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Lilac Girls

by Martha Hall Kelly



About the Book

Based on a true story of a New York socialite who championed a group of concentration camp survivors known as the Rabbits, this acclaimed debut novel reveals a story of love, redemption and terrible secrets that were hidden for decades.

Caroline Ferriday is a former Broadway actress and liaison to the French consulate whose life is forever changed when Hitler?s army invades Poland in September 1939 --- and then sets its sights on France. An ocean away from Caroline, Kasia Kuzmerick, a Polish teenager, sinks deeper into her role as a courier for the underground resistance movement. In Germany, Herta Oberheuser, a young doctor, answers an ad for a government medical position --- only to find herself trapped in a male-dominated realm of Nazi secrets and power.

The lives of these three women are set on a collision course when the unthinkable happens and Kasia is sent to Ravensbrück, the notorious Nazi concentration camp for women. Their stories cross continents, as Caroline and Kasia strive to bring justice to those whom history has forgotten.

Discussion Guide

1. In what ways do you think the alternating points of view helped to enrich the narrative? Was there ever a time you when you wished there was only one narrator? Why or why not?

2. The primary settings of this novel are starkly different --- Caroline?s glamorous New York world of benefits and cultural events, and the bleak reality of life in a concentration camp. In what ways did the contrast between these two settings affect your reading experience?

3. Caroline?s relationship with Paul is complicated, taboo even, was there ever a time when you didn?t agree with a choice Caroline made with regards to Paul? When and why?

4. As Caroline became more and more invested in her work with the French Families Fund, and eventually with the ?rabbits?, did you feel that she changed in any way? How were those changes apparent through her interactions with others?

5. Throughout their time in Ravensbruck, Kasia and the other prisoners found subtle, and not so subtle, ways to demonstrate their resistance. Discuss the variety of actions they took. Which of them did you find to be most powerful? Most moving? Most effective?

6. When Kasia learned that they were hunting ?rabbits? on page 278 she thought ?Just don?t feel anything. If you are to live, you cannot feel.? Do you agree with this statement? What do you think it says about the nature of survival? Is it relevant to any other characters in the book, not just the prisoners?

7. Did you find Herta to be a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

8. When Vilmer Hartman came to visit Ravensbruck he showed concern for Herta?s mental state. What do you think this revealed about her character? Had you previously thought about any of the points he made?

9. Though the Nazis made sure the German people only got their news from one media point of view, Herta?s father continues to read as many newspapers as he can. Does this relate to media today?

10. Did you feel that Halina?s ring was an important symbol in the book? How did Herta feel about the ring? Why did she keep it?

11. Throughout the novel, in and out of Ravensbruck, the characters experience harrowing, difficult situations. Was there one that you found more memorable than the others? Why do you think the author chose to include it?

12. If you had to come up with a single message or lesson to represent each of the main characters? experiences --- Caroline, Kasia, Herta --- what would it be and why?

13. Many of the themes explored in LILAC GIRLS --- human rights, political resistance, survival --- are a direct result of the historical WWII setting. How are those themes relevant to current events today?

14. LILAC GIRLS also touches on a number of interpersonal themes including female friendship, mother-daughter relationships, love, infidelity, mental health, and more. How do these themes impact the characters? lives?

15. What do you think the author hoped her readers would take away from this reading experience?

For more information, visit marthahallkelly.com/for-book-clubs/ and marthahallkelly.com/therabbits/.

Author Bio

Martha Hall Kelly is the *New York Times* bestselling author of?LILAC GIRLS, LOST ROSES,?SUNFLOWER SISTERS, THE GOLDEN DOVES and THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD BEACH AND BOOK CLUB. Born and raised in Massachusetts, she was inspired to write this novel by her mother?s family, the Smiths, who settled on Martha?s Vineyard in 1891. She received journalism degrees from both Syracuse and Northwestern universities and worked as an advertising copywriter for many years before becoming a novelist. With more than two million copies of her books sold? and translated in 50 countries, Martha Hall Kelly lives in Litchfield, Connecticut, and Hobe Sound, Florida.

Critical Praise

?Extremely moving and memorable... This impressive debut should appeal strongly to historical fiction readers and to book clubs that adored Kristin Hannah?s THE NIGHTINGALE and Anthony Doerr?s ALL THE LIGHT WE CANNOT SEE?

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