

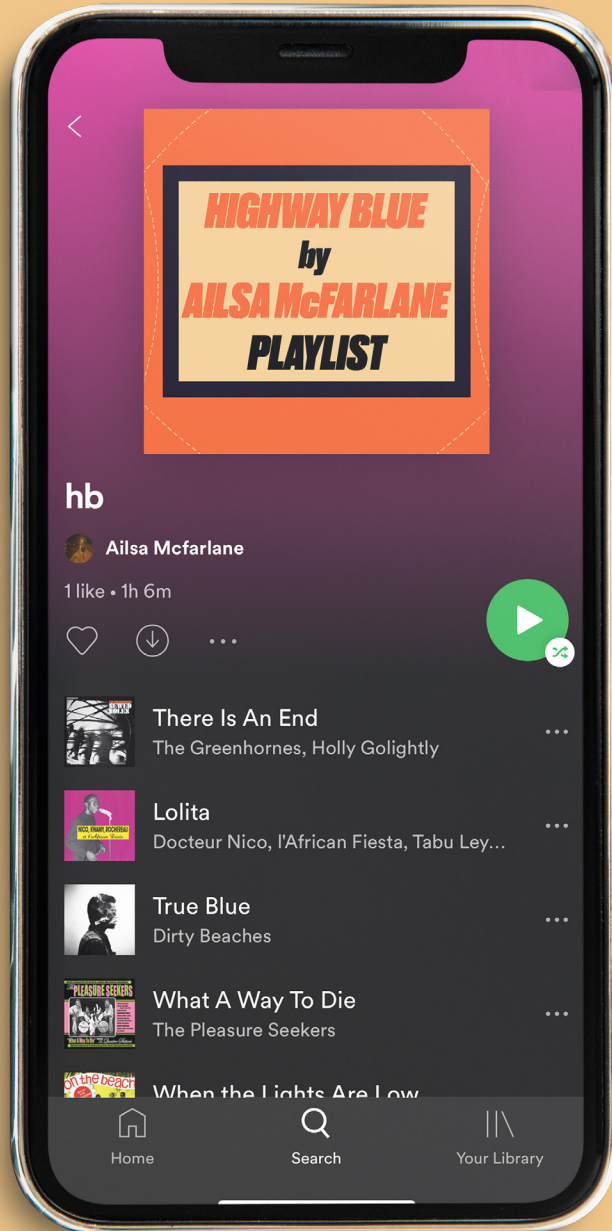
## ***BOOK CLUB KIT***

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. *Highway Blue* begins with a phone conversation with Anne Marie's cousin, Tricia. How does this set the tone at the novel's beginning and what role does family play more generally throughout?
2. How would you describe the style in which *Highway Blue* is written? How does Ailsa McFarlane's writing style reflect Anne Marie's worldview?
3. We know that Cal and Anne Marie met young and married quickly. How would you describe their relationship? Do you trust Cal?
4. Neither Anne Marie nor Cal know what caused the gun to go off in the alley. How is violence handled throughout this scene, and how does this ambiguity reflect the predicament of the characters?
5. Anne Marie calls her former belief in love "another cultural misstep in the wiring of my brain." How do you think Anne Marie might have arrived at this understanding?
6. Anne Marie sometimes reflects on herself and the body in almost forensic corporeal detail: "Bunches of cells, that was all it was, and that was all we were; His snoring made me think about the two wet heavy bags which were his lungs hemmed in by meat; I seemed such an odd construction of white bone and slick red muscle and nameless yellow sludge all tied up with sinews and tendons and packaged mechanically to stand or fall." At what point do such observations occur, and what might they say about how Anne Marie sees things?
7. *Highway Blue* is the latest in a long tradition of novels and films about life on the run. What other cultural touchstones share these themes? How is *Highway Blue* similar to, and different from, other portrayals of fugitives?
8. Anne Marie has few memories of her mother, but they start to emerge as her journey goes on. What role does her mother play throughout Anne Marie's life? And what role does lost love play more generally in the novel?
9. *Highway Blue* is set across a vast and mythical American landscape. Why do you think the author chose not to situate the book in real places? Does this change how you read it? What freedoms might this imagined territory give?
10. What might Cal and Anne Marie's destination of Eidon come to represent?
11. "If something has happened to you that you didn't like or if something has made you feel small or useless or stupid, you just leave behind the life that dropped you in the middle of that experience and slip away into another one," Anne Marie says. You build another person. In which way does Anne Marie's journey shape her? And to what extent has she built another person by the end of the novel?
12. To what extent can *Highway Blue* be read as a quest narrative? What might Anne Marie be in search of throughout her journey?

