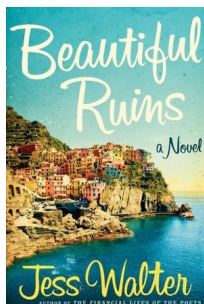


Further Reading

Beautiful Ruins (Jun 2012)

by **Walter, Jess**

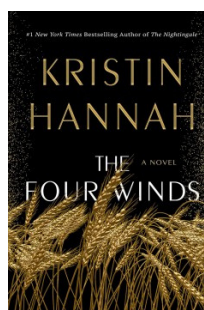
The story of an almost-love affair that begins on the Italian coast in 1962 ... and is rekindled in Hollywood fifty years later, featuring an Italian housekeeper and his long-lost American starlet, the producer who once brought them together, and his assistant.



The Four Winds (Feb 2021)

by **Hannah, Kristin**

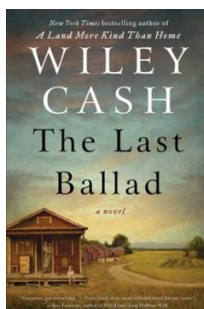
A Depression-era woman confronts a wrenching choice between fighting for the Dust Bowl-ravaged land she loves in Texas or pursuing an uncertain future in California.



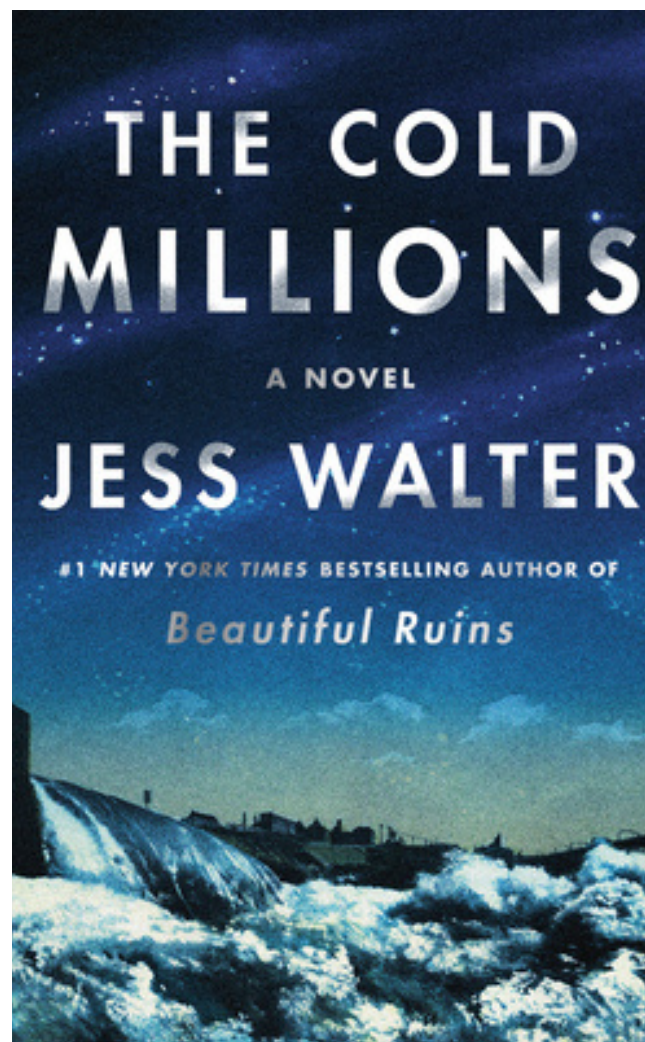
The Last Ballad (Oct 2017)

by **Cash, Wiley**

Inspired by actual events, a tale set in the Appalachian foothills of 1929 North Carolina follows the struggles of an ordinary woman to reclaim her dignity and rights in a labor mill, where she earns a paltry salary before risking her family and future to join a union.



