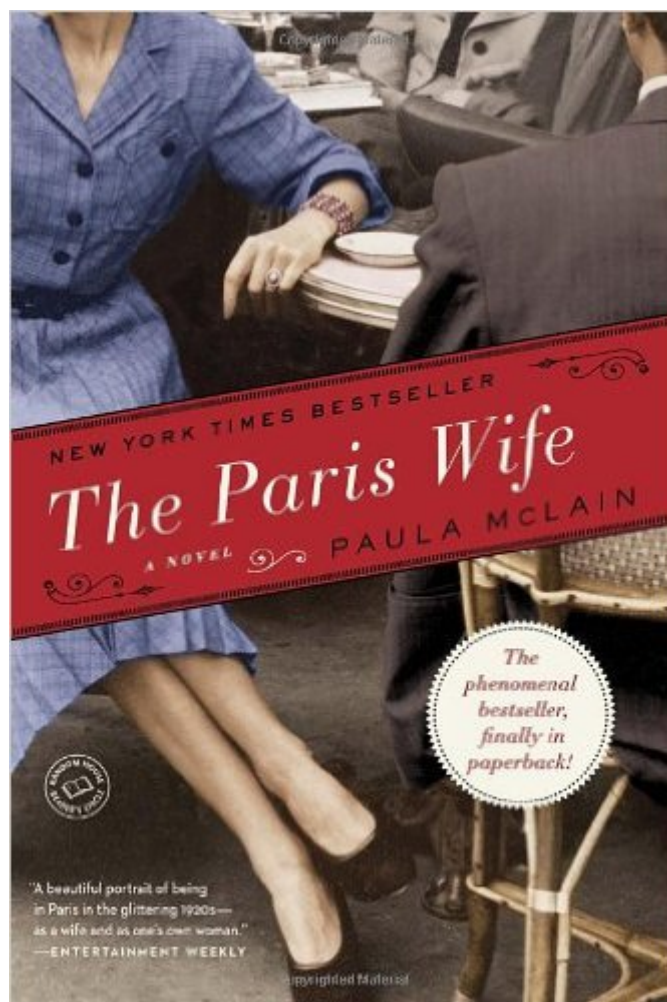


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The Paris Wife



At the end of Ernest Hemingway's memoir, *A Moveable Feast*, he writes of his first wife, Hadley Richardson, "I wish I had died before I loved anyone but her." After their divorce, Hemingway marries three more times, each one prompt to follow, like serial wives. This is the story of the woman that loved him before he was famous. Paula McLain researched their biographies, letters, and Hemingway's novels, culling the material to imagine a story of their charmed and battered marriage in Paris, from 1921-1926. The tortured life and tragically foreshadowed suicide of Ernest Hemingway is public knowledge, as was his legendary womanizing. McLain's novel dodges the palaver, blending the facts that are known together with credible inference, creating a plausible, informed depiction of Hemingway and Hadley's marriage--the quotidian, the famed, the halcyon, the harsh. The author writes from Hadley's point of view, inviting the reader inside their most tender and demolishing moments. A few choice sections belong to Hemingway's perspective, urgent and telling. The narrative deftly folds in their histories--the years before they met--artfully revealing early and private woes, which ripple and sometimes hiss beneath the ardor. We get the back stories without muddled exposition; by the time it arrives at the failure of their union, readers have acquired a fluency of Hadley's nature and Hemingway's core. Hadley sustained several painful childhood experiences that eerily parallel Hemingway's, and was a recluse and "spinster" at twenty-eight, when she met and was courted by the twenty-one-year-old Hemingway.

Ernest Hemingway, 21, marries Hadley Richardson eight years his senior and promptly moves with her to Paris to be among the upstarts, the in crowd, the expatriates that worshipped Paris as their city of creativity. Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald not to mention famous actors, musicians and painters were their companions though they often lived hand to mouth. Content to live in Ernest's shadow, providing him with much needed stability and a shoulder, Hadley embraces his love of the outdoors, spontaneous moves to various European locals, bull fighting, horse racing and for a time, drinking. But soon the lure and glamour began to fade. The eccentricities of open marriages, mistresses and provocative lifestyles leaves Hadley at loss especially after the birth of their son. Hemingway's constant moodiness, carousing, heavy drinking, lack of decorum and superior attitude begin to unravel his wife's resolve. His resentment of her few friendships also speak to his possessiveness and selfish nature. When "fame" arrives it shatters all handrails that Hadley has clung to. The intense love she feels for Ernest drives her to fight for their marriage and for Ernest's life, but to what avail? I adored the book, "Loving Frank" by Nancy Horner all about Frank Lloyd Wright and his mistress; it as well as "The Paris Wife," demonstrate the incredible sacrifices a companion must make to cajole an artist's tender ego. Not surprisingly I see Nancy

Horan endorsed this book and rightfully she should. The writing is so beautifully strong as it exposes lifestyles of creative geniuses. Paula McClain does an amazing job of keeping the reader glued to the perils of this complex couple.

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