

Death of Mrs. Westaway Discussion Questions

by Ruth Ware

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & author website)

Ruth Ware grew up in Lewes, in East Sussex in Britain. After graduating from Manchester University she moved to Paris, before settling in north London. She has worked as a waitress, a bookseller, a teacher of English as a foreign language, a press officer, and is now a full time writer. She is married and has two children.



Characters:

- **Harriet “Hal” Westaway** – (21) – Tarot Reader who works the Pier under the name Madame Margarida. In a financial hole and owes money to a loan shark. Hal’s mother, Maggie, died in a hit-and-run car accident when Hal was 18. Receives a letter saying her grandmother, Hester Westaway, died and Hal is due an inheritance.
- **Robert Treswick** – Lawyer for Hester Westaway’s estate. Gets a hold of Hal and tells her that her grandmother died and that Hal is one of the beneficiaries of the estate.
- **Ada Warren** – (80’s) – Housekeeper at Trepassen House. Was Hester’s main companion in her later years. Spiteful woman.
- **Able Westaway** – Hester’s middle son. Easygoing. Lobbyist on behalf of children’s charities. Gay. Partner, Edward, is a doctor.
- **Ezra Westaway** – Hester’s youngest son. Maud is his twin sister. Charming. The favored son.
- **Harding Westaway** – Hester’s oldest son. Pompous and stuffy. Wife is Mitzi. They have 3 children – Richard, Katherine, and Freddie. Financial Manager.
- **Hester Mary Westaway** – Hal’s grandmother. Bitter woman. Owns Trepassen House and the lands surrounding it. Widow of Erasmus Westaway who died in the 70’s. Hester died and left Hal a substantial estate. Had 3 sons, Harding, Abel, and Ezra, and 1 daughter, Maud.
- **Margarida “Maggie” Westaway** – Hal’s mother. Read Tarot cards. She worked telling fortunes on the pier before her death in a hit-and-run car accident three years previous. Maggie’s parents died when she was young and she went to live with her cousins in Trepassen House. Eventually runs away from Trepassen.
- **Margarida “Maud” Westaway** – Hester’s daughter and Ezra’s twin. Very logical and forthright. Unhappy at home. Runs away from home at the same time as Maggie leaves Trepassen.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Hal makes her living as a tarot card reader, a skill she learned from her mother. What do you think of tarot cards? Have you ever done a tarot card reading? What happened?

3. The novel says people like tarot because it gives an “illusion of control” against the senseless randomness of fate. Do you think that is true? What other things do people do to control fate?
4. When Hal receives the letter informing her of her inheritance, she isn’t sure what to do. What would you have done in Hal’s position?
5. How did the way Hal grew up (poor, but with a tarot reading mother who loved her) inform her adult decision making? What effect did it have?
6. Magpies are an omnipresent symbol in the novel. This begins with the book’s epigraph, where we find the old saying, “One for sorrow / Two for joy / Three for a girl / Four for a boy / Five for silver / Six for gold / Seven for a secret / Never to be told.” Discuss the significance of magpies in the story.
7. Even though her name is part of the book’s title, we never actually meet Mrs. Westaway. What do the other characters say Mrs. Westaway was like? What do you think of her?
8. The French phrase “après moi, le déluge” is important in the novel. Discuss its meaning and significance in the story.
9. What do you think Mrs. Westaway’s motive was in leaving her will as she did? How much do you think she knew about Hal before her death? Why?
10. How do the diaries affect your understanding of the events? Did you guess at the identity of the writer before it was revealed?
11. Discuss Mrs. Warren’s personality and her role at Trepassen. How do you explain her behavior? What should she have done?
12. How does the solicitor, Mr. Treswick, change the outcome for Hal and the Westaway family? Did he do his due diligence in finding and vetting Hal? Do you think Hal is glad to have been found, in the end?
13. There comes a point where Hal just wants to give her bequest back to the family. Is her response panic? Guilt? Deception? Fear? What would you do?
14. Abel, Harding, Ezra — and even Mrs. Warren — swear that Ezra was the favorite. How does that fact play out in the end? Was Mrs. Westaway protecting Ezra?
15. Did you know what happened to Maud before it was revealed? Maggie?
16. Did you know who the villain of the book was before it was revealed? Why or why not? Did the author give you enough clues for you to figure it out?
17. Who is the real villain of **The Death of Mrs. Westaway**? Why? Does that change throughout the course of the book?
18. Were you surprised by the revelation between Ezra and Hal, or by the final revelation Hal discovers in the study and Mrs. Warren’s wing? Why or why not?
19. What do you think happens after the conclusion of the novel?
20. Ruth Ware has written several standalone novels. Will you read any of them?

References:

- Book Companion - https://www.bookcompanion.com/discussion_questions_tdomw.html
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/ruth-ware/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36373481-the-death-of-mrs-westaway>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=4&sid=0d4ddea2-1bba-41cc-a0b5-9435a4d3eb87%40pdc-v-sessmgr02&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10657743&db=neh>
- Papers and Airplanes - <https://papersandairplanes.com/2019/08/12/book-club-guide-the-death-of-mrs-westaway/>

Ruth Ware's Books

Hush

1. Snowflakes (2020)

Standalone Novels

- In a Dark, Dark Wood (2015)
- The Woman in Cabin 10 (2016)
 - The Lying Game (2017)
- The Death of Mrs. Westaway (2018)
 - The Turn of the Key (2019)
 - One by One (2020)

If you liked Death of Mrs. Westaway, try...

- An Anonymous Girl – Greer Hendricks
- The Family Upstairs – Lisa Jewell
- Revenge of the Tide – Elizabeth Haynes
- Call Me Evie – JP Pomare
- Endless Night – Agatha Christie