# PLAYLIST



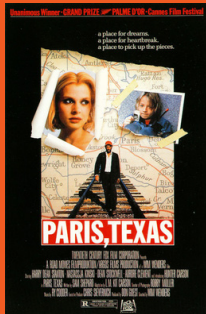
## LISTEN TO A PLAYLIST OF SONGS THAT INSPIRED HIGHWAY BLUE (CLICK TO PLAY)

1. There Is An End by [The Greenhornes](#)
2. Lolita by [Docteur Nico](#), [l'African Fiesta](#), [Tabu Ley Rochereau](#), and [Kwamy](#)
3. True Blue by [Dirty Beaches](#)
4. What A Way To Die by [The Pleasure Seekers](#)
5. When the Lights Are Low by [The Paragons](#)
6. Come Undone by [Isobel Campbell](#) and [Mark Lanegan](#)
7. Mama, You Been on My Mind by [Jeff Buckley](#)
8. Electronic Renaissance by [Belle & Sebastian](#)
9. Where Did You Sleep Last Night by [Lead Belly](#)
10. No Fun by [The Stooges](#)
11. Witchcraft by [Elvis Presley](#)
12. Somedays by [Tess Parks](#)
13. Little Miss Strange by [Jimi Hendrix](#)
14. Love Me or Leave Me by [Nina Simone](#)
15. Whiskey Woman by [Flamin' Groovies](#)
16. Low Light by [The Soundcarriers](#)
17. Yègellé Tezeta by [Mulatu Astatke](#)
18. Sunday Morning by [Amanaz](#)
19. Ride, Ride by [Annie Briggs](#)
20. Memphis, Tennessee by [Chuck Berry](#)
21. Friend of the Devil by [Grateful Dead](#)



# WATCHLIST

Here are four films that inspired Ailsa McFarlane while she wrote *Highway Blue*.



## PARIS, TEXAS

(DIRECTED BY WIM WENDERS):

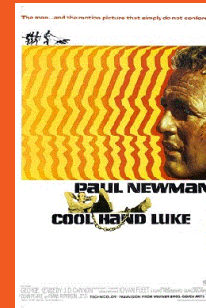
Harry Dean Stanton's Travis wanders out of the desert and stands framed against the backdrop of the burnt land behind him—these are the opening scenes of Wenders's aching masterpiece about loss and self-destruction. Every second of this film is so beautiful, so real and unflinching.



## THE LONG GOODBYE

(DIRECTED BY ROBERT ALTMAN):

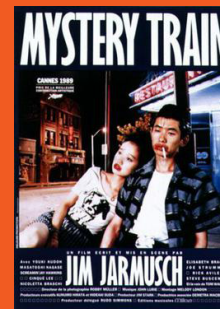
Altman's adaptation of Raymond Chandler's neo-noir always walks the line between the tongue-in-cheek and the horrifying, framed by Altman's oblique directing. John Williams's haunting soundtrack loops through and around the film.



## COOL HAND LUKE

(DIRECTED BY STUART ROSENBERG):

Lucas Jackson is sent to a prison camp in the south of Florida to become part of a work gang, where his refusal to conform at any cost soon begins to have its consequences. *Cool Hand Luke* is a story about a mind's refusal to be beaten into any shape other than one of its own choosing. It's a film I've loved for a long time.



## MYSTERY TRAIN

(DIRECTED BY JIM JARMUSCH):

This anthology film follows three loosely linked stories, each taking place on the same night in Memphis, Tennessee. The promise of morning holds something different for each of them. What I especially love about *Mystery Train* are Jarmusch's pithy observations—Sun Studios, the site of Elvis Presley's recordings, has become something of a lauded mecca for tourists, whilst the former premises of Stax Records (a label known for its recordings of artists such as Otis Redding) stands empty and boarded up. Jarmusch makes eloquent, wordless points in his shots of the city of Memphis itself.