



Paula

By Isabel Allende
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Introduction

When Isabel Allende's daughter, Paula, became gravely ill and fell into a coma, the author began to write the story of her family for her unconscious child. *Paula* seizes the reader like a novel of suspense, capturing the lives of Isabel's outrageous ancestors, both living and spiritual, while unabashedly accepting the magical world as both vital and real. The author writes of love and hate, peace and war, weaving together delightful and bitter childhood memories that represent amazing anecdotes of her youthful years and the most intimate secrets passed along in whispers.

Questions for Discussion

1. Isabel speaks lovingly about all of her eccentric relatives and has special relationships with each one. What influence did each relative have on the author? How did each help to shape the author's life: Tata? Memé? Tió Ramon? Tió Pablo? Her mother? Granny? Mama Hilda? Paula?
2. As a child, Isabel was molested by a fisherman near her beach house in Chile. The author says she was scarred by the experience but no longer feels repugnance to it (page 109). She feels something closer to tenderness for the fisherman for not raping her. Why is she so forgiving?
3. Do you feel Tata had a role in the fisherman's death, or was his murder a bizarre coincidence, as are most episodes in the author's life?
4. Tata asks Isabel to help him die with dignity, but she is unable to fulfill her grandfather's wishes. Years later, long after Paula slipped into the coma, Isabel also feels she should be able to help end her daughter's suffering, but cannot. She mentions the sleeping pills hidden away and says she may use them, but her brother Juan tells her not to because she'd be forever burdened by the guilt. Do you feel Paula finally succumbed to her illness, or did Isabel or Nicolás help end Paula's suffering? Did Paula linger so long because Isabel was unwilling to let her go?
5. Magara was a strict and callous caretaker who helped raise Isabel and her brothers. Isabel says that Magara hated her, but there does not seem to be any dramatic moment in the book that punctuates that sentiment. How did Magara make Isabel feel this way?
6. Love is bountiful in Isabel's life, and in the lives of her family members. A mother's love plays a particularly prominent role in her story. How did maternal love help shield Isabel and her children from the pain and violence that permeated their lives?
7. Early in the book, the author writes to her daughter, "Listen, Paula. I am going to tell you a story, so that when you wake up you will not feel so lost." Does Isabel really write with the hope that she will share this story with Paul when she awakens, or does the task of writing help Isabel come to terms with her daughter's terminal illness?
8. Are the spirits in Isabel's life real, figurative, or a mix of the two? Do you feel that she believes the spirits dictate her stories to her, or by opening her mind to her spirits is she letting go of all barriers between her and her imagination?
9. Isabel Allende's work has been described as sentimental. But in writing her memoir for Paula, Isabel had to respect Paula's strong aversion to sentimentality (page 760.) Did she succeed?
10. Paula's adult life is spent in search of God, while Isabel is agnostic. Does Isabel ultimately embrace God in Paula's final moments?

About the Author

Born in Peru, Isabel Allende was raised in Chile. She is the author of the novels *Portrait in Sepia*, *Daughters of Fortune*, *The Infinite Plan*, *Eva Luna*, *Of Love and Shadows* and *The House of Spirits*, the short story collection *The Stories of Eva Luna*, and the memoirs *Paula*, *Aphrodite*, and *My Invented Country*. She is also the author of *City of the Beasts* and *Kingdom of the Golden Dragon*, the first two in what will be a trilogy of children's novels. She lives in California.