BOOK DISCUSSION



Discussion Questions

1. The book opens with a first-person narrator—Officer Waterbury—who is killed at the end of his brief section. Why do you think the author chose to start the book this way? Did you find it effective?

2. The character Jules says, "People expect a story to always mean the same thing, but I have found that stories change like people do." While the story of the novel's hero, Rye Dolan, is told primarily in the third person, his narration is interwoven with chapters from the first-person perspective of supporting characters. Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel in this way? How does this choice relate to Jules' observation?

3. Debating with Gig, Early Reston says, "I just don't see how you fight a class war without the war." This is a persistent theme throughout the novel—bombs versus speeches. Where do you think the author falls in this debate? What are your own thoughts?

4. At one point in the novel, we read that "Rye thought that history was like a parade. When you were inside it, nothing else mattered. You could hardly believe the noise—the marching and juggling and playing of horns. But most people were not in the parade. They experienced it from the sidewalk, from the street, watched it pass, and when it was on to the next place, they had nothing to do but go back to their quiet lives." Discuss.

5. The main action in the book takes place during the Free Speech riots of 1909 and 1910; of the years that follow, Rye observes, "I wondered if the whole world wasn't collapsing. The news was all famine and influenza, murder and war, every day some fresh horror." What parallels do you see to current events? Does the novel's historical lens provide you with any insight into what is happening today?

6. Rye has his epiphany about the "cold millions" of the title in Lem Brand's library; *War and Peace* plays a supporting role in the novel. Discuss the role of books and literature in the novel. What is the symbolism of the fact that Gig's "prized possession" consists of volumes 1 and 3 of *War and Peace*, "two fifths of the finest novel ever written"?

7. At one point, Early Reston asks Rye, Who are you? and Rye concedes that it was a fair question; at another point, when asked to identify himself, he claims that he's 'not anything.' At the end of the novel, Fred Moore tells Rye that "She [Gurley Flynn] always believed, as I did, that you were a pawn in the other side's treachery." Rye himself wonders about Ursula—and by extension himself—"just what sort of ethics a person needed to survive so long in cages with cougars." How does Rye's identity evolve over the course of the novel? Do his 'ethics' change?

8. Early in the narrative, Rye notes that "when Gig was smitten, by cause or by woman, there was no sense in him"; he also notes that he "didn't like it when Gig ran with these union types; he thought their revolutionary banter half foolish and half dangerous and was never quite sure which was which." And yet Rye is drawn into the cause alongside his brother. Discuss.

9. Water is at the center of the narrative, both literally and figuratively. In telling his story about running the ferry, Jules observes, "One man to a boat.... We all go over alone." Rye notes of Jules's stories that the "meaning was like an undercurrent beneath the surface." Discuss.

10. The novel's two main female characters—Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Ursula the Great—each receive a fair amount of time on the page before they get to speak for themselves. When they do tell their stories, do they change the perception you've formed of them from others' narratives?

11. The story of First Ursula's creation of her persona echoes Gemma's observation, "What was life if not one invention after another?" How does this relate to the other main characters in the novel?

12. Ursula the Great observes that "a woman owns nothing in this life except her memories" several times, and yet when Rye goes to offer her money after Gig's death, she is the only one to refuse him, telling him that she "owned the hotel free and clear now." What changes for Ursula, and how does she help effect that change?

13. How are Del Dalveaux and Early Reston similar, and how are they different? Did you find that you had sympathy for either character?

14. Thinking back about Gurley Flynn, Rye says, "I knew cops and killers, detectives and anarchists, and not one of them had her strength, could have done what she did." And yet he also notes that "It didn't matter what he did, what Gurley did, what Fred Moore did, what any of them did. Somewhere there was a roomful of wealthy old men where everything was decided." Do you agree with him?

15. The epigraph to the epilogue comes from Tolstoy: "Life did not stop, and one had to live." How does this fit with what follows, in which Rye finally speaks in the first person? Did you like knowing what happened in the aftermath of the novel's main events?

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