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# THE ASHFORD AFFAIR

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Addie wants “her” girls to have the chances their mother didn’t; Marjorie, in turn, pushes Clemmie to focus on work, rather than marrying young like she did. How do their ambitions impact their children? What role does the weight of familial expectations play in shaping the major characters in this novel? Have there been times in your life when you’ve felt constrained or propelled by your parents’ wishes?
2. Addie and Bea love each other dearly, in their own way, but neither really understands what makes the other tick. Do you think their friendship is an unhealthy one? Do you have legacy friends from your childhood with whom you have a similar dynamic?
3. In *The Ashford Affair*, we see Bea and Addie on either side of World War I, a moment of huge social and cultural change. How does that changing landscape affect the lives of these two characters? What do you think would have happened to them both if World War I hadn’t intervened?
4. Ashford Park has a powerful hold on both Addie and Bea, so much so that Bea names her home in exile “Ashford Redux”. What do you think Ashford represents to each of them?
5. In the case of both Addie and Frederick, and Clemmie and Jon, it takes two tries for true love to conquer all; Clemmie comments at one point that if she and Jon had gotten together the first time, they would probably have broken up, that they were too young. What do you think might have happened if Clemmie and Jon had dated after Rome, or if Addie and Frederick hadn’t been derailed by Bea? Would those relationships have been very different from the ones they eventually achieve? Why or why not?
6. Both in England and in Kenya, Bea feels betrayed by the difference between what she’s led to expect from life and what she receives. She complains that she wasn’t trained for this new world. Do you have sympathy for her? Have there been times when you’ve felt the same way, or known people who have?

7. In the 1920s, large numbers of Europeans moved to Africa, seeing it as a place of hope and opportunity, a place to make one's fortune or to get away from the memories of the Great War. Frederick, Bea and Addie all find very different things in Kenya. What does Kenya mean to each of them? Does it matter that it's Kenya, or would the same story have played out anywhere?

8. The world of Bea, Frederick and Addie in Kenya is essentially the English aristocracy transplanted to the African landscape. None of them questions his or her right to make a home there or to use native labor. Does the colonial aspect of this bother you or make you think less of them? Or is it simply a reflection of the times?

9. Addie makes some choices in the novel that ripple down through history to deeply impact her loved ones. She decides not to tell Marjorie and Anna that Bea was still alive. Do you think this was the right or wrong thing to do? Why? Do you sympathize with Addie and Marjorie's decision not to tell Clemmie about her real relationship with Addie? How might the story have been different if these two decisions had gone the other way?

10. After finishing the novel, what do you think of Bea? Do you find her sympathetic? Unlikeable? What did you think happened to her – and were you surprised when you learned that she was still alive?

11. Clemmie comments at the end of the novel that her grandmothers—both of them—lived through so much, while her generation has been ridiculously sheltered. Do you think that's true in general or just true of her? Were the World War I and II generations really tougher and more daring or do we just perceive it that way?

12. Clemmie's sense of self is shaken by learning the truth about her family. Do you think she overreacts? How would you respond to a similar revelation? Have you ever learned something about your family that has shaken you?