

The Ladies of Managua

Eleni N. Gage

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READING GROUP GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Maria Vazquez returns to Nicaragua for her beloved grandfather's funeral, she brings with her a mysterious package from her grandmother's past—and a secret of her own. And she also carries the burden of her tense relationship with her mother Ninexin, once a storied revolutionary, now a tireless government employee. Between Maria and Ninexin lies a chasm created by the death of Maria's father, who was killed during the revolution when Maria was an infant, leaving her to be raised by her grandmother Isabela as Ninexin worked to build the new Nicaragua. As Ninexin tries to reach her daughter, and Maria wrestles with her expectations for her romance with an older man, Isabela, the mourning widow, is lost in memories of attending boarding school in 1950's New Orleans, where she loved and lost almost sixty years ago.

When the three women come together to bid farewell to the man who anchored their family, they are forced to confront their complicated, passionate relationships with each other and with their country—and to reveal the secrets that each of them have worked to conceal. Lushly evocative of Nicaragua, its tumultuous history, and vibrant present, *The Ladies of Managua* brings you into the lives of three strong and magnetic women, as they uncover the ramifications of the choices they made in their pasts and begin to understand the ways in which love can shape their futures.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The very first line of the book is Mariana informing the reader of her grandmother's opinion that "Revolutionaries make bad husbands." What does Isabela mean? Why does she feel this way?
2. Why do you think the author chose to begin each of the first three chapters with the alternating narrators repeating the same sentence?
3. Each woman is concealing a secret from the others. What are these and why does each character feel she can't share hers with her family?
4. The question of what it means to be a good parent (and/or a good daughter) preoccupies each of the narrators of *The Ladies of Managua*. Do you think they have judged each other fairly? Has Isabela been a good mother and grandmother? Has Ninexin? Is Mariana a good daughter and do you think she has what it takes to be a good mother?
5. Mariana often suggests that her relationship with Allen has parallels to her relationship with Ninexin. Do you agree? If so, how are the two bonds similar? Different?
6. In many ways, the Valanzuela/Vazquez women have been unlucky in love. Is Mariana breaking this pattern or continuing it? Is Allen a good choice for her? And does he fit Isabela's definition of a "revolutionary"?

7. The revolution in Nicaragua forever changed the course of each of these women's lives (and the history of the country). At the same time, each character undergoes a personal revolution throughout the course of the book. What revolutions do these three women undergo?
8. Ninexin feels responsible for Manuel's death. Is she?
9. Why do you think Mariana and Isabela are so close, and what role do you think the generation gap plays in parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relationships?
10. "I carry all those other selves inside me," says Isabela, reflecting on the girl, young woman, and mother she used to be. How has Isabela changed to accommodate the shifting world around her? How has she resisted change?
11. The novel begins on an airplane and ends in New Orleans, a city in which none of the protagonists live. Why do you think the author chose these settings?
12. To what extent is Nicaragua itself a character in the novel? How does each woman's relationship with the country impact her life and her choices?

Want to learn more about Eleni N. Gage?

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